PINCHAS { פִּינְחָס } (Phinehas – Dark Skinned)

Numbers 25:10-29:40 (30:1), I Kings 18:46-19:21, John 2:13-25

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"**Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites. Since he was as zealous for my honor among them as I am, I did not put an end to them in my zeal**." (Numbers 25:11)

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In our last parashah, Balak, we saw that although Balaam did not succeed in cursing Israel, whom God had blessed; in the end the people of Israel brought destruction upon themselves through their own sin. The Midianites, unable to curse Israel directly, instead '**beguiled them in the matter of Peor.**" [1]

The LORD said to Moses, "**Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them."** (Numbers 25:16-17)

Balaam in the end must have somehow been involved in leading Israel into sin with Midianite women through sexual immorality. It seems that the desire for riches won out over his desire to do God's will. God told Moses to attack the Midianites and smite them in return.

Some people may still be under the harassment of the Midianites in the spiritual realm. We need to get on the offensive when we are being harassed and smite the Midianites in the spirit. They are dangerous enemies that can seduce us into sin.

Pinchas, son of Eleazer, son of Aaron the Cohen (priest), took a spear and thrust it through Zimri and Cozbi, an Israelite man and Midianite woman caught in the sin of fornication (sexual immorality) within the camp.

In this week's parashah, God honors Pinchas, the grandson of Aaron, with both the priesthood and an eternal covenant of peace. **"I give him My covenant of peace**." (Numbers 25:12)

It is interesting the in the Hebrew text, this word for peace, shalom, has been scribed with a broken letter vav. With the vav, the word is '*shalom*' which means peace; but without the vav, the word reads '*shalem*' which means wholeness.

[1] Numbers 25:18

The Broken Vav

What does it mean that this letter vav is broken in the word 'shalom'? Laws concerning the scribal art of writing a Torah scroll requires that all Hebrew letters be well formed, complete and not touching one another; however this one word is an exception. What message is this giving us?

On one level, it is a picture of the Messiah. His body was broken on the execution stake so that, 'by His stripes we are healed.' (Isaiah 53:5) His brokenness brought us an eternal covenant of peace (shalom), just like Pinchas.

The broken vav in this word 'shalom' indicates that it could either be 'peace' or 'wholeness'. How can brokenness bring healing, peace or wholeness? Until a person is broken, they are full of themselves and this does not leave much room in their heart for others. Once a person experiences brokenness, however; he or she is filled with compassion and grace for others.

Yeshua is the healer of the broken-hearted. God knows exactly how we need to be broken in order that we may become whole and complete - just like His son, Yeshua the Messiah. Let us trust Him in our brokenness as well as in our wholeness.

Bli Busha - Without Shame

The namesake of this week's parashah, Pinchas, is the subject of a great deal of controversy amongst Jewish Biblical scholars and commentators. Pinchas appeared at the end of last week's parashah (Balak) as the zealot who effectively stopped the plague upon Israel by throwing a spear right through Zimri, son of Salu, chief of the Simeonite tribe and Cozbi, Zimri's Midianite mistress.

It was not only their sin of fornication that brought on Pinchas' righteous indignation but the fact that they did so 'bli busha' (without shame) in the sight of the whole community of Israel.

This is our world today. People who are engaged in sexual sins that would have been considered shameful years ago are now parading their perversions in the streets of the city – completely bli busha!

Since the passing of a law making homosexual marriage legal in all of the United States, all manner of sexual perverts are coming out of the woodwork demanding a legal right to practice their abominable sexual acts such as pedophilia and bestiality just to name a couple.

Israel is not exempt from this sin, as Tel Aviv held one of the biggest gay parades of all time, as hundreds of thousands of homosexuals flaunted their sin in the streets. We are becoming a people who don't even know to blush as the Word of God states,

"**Are they ashamed of their detestable conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when they are punished, says the LORD**." (Jeremiah 8:12)

Gay pride parade in Jerusalem, Sept. 19 2014 Photo: Olivier Fitoussi

In the preceding Scripture, they were attempting to bring healing to the people through peace – but it was only superficial and brought no lasting peace – just like today with all the talk of 'peace' with the Palestinians.

"They heal the brokenness of the daughter of My people superficially, Saying, 'Peace, peace,' But there is no peace." (Jeremiah 8:11)

We need more than a superficial healing. We need more than the covenant of peace (shalom) for the true healing of our souls – we need to be made whole (shalem) through Yeshua Hamashiach.

The Measure of a Man

Besides his controversial use of violence, Pinchas has also become the subject of much debate because of his questionable lineage. At a time when a man's lineage generally mentioned only the father's name (_____ ben _____), Pinchas' lineage is also traced to his grandfather, Aaron.

Why? It is because Pinchas is named as son of the daughter of Putiel, a descendant of Yitro, who (although he later converted to the God of Israel) began as a pagan priest who offered up sacrifices to idols. Thus, the Torah traces his lineage back to Aaron the High Priest (Cohen Hagadol) from where he derives his righteous zeal.

