

As our *parashah* opens, Hashem says of Pinchas: "Behold! I give him My covenant of *shalom* / harmony." R' Azaryah Figo z"l (Italy; 1579-1647) writes: Just as man's physical existence depends on good health--preferably, staying healthy, but at a minimum, taking medicine--so society's existence depends on unity and love. Ideally, we would always feel *shalom* and brotherhood so that we would not come to dissension and separation; at a minimum, we must pursue *shalom* to repair any breaches among us.

He continues: We learn in *Pirkei Avot* (ch.1), "Be among the students of Aharon: lover of *shalom* and pursuer of *shalom*, he loved people and brought them closer to the Torah." Being a "student of Aharon" means that one is personally at peace with everyone. Otherwise, it is impossible to emulate Aharon by pursuing peace among warring individuals or groups.

We read in *Tehilim* (120:7), "I am *shalom*, and when I speak, they are for war." R' Figo explains: There are some people who speak softly, but who are full of conflict inside. On the other hand, there are people who are gentle inside but who speak gruffly, or even harshly. King David said, "I have the best trait of each of these groups: 'I am *shalom*, and [also] when I speak, [I speak *shalom*].' But the wicked are not so; 'they are [always ready] for war.' Even when they speak gently, it is only to lull the listener into complacency."

R' Figo continues: The proper path is to hold on firmly to *shalom* in both forms that we mentioned, i.e., always loving, and doing whatever is possible to eliminate hatred. (*Binah La'ittim: Drush Eit Shalom*)

Memoirs

R' Yaakov Halevi Lifschutz z"l (1838-1921) was the long-time secretary to R' Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor z"l (1817-1896; rabbi of Kovno), who was one of the leading halachic authorities of the second half of the 19th century as well as a spokesman and lobbyist for Russian Jewry in the Czar's court. Through his position, R' Lifschutz was a witness to, and a participant in, many important events of that era. His memoirs are entitled "Zichron Yaakov." He writes:

All classes of city-folk: those who studied all day, the elders, the wealthy, the merchants, the craftsmen, and the laborers were careful to pray with the congregation three times a day (not only on *Shabbat*, *yom tov*, or a *yahrzeit*), each in whichever *shul* he chose. Immediately after *Shacharit*, the distinguished community members would sit down at tables--some to learn with the *Chevra Shas* / *Talmud* society and some with the *Chevra Mishnayot*, whether studying as a group of friends or listening to a class taught by one person for whomever listened. This is how they learned for an hour or hour and a half before they went to their businesses, where they worked honestly.

Between *Mincha* and *Ma'ariv*, the simple folk and laborers, even the hired hands, sat at tables that were set aside for their various societies, and they learned for an hour and a half. Some learned Scripture; some, *Ein Yaakov* [a compendium of the non-legal parts of the *Talmud*]; some *Menorat Ha'maor* [an arrangement of the *Ein Yaakov* by subject rather than following the order of the *Talmud*, with a focus on ethical lessons]; some, *Chayei Adam* [halachah]; some, other works that increase one's fear of G-d. Each of these societies had regular teachers. Sometimes, these groups had the pleasure to combine between *Mincha* and *Ma'ariv* to listen to *derashot* of well-known *maggidim* / itinerant preachers. These *derashot* included "Pardes" [acronym of: *p'shat* / plain meaning, *remez* / allusions or symbolic meaning, *derash* / homiletic meaning, and *sod* / esoteric meaning], not dry rebuke which is pleasing on the surface like artificially-colored water but which does not give life flavor as the true Torah provides. Through these activities, the simple folk avoided being crude *amei ha'artez* / ignoramuses. Nearly all of them were knowledgeable in Torah thanks to the various societies and the *derashot* of the *maggidim*; there was virtually no one who did not know even the history of the great people of *Yisrael*, the sages of the *Mishnah* and *Gemara*. The best among them knew by heart the choicest *derashot* of the *Binah La'ittim*, *Ye'arot Devash*, *Afikei Yehuda* and the *Dubno Maggid*. [An excerpt from each of these works appears in this issue.]

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"Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the *Kohen*, turned back My wrath from upon *Bnei Yisrael*, when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume *Bnei Yisrael* in My vengeance. Therefore, say, 'Behold! I give him My covenant of *shalom*.'" (25:11-12)

Midrash Rabbah comments: "Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the *Kohen*--it is only right that he should receive his reward."

