

B”H

PERSONAL EXTREMISM AND EXTREME LOVE FOR EVERY JEW = GEULA

BEGIN WITH A GRIN

Danny was sure Professor Kochman hated him. He was also sure that Kochman would fail him on the written test, finding all kinds sorts of silly reasons to take off half-points and whole points, giving him a mark that was one point less than the mark needed to pass the test.

Despite all that, when Danny saw the professor on the street, he politely greeted him, “Hello.”

“I don’t say hello to fools,” said the professor arrogantly.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” said Danny, “but I do.”

EXTREMELY PUZZLING

This week’s parsha, Pinchas, ends the story that began at the end of last week’s parsha, about Pinchas’ zealousness for G-d. This was in reaction to the immoral act done by Zimri ben Salu, prince of the tribe of Shimon. Although it is a sad story, the ending is happy. Hashem gets personally involved and awards Pinchas a gift ... a gift that no individual had received before – the priesthood! Hashem even promises him an eternal “covenant of peace,” i.e. not only Pinchas but all his descendants, forever, would be blessed with the kehuna.

Who was Pinchas and how did he merit to become a kohen? After all, didn’t we learn in parshas Korach, a few weeks ago, that the priesthood is likened to the morning. Moshe told Korach that the priesthood is a natural thing which is not subject to change or switching, just as we can’t turn eight in the morning into ten at night (nor coffee and cake into supper), so too, a Levi or Yisrael cannot become a kohen!

So how did Pinchas suddenly turn into a kohen? Korach – no, Pinchas – yes? And mainly, what can we learn from this zealot Pinchas about bringing the Geula? [And no, obviously the message is not to kill our competitors or those who don’t agree with us!]

The holy Zohar teaches us about the source of Pinchas’ soul. According to the Zohar, Pinchas’ soul was “impregnated” with the combined souls of his two esteemed uncles, Nadav and Avihu. Therefore, wherever the name of Pinchas is mentioned, it then mentions Aharon. “Pinchas the son of Elozor the son of Aharon the kohen” - there is always a mention of Aharon HaKohen. Why? Because Pinchas was actually the son of Aharon the kohen through his soul! He carried within his soul an element of the souls of Nadav and Avihu who were the great sons of Aharon the kohen.

According to this, Pinchas was actually meant to be a kohen by nature; it was part of his ancestry, a natural aspect of his family. And as we see in the Zohar, it is very closely bound with the root of his soul. From every direction and all the explanations, Pinchas was fit to be a kohen from birth. The question then needs to be rephrased: Why did G-d wait with the gift of the priesthood until now? Why wasn’t it given to Pinchas before?

The Medrash (Yalkut Shimoni) says “Pinchas is Eliyahu.” The connection between the two and the reason that the Medrash connects the two is because both of them, Pinchas and Eliyahu, are known for their zealousness for G-d. We already spoke of Pinchas’ zealousness and Eliyahu said about himself (Melachim 1 19:10), “I have been zealous for the Lord, G-d of Hosts.”

After the contest with the prophets of Baal, as related in the Haftorah (which we read in certain years, not this year), a contest in which Eliyahu emerged victorious and the prophets of Baal were killed, Eliyahu had to run away from

Achav and his evil wife Izevel. He fled to the Sinai desert and forty days later he reached a cave on Har Sinai where he spent the night. G-d appeared to him and asked, "Why are you here Eliyahu?"

Eliyahu answered with a statement that sealed his fate until the end of days, "I have been zealous for the Lord ... for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant ..." G-d did not like this criticism of His people and He censured Eliyahu and told him to appear at every bris so he would see for himself and testify that the Jewish people fulfill mitzvos.

Furthermore, in Malachi (3:1), Eliyahu is mentioned as the "malach ha'bris (the angel of the covenant)." It's interesting to note that in the same verse, the prophet also says that Eliyahu will be the one to announce the coming of Moshiach and the Geula. "And suddenly, the master [Moshiach] whom you seek will come to His Temple. And behold! The angel of the covenant [Eliyahu, the herald of the Geula], whom you desire ..." So what is the connection between Pinchas, Eliyahu, bris mila, and the Geula?

EXTREME MAKEOVER

The connection is simple and obvious. It all has to do with the Ahavas Yisrael which will bring the Goel!

Pinchas is a zealot. So is Eliyahu. They were ready for anything, to die or kill, on behalf of G-d, and G-d wants this zealotry to be turned into love, Ahavas Yisrael! That we should look at other, different Jews and see – not what he isn't doing but what he *is* doing ... not what he is not fulfilling but what he *is* fulfilling ... not where he is sinning but how much he learns Torah and does mitzvos and chesed.

Rambam, in his introduction to his sefer says that Eliyahu was the student of Achiya HaShiloni. Achiya was the student of Moshe Rabbeinu. The Baal Shem Tov was also a student of Achiya Ha'Shiloni, referred to as the *Baal HaChaya-Yechida*. This duality (Eliyahu – zealotry, Baal Shem Tov – boundless Ahavas Yisrael) alludes to two dueling inclinations in man's soul, which it is our obligation to unite. Zealousness on the one hand, and love on the other. Uncompromising faithfulness to the correctness of our way; we cannot allow a single person or institution to weaken us. At the same time, endless love for every Jew with the knowledge that there is goodness within every Jew, the goodness of holiness, Torah and mitzvos!

Ultimately, Eliyahu also testifies and concedes that every Jew fulfills the mitzva of bris mila which is why we all merit the Geula!