Although there are those who do not agree with the use of violence for any reason; and even believe that Yeshua taught complete pacifism, in this parashah we see that Pinchas' spear did turn away God's wrath. This effectively brought an end to the tragedy of Baal Pe'or which destroyed twenty four thousand Israelites for their participation in sexual immorality. [2]

[2] Numbers 25:9

'The Zeal of God has Consumed me'

It is interesting that an act of violence brought peace (shalom). We may look at this act of violence in two ways. Through man's eyes, this was a clear act of murder, deserving the most severe punishment; but through God's eyes it was a righteous act.

The Psalmist recalls this incident, **"Then at Peor, God's people joined in the worship of Baal and ate sacrifices offered to dead gods. They stirred up the LORD's anger by their actions, and a plague broke out among them. Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stopped. And that was accounted to him for righteousness to all generations forevermore."** (Psalm 106:28-31)

Because of Pinchas' zeal for the Lord, the plague was stopped and God rewarded Pinchas with the covenant of an everlasting priesthood. The word for' zeal' in Hebrew is usually translated as 'jealous' in English. It comes from the root '*kanah*' **(קנא)** as in El-Kanah **אל קנא** (God is jealous). This was the name of Hannah's husband in the Bible.

Yeshua instructed us that the Kingdom of heaven must sometimes be taken by force (or violence). "**And from the days of John the Baptist (Yochanan the Immerser) until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent 'take it by force."** (Matthew 11:12)

What is our view of religious fanaticism? Might it be different from God's?

Pinchas was filled with hatred of evil and indignation against that sin which so grossly profaned God's holy name. In fact, in the Hebrew, a distinction exists between the words for murder (ratzach) and kill (harag). In the Ten Commandments, God forbids the act of murder; but there are various instances where He commands the people of Israel to kill, as shocking as this seems to our humanistic mindset.

The vital point to be made here, however, is that Pinchas was zealous with the zeal of God, not his own, carnal passion. The Lord spoke to Moses saying, "**Pinchas…has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal."** (Numbers 25:11)

There are people who commit all kinds of crazy, radical and even violent acts, thinking that they are doing God a favor; whereas, their zeal is usually totally misguided. A Biblical example of this is Shaul, before he became transformed into the Apostle Paul, who persecuted the Church, imprisoning Believers and putting followers of Yeshua to death for their faith. He is one who stood by, consenting to the death by stoning of the martyr, Steven. [3]

[3] Acts 22:20

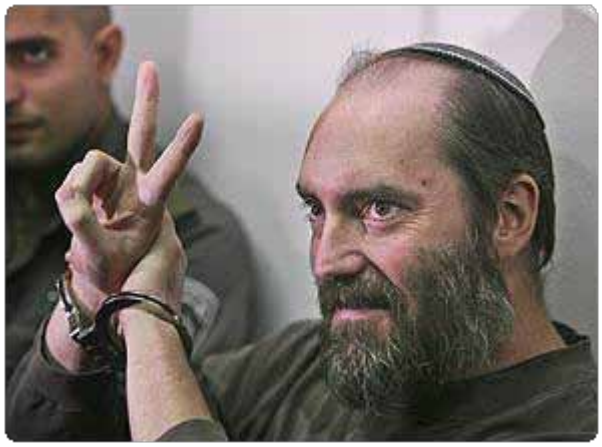
By his own words, Paul admits to being "**zealous toward God**" [4] ; but his zeal was totally without knowledge of the Truth and therefore misguided, just as are so many Orthodox Jews today. They seek to establish their own righteousness through keeping many man –made laws and rules rather than receiving the righteousness we have by grace through Yeshua.

Paul's heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel was that they may be saved. For he bore witness that they have a **"zeal for God, but not according to knowledge."** (Romans 10:1-2)

Here is a photo of an Orthodox Jewish man passing out religious tracts and CD's (and collecting donations) from cars stopped in traffic along a busy street in Jerusalem.

Whenever we have zeal (even for God) but without revelation knowledge of Truth, our zeal can become destructive. Most Muslim terrorists, including ISIS, are killing out of religious zeal. Christians have also used terrible violence in their religious fervor, such as during the Crusades. It is not only Muslims and Christians, however, who use violence out of religious zeal. Although violence is less prevalent in the Jewish community, it is not absent. A well publicized, modern- day example of this is the religious Jewish zealot who planted a bomb in a Purim basket (Shlach Manot) at the home of Messianic Believers, the Ortiz family in Ariel, Israel. This bomb blew up in the hands of their innocent 15 year old son, Ami, and almost cost him his life! [5]

Jack Teiltel, who was arrested on November 1st 2009, publicly spoke these words, "*It was a pleasure and an honor to have served my G-d."*
-Jack Teitel, Ultra Orthodox Jewish Terrorist



Jewish terrorist Jack Teitel

There are, of course, many other examples - enough that we should have a healthy fear of acting out of our own misguided zeal. We should, therefore, possess this same zeal as Pinchas for righteousness; but we must make sure that our zeal is truly from the Lord.

