Why did God present Pinchas, the archetypical zealot, with a covenant of peace? What was the nature of this covenant?

The Talmud (Berachos 28b) recounts that Rabban Gamliel, who headed the Sanhedrin in Yavneh after the destruction of Jerusalem, saw the need to make an addition to the daily prayer. The Jewish people needed heavenly protection against heretics and informers. But Rabban Gamliel had trouble finding a scholar capable of composing such a prayer. In the end, Shmuel HaKatan (“Shmuel the Modest”) agreed to formulate the prayer, called “Birkas HaMinim”. Why was it so difficult to find a scholar to author this prayer? And what made Shmuel HaKatan so qualified for the task?

By its very nature, prayer is a medium of harmony and understanding, full of kindness and love. Any scholar on an appropriate spiritual level is capable of writing prayers that are fitting for a holy and wise nation. A prayer decrying slanderers and heretics, however, touches upon powerful emotions of hostility and anger. We naturally feel hatred towards our foes and the enemies of our people. To compose a fitting prayer against enemies requires an individual who is utterly pure and holy, and who has succeeded in eliminating all petty hatred and resentments from his heart. In order that such a prayer will be pure, its sole intention must be to limit the damage and correct the evil caused by the wicked, as they impede the world’s spiritual and ethical progress. It is for the sake of this pure, unselfish motive that we plead that God vanquish the wicked and foil their evil plans.

Even though one’s initial motives are pure, if he is subject to even the slightest feelings of animosity that are naturally aroused when one feels attacked, his thoughts will be tainted by personal hatred, and his prayer will deviate from the true intent. Only Shmuel HaKatan was a suitable candidate to compose this difficult prayer. His life’s motto (Avos 4:24) was “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls...” (Mishlei 24:17-18) Shmuel succeeded in removing all feelings of enmity from his heart, even for personal enemies. Only this saintly scholar was able to compose a prayer against slanderers that would convey the feelings of a pure heart, expressing the soul’s inner aspirations for complete universal good.

From Shmuel HaKatan we see that zealotry is not a simple matter. Zeal must be carefully refined to ensure that it is truly for the sake of heaven. As Rav Kook explained in Oros HaKodesh (Vol. III, p. 244):

“We need to refine the attribute of zeal, so that when it enters the realm of the holy, it should be a pure zeal for God. Since zealotry often contains some slight influence of human failings, our powers of self-examination must determine its primary motive. We must ensure that it is not based on personal jealousy, which rots one’s very bones, but rather a zeal for God, which provides a covenant of peace.”

When Hashem gave Pinchas a covenant of peace, He affirmed that Pinchas’s act of zealotry – defending the Jewish people from idolatrous influences – was performed with pure motives. Only Hashem could testify as to the purity of Pinchas’s zeal, that he had acted solely for the sake of Heaven, without any admixture of pettiness or
personal animosity. Pinchas’s zeal was purely the product of his burning love for Hashem, an expression of his desire to bring true peace (shalom) and perfection (shelemus) to the world.

NEVER BEYOND REACH

It is interesting to note that Binyamin had ten sons, whereas Dan had only one. In addition, we are told in the Gemara (Sotah 13a) that Chushim, the only son of Dan, was deaf. (Rashi points out that Chushim and Shucham were the same person.) Yet, later, as described in our parashah, the tribe of Dan had many more descendants (Binyamin - 45,600; Dan - 64,400).

The Chofetz Chaim focused upon this phenomenon to note that when Hashem decides to bless someone, the blessing will happen even when the resources available are limited. It would have seemed that Binyamin’s descendants should have far outnumbered those of Dan, since they had more resources available. Nonetheless, once Hashem decided to bless Dan with descendants, they were able to multiply at a faster rate than those of Binyamin, despite having limited resources. This is integral to bear in mind when approaching any pursuit. Even though it may seem that our goal is beyond our reach due to limited resources or abilities, nonetheless, if Hashem desires us to be successful, we will be successful in overcoming those odds and succeed.

