

Parsha Journeys: Parshat Pinchas

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

Pinchas was a grandson of Aharon HaKohen. His zealous act of killing Kozbi and Zimri stopped the plague. Yet people were upset at him for killing a prince of Israel. They called him by the derogatory name Pinchat. They said, "You are not a descendant of Israel, but of Yisro, who worshipped every form of idolatry and this proves you didn't have proper intentions. You are just an idol worshipper yourself." But they didn't know that he had asked Moshe who forgot the law and advised him to act on his zealous instincts. They were taken aback when Hashem announced He would give Pinchas His covenant of peace. Hashem said, "You call him Ben Putiel referring to idolatry, but I say this is a badge of

honor hinting to Yosef who was able to fight against his *yetzer*."

Peace isn't about passivity. One has to be proactively involved in it and even fight for it. The Chofetz Chaim gives some pointers how to do this. If you have an argument and your right and the other person is wrong give in. Tell Hashem the problem and he'll take care of it. There's a prohibition in the Torah that one may not hate an Egyptian because we were once strangers in their land. So if you are not allowed to hate an Egyptian although they caused us so much suffering, how much more so are we not allowed to hate a neighbor or a friend, who doesn't do us a favor. But the fact is he doesn't owe you anything. Instead of

thinking of the bad, think about the good. How many times did he say yes to your requests. The Chofetz Chaim says it's a wise idea to set up a peace fund. So many arguments can be avoided through money set aside for peace. The most important thing of all is to give the benefit of the doubt and to judge favorably.

Pinchas was worthy of being a priest not only because he was descended of one, but because he was like Aharon Hakohen. Like his grandfather, he was able to turn back the anger of Hashem and achieve atonement for the entire Jewish people.

Netivot Olam II: Defeat of Great Cities

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The second *beit hamikdash* was destroyed because of *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred). The halachic definition of hatred is disconnection. *Sinat chinam* is hating a person who fails to fulfill your expectations although he may be doing something permitted. It's failing to rebuke someone who's done something forbidden and preventing him from reaching proper *tikun*. The underlying feeling of *sinat chinam* is this person is not on my side. There's no feeling of unity which draws people together and makes it possible for Hashem's presence to rest. No one person can make up the whole puzzle. We can only be a piece of it. You could see a person with all of their failings and pettiness and brokenness and still feel for him. That's what true *achdut* is about.

The nations never opposed the *beit hamikdash*. Even Nevuchadnezzar and Titus who destroyed it, did it as an act towards Israel. They knew on a gut level that the *beit*

hamikdash had the power to bring unity to the world and they too were dependent on it. It was only when we had *sinat chinam* and were no longer a receptacle for this supernatural unifying force, that the *beit hamikdash* was destroyed. Bar Kamtza's intent was to do evil. He wanted to prove that the unifying force of the *beit hamikdash* drew the Jews away from Rome. He wanted to find a reason to give them the message that we were superior and did not see ourselves as under their authority. In fact we do have a certain level of superiority. The Jews are to the people like the *mikdash* is to the universe in place and *Shabbat* is to time. They create unity by bringing the inner dimension in contact with the outer dimension. Bar Kamtza knew all this and used it against the Jews. Yet the only reason his plan worked was because of our preexistent *sinat chinam*.

The nations are like a body in the way they relate to *korbonot* as a symbol of who they are. If the body is whole, the sacrifice is good. But

for Jews a defect of the eye or mouth invalidates the *korbon* because vision and speech are somewhat beyond the body. Bar Kamtza's intent was to stress our separateness. The only way it would be credible was if we felt separate from each other. Our separateness and *sinat chinam* began with the eye and mouth, *ayin haran* (evil eye) and *lashon hara* (evil talk). *Ayin hara* is not wanting the other person to have or succeed. That can only happen when you don't view their success as your success. *Loshon hara* is feeling separate from the other person so that your emotional interest is to degrade them and focus on their negativity. These negative forces within us were the cause of exile. Bar Kamtza was only the trigger. If we want *tikun* it has to come from *ayin* (eye) and *peh* (mouth). We have to work hard at nurturing a good eye and pursuing pure speech. Only then can we hope to merit the ultimate redemption.



Tragedy- A Call To Unity

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Attributing tragedy to externality, to cause and effect, or to nature, is the voice of Amalek. Amalek says it's all coincidental. We perceive the actual results, but not what triggered it. In truth, our suffering is a result of exile which was caused by senseless hatred. Our chosenness as a people, our ability to make an impact on the world, and our relationship to Hashem as a people, is contingent on our unity. The Maharal says the Torah couldn't be given to our forefathers. It had to be given to an entire people. Each person is meant to add a specific dimension to the whole. It had to be 600,000 people that were standing at Har Sinai because every soul is an essential link in the Jewish nation.