[4] Acts 22:3-5
[5] See the Ami Ortiz story http://www.amiortiz.com/home

Covenant of Peace

The covenant of everlasting priesthood was given to Pinchas – and to his seed (zerah). This, of course, refers to his natural descendants, but it may also refer to his spiritual seed. Not all of us are natural born Cohanim, but each of us belonging to the God of Israel through Yeshua has been given the privilege of priesthood. "**But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God…"** (1Peter 2:9)

As God's people we cannot live our lives based on humanistic sentimentality that is running rampant in today's world; but upon the truth of God's Word. I am not advocating violence as a solution to all of the world's problems. Senseless violence is an increasing problem in Israel and in the entire world. It was because of violence that God destroyed all the inhabitants of the earth (save Noah and his family) in the flood.

A World Health Organization sponsored a study that ranked Israel in the top 10 Western countries for schoolyard violence. Israeli minister Ben-Ami reported that the national statistics for such violent incidents had quadrupled from 1991 to 1999. These acts of mindless violence reveal a frightening emptiness in the soul of the nation.

In this week's Torah portion, we read of an incident that, on the surface, looks like it could have been culled from a contemporary newspaper:

A lone assailant picks up a spear and, in front of a vast crowd, murders a prince and a princess in cold blood. Their only crime -- they were "romantically involved." You would think that G-d would have punished Pinchas severely, and yet, He conferred priesthood on Pinchas and all his descendants -- "My covenant of peace." Why?

A society that runs on sentimentality will ultimately turn around and perform acts of unspeakable cruelty. In Nazi Germany, the first law that was passed against Judaism was the outlawing of shechita, kosher slaughter of animals. And during the war, the German Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals sent a memo to the SS to ask them to please slow down the deportation of Jews to concentration camps because they couldn't keep up with the volume of pets for which new homes had to be found.

The word for peace in Hebrew also means wholeness and perfection. There is only one true peace. There is only one true perfection**.** By definition, if we do what G-d wants, we are performing an act of peace, we are bringing the world to its perfection -- even if that act looks like violent murder. If we act against the Creator, though modern culture may praise our liberality and our cultured open-mindedness, we have waged war on reality.[6]

Let's pray in unity that people in Israel and all over the world will open their eyes to see that none of our best human effort will ever achieve true peace in this world; but only through the "Prince of Peace - Sar Shalom" will we ever know true 'shalom'. [7]

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[6] * Binyomin Yerushalmi in Yated Neeman, AP wire service
[7] Isaiah 9:6

Second Census: The Sons of Korach

After the plague, and in preparation for the division of land, the people of Israel were counted again, the first time being after their deliverance from Egypt. But after the devastation of the plague, the Lord commanded another census, like a shepherd, whose flocks have been depleted by an attack of wolves. When the catastrophe is over, the shepherd lovingly counts his sheep in order to know how many are left alive.

We may notice that *"***the sons of Korach died not***."* (Numbers 26:11) Korach was the leader of the rebellion against Moses - he and his followers were consumed by an earthquake and fire. But the sons of Korach survived to become the founders of a whole guild of Psalmists, whose writings are still with us today filling a portion of the book of Psalms (Tehillim). The lesson behind this verse is that we are not destined to follow in the footsteps of our father (or mother). We can rise above our backgrounds- even the sin or rebellion of our own parents - to become devoted followers of God.

The other side of the coin, however, is that Godly parents do not necessarily beget Godly children. "**And Nadav and Avihu** (sons of Aaron the priest) **died when they offered strange fire before the Lord."** (Numbers 26:61) (Leviticus 10:1-7).

This is a source of great sorrow to parents who love and serve the Lord; but we see many other examples in the Bible of children who do not follow in the footsteps of their parents, for example: the sons of King David, the Prophet Samuel, and the Priest, Eli. We each must choose whom we will serve and cannot either blame nor rely upon the previous generation.

We must accept our responsibilities as parents to train up our children with the best of our abilities to love and serve God but we must also accept that children will eventually grow to make their own decisions about their relationship with God. In Judaism, boys (and often girls) celebrate this rite of passage called a Bar or Bat Mitzvah at the age of 13 (12 for girls). Thus, they declare before the whole community that they acknowledge reaching this important milestone – the age of accountability.

We must learn to let go of the guilt associated with having grown children who refuse correction and follow in the pathway of sin and rebellion. We can, however, continue to hold onto our faith that God will receive the prodigals when they come to their senses and return home to their Father.

Caleb and Joshua Inherit the Land

Only two men from the first census survived to be counted in the second - Caleb and Joshua Why? They were the only two who '**believed and trusted in God wholeheartedly'.** (Numbers 26:64-65, Numbers 32:12)

All the rest of this generation perished. We must wholeheartedly put our trust and confidence in the Lord. Doubt and unbelief are serious handicaps to our spiritual growth. We will never posses all the blessings God has for us unless we choose to trust in Him and believe in His promises.

What do we believe? If we think we are just a lowly grasshopper, so we will be; but if we believe we are more than conquerors in Messiah Yeshua, then that we will also be. Yeshua said to the centurion who came to plead for his servant's healing, "…**as you have believed, so let it be done for (or unto) you."** (Matthew 8:13)

This is so powerful if we really get it! This can work for us both in the positive and in the negative. Therefore whether we are believing for success or failure, life or death, victory or victimhood, God will give us according to our faith or belief system. If we believe that nothing ever works out for us, or that we don't deserve to enjoy the blessings of God, then this will be done unto us.