DARE TO DEFER

Rabbi Yosef Babad (1800-1874), author of the Minchas Chinuch, was the rabbi and posek of Tarnipol. Once, two men approached him to settle a dispute between them. As they presented their arguments, one of the men mentioned that the father of the Minchas Chinuch had served as the m’ader kiddushin at this man’s own wedding. Immediately upon hearing this, the Minchas Chinuch turned to the other man and asked him, “Did my father officiate at your wedding as well?” When the man answered negatively, the Minchas Chinuch announced that he was disqualifying himself from judging the case. As dayan, he was concerned that he would now perhaps be biased for the first man, whose family had known his father personally.

The Minchas Chinuch explained that we find a similar situation regarding Moshe Rabbenu. When the daughters of Tzlafchad presented their request that they be given their father’s inheritance in Eretz Yisrael, Moshe did not answer their inquiry personally. Rather, he declared that the answer would be forthcoming from the heavens. Why did Moshe not respond to their question directly and convey the halachah to them as he did with all other laws?

Sefer Talelei Oros elaborates. A judge must be exceedingly careful to avoid any semblance of bias in dealing with judgments. He must certainly not accept financial gifts from the litigants before him, and he must also refrain from being on the receiving end of any form of favor or benefit from them (see Choshen Mishpat #9). The Gemara (Kesubos 105b) cites many stories of judges who disqualified themselves due to even the slightest concern of bias. For example, the great sage Shmuel was once crossing a bridge, when someone stepped forth and offered him his hand to assist him to step ahead. Shmuel was quite appreciative, and he asked the gentleman how it was that he had come to help him. The man explained that, in fact, he was on his way to the court and he wanted to show courtesy to Shmuel, knowing that he was one of the judges. Shmuel immediately disqualified himself from being a judge in that case.
When the daughters of Tzlafchad approached Moshe and presented their request, among their arguments was the statement that their father “was not among the members of Korach’s party who protested against God”. In other words, they pointed out that their father was not among the rebels who fought Moshe. Moshe detected that this statement influenced his perspective in dealing with their case. Once these women mentioned that their father was a loyal follower of his, Moshe felt that he could no longer be perfectly objective in dealing with their judgment. This is why he deferred to Hashem and directed their question to Him for an answer.

WE COULD HAVE DONE IT

Moshe was to confer only a portion of his glory upon Yehoshua, but not all of it. The elders of that generation, upon noticing this level achieved by Yehoshua, proclaimed: “The countenance of Moshe is like that of the sun, while the face of Yehoshua is like that of the moon.” Woe to such an embarrassment, woe for such shame. - Gemara Bava Basra 75a

Rabbi Itzele of Volozhin understood this Gemara to be speaking about shame felt by the elders at this point, and explains the Gemara with a story. A successful merchant arrived in a small town where the people were quite poor. He presented an offer for some people to travel with him and thereby build themselves up in business and become wealthier. No one showed any interest in his offer, with the exception of one man who responded and set off to make his fortune. Not too much later, the two “partners” met with great success. When they returned to the small town, the people hid their faces in shame and felt uncomfortable looking in the face of their former neighbor who was now wealthy. He approached one of his friends and asked him, “Why is everyone ashamed to look at me, yet they are comfortable with my partner, who is many times wealthier than I am?” The friend explained the difference very clearly. “You see, his wealth is inherited, and it is basically a gift to him directly from the heavens. We are such poor and simple people. How can we be jealous of such a thing? You, however, are just like us. Each of us could have invested the time and effort that you did, and the wealth could have been ours. When we see you, we are embarrassed that we did not put forth the effort to achieve what you did.”

When the elders of that generation saw Moshe, they knew that his level was beyond their reach. He was a man known as an אֱלֹהִים וְזֶה כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֱלֹהִים, and no one felt jealous of his unique accomplishments. Yehoshua, however, achieved his status by means of hard work and sheer diligence. He was a close and dedicated assistant to Moshe, and he never left Moshe’s tent. The elders were ashamed that they, too, had not used the opportunity to grow as close to Moshe as Yehoshua had done, and they felt a certain degree of frustration in viewing Yehoshua’s accomplishments.