R' Yehuda Leib Adel z"l (1757-1828) asks: Wouldn't the comment by the *midrash* seem to relate more to the second part of the verse, *i.e.*, he turned back my wrath; therefore, "It is only right that he should receive his reward"? He explains:

A person deserves the greatest reward when he acts against his nature. The *midrash* is pointing out that Pinchas was the grandson of Aharon, the lover of peace and pursuer of peace. Nevertheless, when the situation called for zealous action, Pinchas acted against that inherited nature. That is why he was deserving of a special reward. (Afikey Yehuda)

"You [Moshe] shall place some of your majesty upon him [Yehoshua] ..." (27:20)

Rashi z"l comments: "Some of your majesty"--not all your majesty. We learn from this: 'Moshe's face beamed like the sun; Yehoshua's face, only like the moon'."

The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 8a) states, "Moshe told Yehoshua that the Elders would lead with him, while *Hashem* said, "Take a stick and hit the Elders over the head; there is one spokesman in a generation and there are not multiple spokesmen in a generation." R' Yehonatan Eyebchutz z"l (1690-1764; rabbi of Prague and Altona-Hamburg-Wandsbeck; prolific author of works in all areas of Torah study) asks: Why not? Moshe Rabbeinu led *Bnei Yisrael* with the help of the Elders; why couldn't Yehoshua do the same?

Moshe Rabbeinu, like the sun, had the ability to share his "light" so that other people reflected it. The Elders who ruled with Moshe Rabbeinu had no independent "light" and were no more than extensions of him; thus, that generation also effectively had only one spokesman. Indeed, when Eldad and Meidad prophesied independently, Yehoshua argued that they were rebels worthy of punishment (*Bemidbar* 11:26-28).

Moshe, in his humility, assumed that Yehoshua had the same abilities as he had; therefore he told Yehoshua to share leadership with the Elders. *Hashem*, however, knew that Yehoshua, like the moon, did not have the ability to cause others to reflect his light. Thus, any Elders who had shared the leadership with Yehoshua would have been independent of him, receiving their spiritual influences through separate channels. That would have been intolerable, for a generation can have only one spokesman.

R' Eyebchutz continues: As with prophets, every Torah scholar receives wisdom from Heaven through his own unique channel. That is why our Sages say that *tzaddikim* will not see each other in the future, for each will be in his own *Olam Ha'ba*. When a *tzaddik* dies, the channel through which wisdom flowed to him is shut down. However, if one mourns the passing of a *tzaddik*, a piece of his *neshamah* connects to a piece of that *tzaddik's* *neshamah*, and he is then able to receive through that *tzaddik's* channel. (Ye'arot Devash: Drush 11)

"The name of the slain Israelite man who was slain with the Midianite woman was Zimri son of Salu, leader of a father's house [*i.e.*, a family group] of the tribe of Shimon." (25:14)

Midrash Rabbah comments: Just as *Hashem* occupies Himself with publicizing the praise of the righteous, so He occupies Himself with publicizing the disgrace of the wicked. Pinchas was publicized as praiseworthy, while Zimri was publicized as worthy of condemnation. About them it says (*Mishlei* 10:7), "The memory of a *tzaddik* for a blessing, and the name of the wicked should rot." [Until here from the *midrash*]

R' Yaakov Kranz z"l (1740-1804; the *Dubno Maggid*) explains with a parable: An elderly merchant decided that he would no longer travel to bring merchandise; instead, he would send his son in order to train him. The young man's mother prepared many different outfits for him, each one appropriate for each of the climates through which he would travel. She also prepared many delicacies for him. At the last minute, she remembered that he occasionally suffered from a certain malady, so she ran to the pharmacy to fill a prescription for him. Before he departed, she called to him: "Look, my precious son! On this side of the suitcase are the delicious cakes that I prepared. On this side are the other delicacies. Don't be stingy; eat them, and may they taste sweet to you." She then reached the container with the medicine, and she said with a sigh, "My son--remember! Here is the medicine. Hopefully, you will not need it. G-d forbid, if you do need it, it is here." In short, she blessed him that he would enjoy all of the delicacies, but she did not bless him that he would enjoy the medicine.

Similarly, *Hashem* points out positive role models such as the Patriarchs and Yosef, and he wishes us success in emulating them. The Torah also points out negative role models such as Korach and Zimri from whom we should learn what types of behavior to avoid so that we won't be punished as they were.

This is what the *midrash* means: "Just as *Hashem* occupies Himself with publicizing the praises of the righteous, so He occupies Himself with publicizing the disgrace of the wicked," just like the mother who points out to her son both the delicacies and the medication. There is a difference, however. Regarding the *tzaddikim* He says, "The memory of a *tzaddik* for a blessing." Like the mother who tells her son, "Enjoy the delicacies," *Hashem* takes pleasure, so-to-speak, from speaking of the righteous. In contrast, "The name of the wicked should rot." Like the mother who prefers that her son not need the medicine she packed in his suitcase, *Hashem* would prefer that we not need the negative role models.

(*Mishlei* Yaakov)