The battle is in the mind; we must challenge every lie that we believe and replace each one with the truth of God's word. This is the journey of transformation – by the renewing of our minds, the changing of our belief system to one that wholeheartedly trusts God.

In this parashah, the land was divided according to the size of the tribe. Today, most Jewish people have no idea which tribe they belong to. These records have been lost and forgotten, but the prophet Ezekiel tells us that in the future, the land will again be allotted to Israel (along with the aliens who settle peaceably among them) as an inheritance according to the tribes. These are listed in chapter 48 of Ezekiel. Obviously the Lord has not forgotten who belongs to which tribe, and He will restore the tribes of Israel.

The Daughters of Zelophehad

"Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers." (Numbers 27:4)

The daughters of Zelophehad asked for their inheritance, as their father died without sons. Some mortal fathers may prefer his sons to his daughters, but God's love is not like that. He loves men and women equally and so God decreed justice for the daughters.

The Daughters of Zelophehad
(illustration from the 1897 *Bible Pictures and What They Teach Us* by Charles Foster)

Too often women are hesitant to stand up for their rights in legal or financial matters. We don't receive what is due to us because we are too passive or fearful to go after them. Just because we are women, even single women, it does not mean that we cannot inherit what is rightfully ours.

In a spiritual sense, the Lord is our portion – He is a God of justice and will give us our inheritance if we boldly ask for it and believe that we deserve it. What if the daughters of Zelophehad didn't think they were worthy – or that because all the rest were men, that they should not even ask? They would not have received their portion of the Land that was due to them.

Let us not be timid, but bold, since the Word of God says that the "righteous are bold as a lion." [8] Some of us are like pussycats instead of lions. We must ask the Lord for boldness so that we may receive our full inheritance. "**On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul**." (Psalm 138:3)

God has graciously invited us to ask Him for what we want and trust Him to bring it to pass in His way and His time. But we will not know unless we ask. The Word says, "**You have not because you ask not.**" (James 4:2)

Yeshua invites us to ask for all that we desire in His name: "**Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."** (John 16:24) God can always say no, but if we don't ask, then the answer is automatically no. As the saying goes, *it is the squeaky wheel that gets the grease.*

We see from God's attention to these women's request for their inheritance, that there is nothing so small, so insignificant, or so trivial that God does not care about if it is something that concerns us. He cares not just for the nation as a whole, but for each and every individual within the nation. "**He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him."** (Psalm 145:19)

Seeing from a Distance

In this portion of Scripture God delivered what must have been devastating news to Moses. He was told that although he would be allowed to see the Promised Land, he would never be allowed to enter. [9]

Although Moses did not bring the Israelites into the Land, God still granted him the privilege of seeing that all his labor had not been in vain. [10] We may or may not see the fruit of our service to the Lord in this lifetime; but in faith we press on, believing that our work for the Lord (if done in obedience and with right motives) is likewise not in vain.

Unlike Moses and the Israelites who died in the wilderness, we don't need to wander for forty years and then die, having fallen just short of entering into the Promised Land. We can enter in and possess the Land but only by faith in God's ability to help us overcome.

Moses Sees the Promised Land from Afar (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by James Tissot)

[8] Proverbs 28:1
[9] See Parashat Chukkat
[10] Numbers 27:12-14

Coming under Authority - Samchut

"**So Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses."** (Numbers 27:22 – 23)

Moses Names Joshua To Succeed Him
(woodcut by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld from the 1860 *Bible in Pictures*)

Moses asked God to transfer the leadership to Joshua (Yehoshua) by the laying on of hands. This is a physical act to symbolize the transference of authority. In Hebrew, the word is '*samach*', from which is derived the noun, *Smichah*, the act of rabbinic ordination. The word 'Samchut' means authority. The root of this Hebrew word means '*to trust, to support, or to rely on*'. Being anointed for leadership of a group of people is a sacred trust that we may not take lightly.

Although he would not be allowed to enter along with the people, Moses made sure to ordain Joshua so that the congregation would not be left as sheep without a shepherd. Moses, showing his love for his people, still showed concern for the flock, even when he knew it would not be him (but rather Joshua) taking them into the Land.

"Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying: "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd." (Numbers 27:15 - 17)

When we left for Israel we had been leading a small fellowship of people who studied Torah, Hebrew, worship and Jewish folk dance. There seemed to be no one to carry on after we left and so sure enough, the sheep scattered and fell prey to the wolves. Many of those who once studied and fellowshipped with us have now gone over to the synagogue; and a surprising number of them have even converted to Orthodox Judaism and denied their faith in Yeshua.

We need godly leadership; we were created to be governed – to come under samchut (authority). Without a shepherd, we are scattered and helpless sheep, exposed to attack on all sides. There are Believers who are unable or unwilling to come under the leadership of a shepherd in a congregation; but the Word warns us that those who isolate themselves are not wise.

People may say, "*Well, I am under the authority of the Lord…*" ; but this is not sufficient. We also need to submit to earthly leadership, as is demonstrated in the examples of Moses and Joshua. Even though God is the ultimate authority, and Yeshua is our Great Shepherd, He will also ordain leaders to help guide and support us in our walk with God.