Our sages express this idea very succinctly. “The face of Moshe was as that of the sun.” The light of the sun is inherent and of a heavenly source. So was the prophetic level of Moshe unique. “The face of Yehoshua was as that of the moon.” The moon does not have any light of its own, but it radiates only that which it reflects from the sun. The level of Yehoshua was earned in that he chose to emulate Moshe as much as he did. It was for this reason that the elders were embarrassed and ashamed. They were embarrassed in what they had failed to achieve, and they were ashamed before Yehoshua, for facing him confronted them with the realization of what they could have accomplished had they themselves been as diligent in their emulating Moshe.

HE STOOD NEXT TO THE KOHEN GADOL

Why does the Torah point out this particular function of the role of the Kohen Gadol now, when introducing the appointment of Yehoshua as the next leader of the Jewish nation?

Gri’z notes that one of the differences between Moshe Rabbeinu and other prophets was that Moshe was able to ask questions from Hashem at any moment. When he was approached by those who were ritually impure and were unable to bring the Korban Pesach, Moshe confidently told them (BeMidbar 9:8): “Wait here, and I will hear what orders God gives regarding your case.” Again, when the daughters of Tzlafchad presented their
MY SON’S MEAL

The Musaf offering for Shabbos is only two animals. These two lambs, brought each week, are the smallest Musaf presentation of any occasion throughout the year. Due to this perceived inequitable situation, the Shabbos complained to Hashem, wondering why it was designated to have such a meager representation.

Hashem reassured the Shabbos: This offering is truly appropriate for you. All aspects of the Shabbos are doubled. The song for the day is doubled, as we find (Tehillim 92:1): “A Psalm. A song for the Shabbos day.” The enjoyment of the Shabbos is doubled, as we find (Yeshayahu 58:13): “And call the Shabbos a delight, the holy day of God honorable.” The one who violates it is culpable of a doubled expression of punishment, as it says, (Shemos 34:14): “Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death - פק כָּרְע. Its bread is doubled, as it says (Shemos 16:22): “And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered a double provision.” Therefore, it is most fitting that the Musaf also be a double amount. It is also for this reason that the only time the Siddur describes a Musaf offering as being כֵּן – “as fitting” – is in reference to Shabbos. -- Midrash Shochar Tov

Rabbeinu Ba’alei HaTosafos point out that this can be compared to a king who commanded the royal chef to prepare a banquet for his sons. The cook prepared two types of food for their portion. After they ate, the king requested that the chef prepare a meal for him as well. The gourmet chef, who was willing to satisfy the monarch’s wishes, asked him what he wanted to eat. The king answered, “Whatever you made for my sons, that is what I want as well. I do not require anything more.” In this manner, Hashem provided a double portion of manna on Friday to accommodate their needs for their Shabbos meals. For this reason He commanded that the Musaf be of two lambs, and no more.

WONDERFUL WELCOME

The Torah has taught us proper conduct here, that one who has a lodger should, on the first day, feed him fattened poultry. The next day he should feed him fish, the next day meat of animals, the next day legumes, then the next day vegetables. He progressively decreases the richness of the fare, like the bulls of the Sukkos festival. -- Midrash Tanchuma

Sefer Shiras Dovid notes that this Midrash quoted by Rashi needs to be explained. Apparently, if a host wants to make his guest feel special, he should not lapse and diminish the favored treatment he affords for him as he stays longer. We would expect the host to continue to shower his guest with added attention, or at least not with less care as time goes on. Although common practice is, in fact, not to be so diligent in how a guest is treated as time passes, this seems to be a matter of getting used to the company, but nevertheless a condition which is unfortunate. Why, then, would the Torah pattern the offerings of Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres after behavior which is less than desirable? Shouldn’t we try to do what is best? This is especially difficult, because the Midrash itself calls this נְאָם רָאָשׁ – “proper conduct” – from which we should learn how to act. Is this, in fact, the proper way to treat a guest who stays for a while?