The second temple was built in the merit of *achdut* (unity). *Achdut* doesn't mean being a cookie cutter replica. It's having a central sense of a common goal and recognizing that the objective can't be reached by any one individual. It's respecting every Jew who's headed in that same direction in their own way. There's no classical Hebrew word for tolerance because it isn't a Jewish value. Love, compassion, kindness, and patience are. The Gemara tells us that the Jews are the most argumentative of all people. But it's about love of truth. In a more mellow society you would hear, "I respect your truth, you respect mine." But in reality they are saying, "I don't know the truth," because truth by definition is the whole picture. When you equalize ideas because they are both ideas, you're saying there's no such thing as objectivity or truth. How could we talk about unity when by our nature we are argumentative? The love of truth is what unites us. You could love someone for their pursuit of *emet*, for their sincerity, and for reaching what they could reach without necessarily thinking they've arrived at their goal. It's very different than saying this is my truth and this is your truth. In essence, we're all climbing the same ladder. You may be up to rung 552 and I may be up to 401. But we're all aiming for the same end point.

Loving someone means feeling one with the other person. It doesn't mean blinding yourself to their failings. It's viewing them as

someone who wants what you want. All Jews share a common spark of the same soul. *Ahavat Yisrael* is training oneself to see what's admirable and good in the other person while at the same time not expecting them to be just like you. We're not all meant to see the world in the same way, but we are meant to see it with the three distinctive Jewish traits, shame, compassion, and loving kindness. A sense of shame is feeling uncomfortable when you're not as you should be or things aren't as they should be. On the highest level, having a sense of shame means having an awareness of Hashem that's so immediate and so real, that there's inner trembling before Him. People may have shame in the wrong areas such as getting old, not having the right profession, or gaining weight. The direction may be misguided, but the quality is holy. So when you talk to someone whose shame is misguided don't let yourself be distracted by it. Go to the core, the holy shame, that tells you this person wants to be a *tzadik*.

The second trait is having mercy. When we see suffering we're compelled to respond. This comes from our forefather Yitzchak and our need and ability to give of ourselves to others. It comes from seeing the truth, the *midah* of Yaakov. When you see the whole picture you see what's perfect as well as what isn't. Your love of perfection is going to say, don't ignore what is black. You have to want to see and be willing to do something to bring about change even if it involves self-sacrifice. The third trait is *chesed*. Jews love to give, not out of pity, but out of the overflowing good inside them that yearns for an address. This comes from our forefather Avraham.

Ahavat Yisrael demands not just that one look for this trait, but that one talk about it. When you see something that's moving, find the right person to share it with. We're influenced by our own words and it make us see things differently. In addition, it creates unity between ourselves and the listener. What you say will touch the part of the listener that's like the person you're talking about.

Ahavat Yisrael means treating people with respect. It's penetrating their externality and believing that there's something there that

deserves that respect. One of the ten names of the soul is *kavod*-honor. There's a spark in everyone's soul that craves significance. The more you give someone *kavod*, the more his spiritual side comes forth. This is true for everyone including your spouse and children. If you can find the part of them that wants *kavod* and yearns for respect, and speak to them on that level, it can have a powerful impact. The tricky part is we also want *kavod*. We have an irrational mechanism that if he's number one, I'm number two. But in truth *kavod* is immaterial. You can give endless *kavod* and not lose any of your own.

Ahavat Yisrael means being helpful. You have to care about a person's financial, physical, and material well being. The more you respond to someone's vulnerability by helping them, the more bonded you feel with them as your own memories of your imperfections surface. In addition, when you are in the position of giver, your best self comes forth which makes you feel one with the recipient. The laws of *ahavat Yisrael* compel us to see what is positive in other people in order to respond to them with authenticity. The more you give yourself permission to see people's inherent yearning for goodness, no matter how misguided it is, the more it will hurt you that it is misguided. Instead of hating them for their bad choices, empathize with the pain of their pettiness and wrongness. *Ahavat Yisrael* doesn't mean acting as if everyone has reached that elusive goal called perfect. It's choosing to relate to the part of them that wants that goal regardless of who they are, and doing whatever you can to help them get there.

Every tragedy is a consequence of *galut*. We fall because of Amalek, the source of doubt within us. Defeating Amalek means having collective consciousness. It's drawing down revelation of Hashem only promised to the *klal* through *mesirat nefesh*. The more physical our self-definition is, the less possibility there is for *achdut*. We must try to get past material considerations. We have to drop the senseless competition. We need the collective merit of *am Yisrael* to bring the redemption and it will only happen through unity.