However, we must be careful under whose leadership we place ourselves, for the anointing flows down from the head. A foolish or incompetent shepherd can lead us astray into deception or destruction, as happened with the people of Israel (and still happens today).

"**My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray."** (Jeremiah 50:6)

It is very common for religious people today to listen to what their 'shepherds' (the Rabbis, Priests, or Pastors) are telling them; instead of allowing the Scriptures to speak for themselves. Therefore they are, as Yeshua said, like the blind leading the blind and they both fall into a ditch.

Passover of the Lord

'**On the fourteenth day of the first month *is* the Passover of the LORD. And on the fifteenth day of this month *is* the feast; unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days."** (Numbers 28:16-17)

The Search for Leaven (illustration circa 1733–1739 by Bernard Picart)

These Scriptures describe the Pesach (Passover) of the Lord in the first month of the year, on the fourteenth day of the month (of Aviv). And on the fifteenth day, there should be a chag (feast) that lasts seven days to eat matzot (unleavened bread).

The first day is a holy day where vocational work is forbidden. Then the Word goes on to describe the prescribed sacrifices for this special mo'ed (appointed time).

As followers of Yeshua, we believe that He is our Passover lamb who was slain on Pesach. His death removes or takes away all our sins by making atonement for us. Although we still keep this mo'ed, as it is an eternal commandment of God to remember this time, we no longer need to give the prescribed sacrifices.

Yeshua has sacrificed his own life so that this system of blood sacrifice need not be repeated year after year after year with the sacrifice of animals on the altar. When Yeshua died on the cross he said, "It is finished." Once and for all.

"Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption for us." (Hebrews 9:12)

Life Lessons from Pinchas – Our Divine Mission

What may we learn from Pinchas? Others had also seen what Zimri was doing (even Moses, Aaron and his sons). They knew it was a sin and offense to God but they did nothing about it; and yet Pinchas, who was not yet an elder in the community, was the only one who took action.

We witness so much sin in the world today; but just because others (even leaders and elders) are remaining silent and passive doesn't mean that we are to do nothing as well. Pinchas not only brought salvation to his people, he also obtained a great reward for himself from God.

Perhaps the reason that no one else is doing anything about the situation (even those older or greater than yourself) is because God has designated this to be your divine purpose in this world to help correct this problem.

Haftarot of Admonition

This reading from the book of Jeremiah is the first of the three special 'haftarot of admonition', since it is the Shabbat that falls after the 17th of the Hebrew month of Tammuz. The other two haftarot are read over the next two weeks as we approach the ninth of Av, a day of mourning, fasting and lamentation over the destruction of both Holy Temples in Jerusalem on this same day. Other major calamities have befallen Israel and the world on this same day.

During these three weeks prior to the ninth of Av, we are to pause and reflect on why all these tragedies have come upon the Jewish people throughout our history. We are also to consider our own personal behavior, attitudes and relationship with God.

These three 'haftarot of admonition are meant to disturb our false sense of peace. The original Hebrew root of the Aramaic word, d'uranata, translated as 'admonition' means 'to disturb'. In this haftarah, Israel is compared to the first fruits that were set apart as holy (kadosh), to be offered up to the Lord.

Anti-Semitism is on the rise in the nations of the earth as those who do not know or believe the Word of God come against Israel and the Jewish people. Those who boycott Israel, send flotillas to break our defensive blockades (set up only to keep our enemies from bringing even more weapons into Gaza to fire upon innocent Israeli men, women and children): these and all those who curse Israel and the Jews will be held guilty in the Heavenly courts of Justice.

This is the word of admonition to the nations from this 'Word out of Zion'. Those who seek to attack Israel are being admonished to cease and desist while there is still time before even greater evil comes upon them.

The prophet Jeremiah spoke to Israel with a Word of warning to the nations saying,

"**For I *am* with you,' says the LORD, 'to save you; though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you.**"
(Jeremiah 30:11)

Many will remain silent and passive in the face of these slanderous attacks against Israel, God's holy portion; but there are those who will rise up in the courage and determination of Pinchas to take action and speak out against it.

We must not think we are too weak (or too timid or too young or too old or whatever excuse we use) to fulfill our mission in life. If God is in it, He will give the strength, grace, wisdom and boldness to do His will.

Pinchas has been compared by the Rabbis to Elijah, who also walked in godly zeal and passion for the Lord. He rose up in boldness of spirit to confront the false prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and to prove that YHVH is Elohim.

Elijah is the one who is to precede our Messianic redemption, as is written, *: "I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the coming of the great and awesome day of God" (Malachi 3:23), "the harbinger who will proclaim peace, the harbinger of good who will proclaim salvation, saying to Zion, 'Your G-d reigns!'" (Isaiah 52:7).*[11]

Haftarah : The Zeal of Elijah

Elijah (1638 painting by Jusepe de Ribera)

This haftorah portion compares the zeal of Pinchas with the zeal of Elijah. Both demonstrated zeal on God's behalf. Here, too, the Israelite nation has gone astray. And also here, it is a foreign woman who is at the core of their idolatry and sin.