The truth is that most people act like this, and diminish the special honor and courtesy extended toward their guests due to weakness. The host tires, and he becomes accustomed to his guest, resulting in a lack of enthusiasm toward his visitor. This certainly should not be our attitude in bringing a single offering to Hashem after eight days of Sukkos. Yet, the Torah commands us to do just that, but to do it for the correct reason. Why is that?

A person feels most comfortable when he is at his own home. Despite all that a host does to make things special for him, a guest does not feel the same, even with special treatment, as he does at home. In fact, the optimum manner to fulfill the mitzvah
of hachnasas orchim is to make a guest literally “feel at home”, and that the guest not even realize that people may be going out of their way to accommodate his needs. The Mishnah (Avos 1:5) teaches that one’s home should be a place where “the poor are members of your household.” Rabbeinu Yona there explains that this means that the poor should be comfortable enough to come and go without embarrassment due to the smiles and free access provided by the family. The lesson is that not only should we provide the needs of our guests, but we should help them feel comfortable and at ease.

A household is run in a way where the members of the family do not treat each other as special guests. Everyone is courteous and helpful to one another, but we do not “roll out the red carpet” for our brothers and sisters. The lesson of the Torah is that when the festival of Sukkos begins, we welcome the Shechinah with great fanfare as a guest who has come from far. As the holiday progresses, we want to feel closer to Hashem and to receive the Shechinah in our homes as a comfortable and welcome member. We slowly diminish the special treatment in terms of the offerings we bring in order to show that the Shechinah is an intimate member of our inner family.

Halachic Corner

Pirkei Avos Chapter 6

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The Musaf offerings of every day of the year, including each of the festivals, are described in the parashah of Pinchas. There is a puzzling tradition which points out that it is very appropriate for this particular joyous parashah to be read during the period of יומ טוב_translated as “the intermediate days” - between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av.

Perhaps the reason for this tradition is as follows. When the time of our full redemption arrives, this three-week period will be transformed into a time of joy. The 17th of Tammuz will be the first day of a Yom Tov and the 9th of Av will be the final day of the festival, with the intermediate days being a type of Chol HaMoed. This is the meaning of the reference in Yirmiyahu (31:12): “I will turn their mourning to joy, and I will comfort them and make them rejoice from their sorrow.” Consequently, the reading of the festival offerings at this time is indicative of the ultimate festive nature of these days.

Halachic Corner is dedicated by Benyomin Freeman in memory of his father Gedalia Freeman. May his memory be for a blessing.

Questions for Thought and Study

1. Which words indicate that Pinchas is the same person as Eliyahu HaNavi? See Ohr HaChaim 25:13
2. Unlike at the beginning of BeMidbar, why does the Torah enumerate all of the heads of each family for each tribe in this week’s parashah? See Ramban 26:5
3. Why were the names of מיכאל and ישוע changed when listing them here in the division of the land? See Malbim 26:14
5. Why did Hashem praise the daughters of Tzlaphchad with the words נתי מיכה וวิดีโอי ויאזיד - “the daughters of Tzlaphchad speak properly”? See Ohr HaChaim 27:7

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1. **Answers:**

   - The double expression "יִתְנָהָ בָּאָלָה" (25:11) – “by his zealous avenging”

2. This is to indicate that just as the land was divided equally by tribe (despite the size), so too, each tribe’s land was divided by family head, regardless of size.

3. The tribe of Shimon was punished severely during the plague after the accident at Midian. The names of these families were changed to nullify the decree against them.

4. Hashem gave more honor to רפיה as he stood up first and strongest against the spies’ slander of Eretz Yisrael. Moshe considered רפיה to be greater, so he mentioned him first before sending them to scout Eretz Yisrael.

5. Ohr HaChaim gives three reasons. First, Hashem was commending the insight of the daughters of Tzlaphchad who learned the laws of inheritance correctly from the laws of Yibbum. Secondly, Hashem praised them for all of the intricacies of inheritance law (see Bava Basra 118b) that they explained to Moshe. Lastly, Hashem praised the daughters of Tzlaphchad by a decree to raise their stature and honor.

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Prepared by Rabbi Ben-Zion Rand, Editor, and Mrs. Naomi Samber, Managing Editor

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