The Rebbe teaches us to preserve this zealousness, albeit mainly for ourselves and not for others. We need to be particular about every jot and tittle of halacha, the most minute detail of Rabbinic obligation or custom, and not compromise and descend to the level of those around us, of the neighbors. At the same time, this cannot affect how we look at them. When we live this way, when we internalize the perfect unity between these two opposite traits: zealotry (inside) and love (outside) we will merit the true and complete Geula.

In maamarei Chassidus (HaChodesh 5666) it explains at length about the difference between Eliyahu and Moshe. Both of them went up to heaven with their bodies, Moshe to receive the Torah and Eliyahu to depart this life, yet there is a difference between them. Moshe's body was buried but we don't know where and how. Eliyahu went up in a storm-wind to heaven with his body. Eliyahu's physical body exists forever; he had no burial. Why?

Eliyahu has a certain unique quality that even Moshe does not have. This is the quality of refinement. Eliyahu represents the ultimate refinement of the material. "Eliyahu" is numerically equivalent to 52 (י"ב) which represents a certain configuration of G-d's name, a name which is mainly associated with sifting and refining the lowly material of this world. Eliyahu completed and attained the level of material refinement which enabled him to live forever. He can be physical and spiritual simultaneously without limitation.

This is also the long anticipated level we will attain in the time of the Geula, "and all flesh will see together that the

mouth of G-d has spoken.” Physical flesh will be so refined that physical eyes will see G-dliness. This is why Eliyahu, the “malach ha’bris,” is the one to announce the Geula. He is the one deserving to announce the refinement of the physical aspect of the world with the Geula!

What about Pinchas and his priesthood? The reason that Pinchas was not a kohen until he killed Zimri, even though from the aspect of his soul and soul root he was always deserving of this, also has to do with what was said previously. In order to attain true refinement of the material, the avoda needs to be “from below – upward!” One cannot rely on that which comes from above; one cannot wait for supernal revelations. One cannot operate solely according to divine messages from above. It is necessary to work in systematic fashion, with care and attention (remember, Pinchas is a zealot!), step by step, level by level. We need to ascend by way of our own efforts, without G-dly help, because only in this way can one ascertain that we really did it, we actually attained true refinement. Because as long as we are dependent on revelations from above, one cannot know what would result without the revelation.

The same is true for Pinchas. If Pinchas’ priesthood was (only) something natural, it would be limited. If it was dependent on the source of his soul and spiritual level, that would not assure the inner refinement of the body. G-d wants Pinchas’ priesthood to come (not only from above, as a result of his soul and ancestry, but) from below, i.e. through his own efforts of refining the material and body. Therefore, G-d waited with the priesthood until Pinchas merited and attained the necessary refinement through his own efforts.

In summary: Pinchas (and Eliyahu) teach us about the unique avoda required on the eve of the Geula, an avoda that combines zealotry and love, even as we need to have as our goal the refinement of our physical body in a deep, uncompromising way.

TO CONCLUDE WITH A STORY

We will end with a story that teaches a special way of combining zealotry to truth and Ahavas Yisrael. Rabbi Shlomo Cunin related:

When I was 18, I passed by the Rebbe on erev Pesach to receive a piece of matza. The Rebbe said to me, “When you go to the Bronx to celebrate the seder with your parents, please be so kind and deliver matza from me to a family over there. My secretariat will give you the address.”

After being given the address, I realized this wouldn’t be a simple matter. My parents lived near Yankee Stadium in the West Bronx, while this address was all the way on the other side of the Bronx Zoo in East Bronx which, in 1958, was a crime-ridden area, very dangerous at night.

I called my mother and told her the Rebbe gave me a mission and if I didn’t come on time, to start without me.

I took the subway and arrived at a housing project for the blind.

When I knocked on the door, I smelled something coming from inside that could only be bacon, and when I entered, I saw a loaf of bread on the table. Clearly, this was not a Torah-observant family that had removed all chometz for Pesach!

I introduced myself to the tattoo-covered man who greeted me. “I am here to deliver matza sent by the Rebbe,” I said, “and I am sure he would like me to share with you the story of Passover.”

The man called in his wife, who was obviously pregnant, and two little girls who were both totally blind. We cleared the table and started the Seder. We did not have a *Haggadah*, but I led them from memory as best I could.

I told them that on this night, G-d liberates us just as he liberated our ancestors. He gives each of us the strength to deal with our challenges.

Instead of wine, we used cups of water. I wanted to know how they knew the Rebbe.

"I am a tanner in a slaughterhouse. At work, I met a kashrus supervisor who is a Chabad Chassid and I confided in him that I have two blind children, and that now my wife has become pregnant again. The doctors said this child has a high chance of being born blind as well, and they advised an abortion."

"I didn't know what to do," he continued, "it seemed to me, on the one hand, that we have a high chance of having another blind child, which we just couldn't handle. On the other hand, what if that child would be able to see?"

"The Chassid suggested that I write to the Rebbe. I had no idea who the Rebbe was but we are Jews and we felt comfortable doing this.

"The answer from the Rebbe came back, 'Don't have an abortion. I give you a blessing that, G-d willing, the child will be able to see, and you will derive much pleasure from this child and from all your children, including those that have not been blessed with the gift of sight.'"

The good ending to the story is that they had a healthy child who could see and the Lubavitcher from the slaughterhouse arranged a bris mila. Years later, I heard that the boy and his sisters became observant.

Good Shabbos!