Queen Jezebel, wife of King Ahab, has persuaded the people of Israel to worship Ba'al, a false god. Much has been written about Jezebel and a controlling, rebellious 'spirit of Jezebel' that can operate in people of both genders.

19th-century painting by John Liston Byam

However, I find an interesting message in her Hebrew name – אִיזֶבֶל **E'zevel**. {E} (pronounced ee) in Hebrew means not, (as in 'E efshar' meaning not able to). **Zevel** זֶבֶל means garbage. Is E'zevel dealing with a spirit of pride, a sense of insecurity, inherent in her name, that she must proclaim "*I am not a piece of garbage!"* Is it haughtiness and pride that causes her to think more highly or herself that she ought, that leads to her ultimate destruction? "**Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall**. (Proverbs 16:18)

[11] http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/145629/jewish/Living-with-Moshiach-Pinchas.htm

On Mt. Carmel, alone and defenseless, Elijah (Eliyahu) single-handedly brought the people back to God through a dramatic display of Divine power. The people surrendered and confessed Adonai Hu Haelohim (YHVH He is God) . In his zeal for God, Elijah slew the prophets of Baal – also an act of violence which was considered 'righteous' in that it stopped the idolatry in Israel.

www.lds.org

Elijah confronts the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel

The Three Deadly D's

After his dramatic success, however, Elijah became demoralized and ran away in fear from the murderous threats of this one woman, Jezebel. Elijah fled into the wilderness, sat down under a broom tree and asked to die. "**Now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers.**" (1 Kings 19:4)

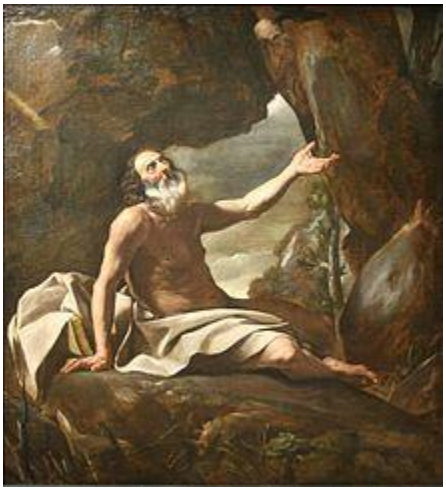
Isn't it so typical that after a high, exciting mountain top experience we often flop, morose and dejected into a deep, dark pit? There were times when, after great times of travelling, ministering, and seeing God do mighty things in our midst, that I would spend my first day back home just sitting and weeping. Why?

Perhaps because of the excitement of travel – meeting new people, having a great time, enjoying the freedom from the daily grind of responsibilities, duties and chores, sometimes even having people look up to me as 'somebody special' because I come from Israel and teach the Word of God.

And then I come home. Thud. The house is a disaster (*Why can't anybody clean up after themselves while I'm gone?!*) Thud. The place is small and confining and the kids are screaming and arguing with each other. Thud. And I still have to unpack, do all the laundry and dishes and it's back to the routine. Thud. *I'm nobody after all – just a maid, servant, more like slave – all I'm good for is cleaning other people's toilets… how foolish I was to think that I could actually do anything for God!* Double Thud!

This is how my negative thinking and self-pity begins to lead me into depression, discouragement and despair – the three deadly 'd's. There were times I actually wanted to die. So I understand Elijah. Maybe some of you do as well.

What is God's response to Elijah or even to us when we feel this way? Well, first of all, He sent him some good food to eat and water to drink and lets him have a good sleep. Sometimes that is all we need; we are just physically depleted and need to build up our bodies again through proper nutrition and rest.



Elijah fed by the ravens
By Giovanni Lanfranco, Musée des beaux-arts de Marseille

Then Elijah ran to a cave; he was not quite finished with his depression yet. God found him in his dark cave and said, **Mah l'cha po, Eliyahu?** (1 Kings 19:9) In Hebrew, mah means what? He's not really asking *Why* are you here? But '*what*?'

In other words, *what business do you have being in this cave, Eliyahu? What brings you to this place*? Eliyahu gives his answer to 'why' – he describes why he is in retreat, demoralized by the difficulties of his work and overwhelmed by the task ahead of him:

"**I have been very jealous (קִנֵּא) for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, <u>even I only</u>, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."** (1 Kings 19:10)

The Prophet Elijah (painting circa 1550–1560 by Daniele da Volterra)

Notice that in his dark mood of despondency, Elijah <u>exaggerates the problem.</u> *I, even I, and the only one*….whereas the truth is that there are 7,000 others who have not bowed the knee to Ba'al. What is it about us, I wonder, that sometimes seeks to exaggerate our problems? '*I am the only one suffering with this….I am the only one who does what is right…*"

We have to make sure we tell people how stressed out we are, how long it has been since we had a day off, or how little sleep we got the night before – or we take it a step further to present ourselves as total victims - *everyone* has abandoned me or *nobody* cares about me – whereas that is not really the truth. Do we do this to make other feel sorry for us?

We can mistake pity or sympathy for love. Maybe this is the way we received the affirmation, affection or attention we needed as children – by being pitiful. But when we grow up we need to say I am not a victim; I am a victor! More than a conqueror in Messiah Yeshua.

If we have a bad habit of exaggerating our problems to others or even to ourselves, we must stop trying to gain sympathy and attention from others through acting pitiful. As one popular female preacher has said God told her, "*You can be pitiful or you can be powerful but you can't be both - so take your pick*!"

A Still Small Voice

The Lord instructed Elijah to stand on the Mount as God's presence passed by. First a strong wind came that broke the rocks apart, and after the wind, an earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in any of these things. The word for earthquake used in the Hebrew here is **'ra'ash'** which also means noise.

God was not in all these noisy, loud, dramatic manifestations. Then comes a still, small voice **– kol d'mama daka**. Elijah had known God in the high drama – he recognized Him as the God who brings down fire from heaven to consume a water drenched offering. But did Elijah yet know God in the silence? Dakah means thin (feminine) and d'mamah comes from damum which means to be still or silent.

"**Be still and know that I am God (Elohim**)." (Psalm 46:10)

We may know God's anointing when we are on stage or in front of a lot of applauding people. But do we know God in the stillness and silence of our own private lives? In the quiet times when we are simply going about our daily tasks?

The Value of Silence

The Hebrew letter Hey ה is often used as a representation of the Almighty God. At the end of a word it is completely silent. Even at the beginning or middle of a word, it is a very soft, almost inaudible exhalation. [12] We are so impressed when we hear that someone actually heard the audible voice of God; but what about hearing His barely audible whisper in our souls?

In the ra'ash (noise) of our lives--- with cell phones, iphones and ipods plugged into our ears and the noise of the T.V., video games, car alarms and traffic bombarding us on a daily basis --- we need to find places of quiet and solitude in order to hear the kol d'mama daka (still, small voice) of God . If Yeshua, Son of God, needed to get away to solitary places to pray and hear the voice of His Father, how much more must we mortals need that as well?

"**The Lord is in His Holy Temple; let all the earth keep silent before Him."** (Habakkuk 2:20)

[12] . See Shalom Morah II, Wisdom from the Hebrew Alphabet.

God cries out to us through a soft voice of stillness. The Philosopher Thomas Carlyle said that "*Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves*."

I recall once attending a seminar led by a man, once a poor bricklayer from a family of thieves and prostitutes. Becoming a Christian in his early adulthood, he arose to become a prominent and wealthy businessman in Australia. His goal – to see how much money he could give away in his lifetime. After the seminar, he took a select group into a private room to disclose the secret of his success.

In the hushed atmosphere of this meeting, he told us of one simple secret that he had learned from the wealthiest man in the Swiss Alps. In the morning, this man arose and sat for an hour in silence, listening for the still, small voice of God, knowing that it was God's thoughts he needed rather than his own, and that God's creative ideas would bring him success.

A quiet, calm, and undisturbed mind is the key to health and peace. "**In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.**" (Isaiah 30:15)

This was God's message to Elijah, and to His word to us today: that not only can God be known by mighty acts, but God is also known in the silence after the greatness. Sometimes God is seen in a small, private moment of a mother or father listening to the stories of a young child, or a friend giving a silent comforting hug to a grieving friend.

A friend of mine who recently lost her husband to cancer said that the most precious gift she received was from a brain-damaged friend who just sat and listened to her and then wept as she wept. God was more with Job's friends while they sat in silence than when they began opening their mouths.

When a siren sounds all across the nation of Israel on the Holocaust Memorial Day (Yom Hashoah), people everywhere stop what they are doing for one minute of silence. That silence speaks a message more powerful than thousands of words.

Standing for a moment of silence in Israel on Holocaust Remembrance Day

I have realized recently that most of us are such a 'wordy' people. We want to be heard and understood. My dog, Pepper, doesn't talk – but he communicates so much. Yeshua warns us that we will be judged by every idle word that comes out of our mouth. A hard word for a writer and speaker who makes her living from words!

Passing on the Authority to Elishah

Again, God asked Elijah the identical question, "*Mah l'cha poh?"* (What are you here?) Elijah gives the identical response. What is striking about this is that Elijah has not been transformed or changed in the least by this encounter with God. The still small voice of God was an invitation for Elijah to come to know God in a new and deeper, more subtle way, but it was lost on Elijah. He could only see God in the grand power plays; and so God knew He would have to bring Elijah down and raise up another.

God realized that it was time for Elijah to have a successor and He instructed Elijah to anoint Elisha as a prophet in his place. Even the greatest prophets of God all have their weaknesses and limitations. There always comes a time for a man to step down and let another take over. For Moshe it was Joshua; for Elijah is was Elisha. No one is perfect and yet sometimes we carry that expectation of others. If even the greatest men and women on earth had faults and blind spots, how much more do we need to have grace for the failings of our friends, family and even ourselves?

Elijah the Prophet (Eliyahu hanavi) was a great man of God. In the end, he was taken up to God in a fiery chariot and given the honor of preceding the Messiah's return. A place is set at the Passover Seder table for Elijah. At the circumcision (Brit Milah) of a Jewish baby boy, a special chair is set up called the chair of Elijah. He even appeared in the New Testament during the transfiguration of Yeshua. But the limitation of Elijah was that he was most confident and comfortable with God in the grand and the great.

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Moses led, however, in a different way. He also demonstrated God's power through the Ten Plagues in Egypt, and by performing signs and wonders in the wilderness; but also by patient and careful listening to the common people – both men and women. As described in this week's parashah, when the daughters of Zelophehad brought their case before Moses, he listened.

The Daughters of Zelophehad (illustration from the 1908 *Bible and Its Story Taught by One Thousand Picture Lessons*)

This resulted in a change, not only for these five women, but a change in the law in general. The legal norm of the day at the time was that if a father died, leaving behind no sons, all the father's property would go to his male relatives rather than his daughters. But after this case, if a man had no sons, his daughters would inherit.

This seems such a small change, a small victory for women but this kol d'mama daka that Elijah missed is the voice of the Divine heard not only in the dramatic gestures of religious zealots like Pinchas, but also in administering justice and mercy to the 'least' and the few.

May we all engage in the holy work of listening slowly and carefully to the quieter voices in our midst, and to rise up to the challenge of speaking with a kol d'mama daka – a gentle, quiet, and yet passionate voice.

We don't need to wait for our one 'destiny moment' like Pinchas or Elijah when, in our zeal, we are used by God in some grand, dramatic way. We are God's messengers, perhaps even more so in unnoticed acts of chessed (kindness, mercy, or grace), than in great demonstrations of power and deliverance in front of a crowd.

Life can't be lived on the mountaintop; at some point we have to come down to level ground and find God in our everyday same old same old. I'll try to hang onto that thought for the next time I come home from a whirlwind trip across the world!

Living Everyday Life with Zeal

Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple, London version, by El Greco

Zeal can be defined as eagerness, enthusiasm, intense desire, and passionate commitment. It carries both the idea of zeal and jealousy. May we all come to a place of living our life with zeal, as did our Lord and Savior Yeshua Hamashiach. When He cleansed the temple of moneychangers, His disciples, witnessing His zeal, remembered the words, "**Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up (consumed me).**" (John 2:17, Psalm 69:9, Psalm 119:139).

I read something recently that made me feel somewhat jealous. It was an article about an Australian man (Steve Irwin) who spent his days splashing around in crocodile infested waters. He had devoted his entire life to wildlife conservation in Australia and had even created a television program to further his cause.

One thing in the article really struck me – it was Steve's statement that he could hardly wait to jump out of bed in the morning and get to work. This was a man who displayed incredible zeal in his life. In his television programs you could just see the passion and enthusiasm emanating from his beaming countenance along with a flashing grin.

In the end, Steve was killed by a giant stingray, but he lived a full and abundant life until the moment of his death. Some of us may live a long life but are we really living or just existing…surviving…? Yeshua said that He came to give us life and life more abundantly (John 10:10).

Recently, I had the pleasure of seeing Steve's widow and daughter on a TV talk show. They carry on Steve's work with the same dedication and I can see that Steve's daughter has certainly inherited her father's contagious zeal. How wonderful. I don't know about you, but I can't remember the last time I eagerly jumped out of bed in the morning. I am seeking and praying for God to light the fire once again in my heart, that I may once again say that the zeal of the Lord consumes me. How about you?

Pinchas Study Questions

1. Why did God reward Pinchas' act of violence with a Covenant of Peace?
2. What is peculiar about how the word 'shalom' is written in this passage (in Hebrew)? What does this say to us?
3. What is your reaction to the acceptance in our modern society of sexual practices that are called 'abominations' in the Bible?
4. What do you think of religious zealots who kill or use violence? How do we reconcile this with Pinchas whose act of violence was called 'righteous' by God? Discuss.
5. Do you consider yourself bold enough to ask for what you believe to be your right? Do you ever struggle with fear, timidity or passivity? How can you become more bold?
6. Do you have a life goal or mission that you have only been able to see 'from afar' and never fully experience? How do you feel about that? Are you able to make peace with it?
7. Are you under any kind of spiritual authority? Why or why not? Share and discuss.
8. Do you have a sense of your divine mission or calling that you have known since you were very young? Are you walking in that calling? Share and discuss if you choose.
9. What are some of the excuses that you use to justify not walking in your God-given destiny?
10. Do you believe that you truly know God? Do you believe that He knows you? To which people will Yeshua say, "I never knew you?"
11. Why does God call Israel His 'first fruits' or holy portion. What will happen to those who try to harm the people of Israel?
12. What does God say He will eventually do to all the nations to where the Jews have been scattered? Why? What can individuals in the nations do to be saved?
13. What was the similarity between Pinchas and Elijah? Where did Yeshua display his 'zeal' for God's house?
14. If Elijah had just won such a great victory on Mt. Carmel against the prophets of Baal, why did he get so discouraged over one wicked woman? Have you ever experienced this kind of 'let down' after coming down from the mountaintop?
15. Are you comfortable with silence and solitude? Do you experience enough of these to hear God's still small voice?
16. Do you feel that you are living your life with passion and zeal? Or is it 'same old same old' most of the time? Share and discuss.

About the Author:

Hannah Nesher grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

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