

Pinchas 5775

BS"D Parashat Pinchas 5775

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

"Imma, I don't work, I serve!"

There is an apparent difficulty with our parasha.

Pinchas was not born a Kohen. Neither was he appointed to the kehuna as was his grandfather Aharon, his father Elazar, and his uncles Nadav, Avihu and Itamar.

Pinchas was appointed to the kehuna by virtue of his killing Zimri ben Salu, head of the tribe of Shimon and Kazvie the daughter of Tzur, one of the princes of Midian. His act fulfilled the obligation of imposing just punishment for their severe sin; thereby relieving the Heavenly Court of Justice from imposing a much more severe punishment on the entire nation of Yisrael.

But was an appointment to the kehuna the proper reward for taking two lives?

Pirkai Avot 1,12 records the message of Hillel:

אֶהְיֶה לָאָדָם כְּתִל וְכִסֵּיטָה וְכִסְיוֹתָא וְכִסְיוֹתָא
:אֶהְיֶה לָאָדָם כְּתִל וְכִסֵּיטָה

One should emulate the students of Aharon HaKohen: love peace, strive for peace, love your fellow Jew and draw him close to Torah.

The kehuna is peace and love whereas Pinchas' actions were

neither peaceful nor loving; so why did HaShem, Whose ways are always balanced with our deeds, permit Pinchas' entrance to the elite status of kehuna?

I submit:

Quantitatively, Tzahal is inversely proportional to the huge number of our enemies, so that every soldier labors harder and longer than in any other army in the world.

My wife, Feige, in the spirit of a Yiddishe Mama who worries about her children 24/7, once asked our son who is in the upper strata of command in Tzahal, "How many hours a day do you work?"

He replied, – "אויס און אויס און און און" Imma, I don't work, I serve!"

That answer has stayed with me always. There is not a day when his words do not cross my mind. When I daven and when I learn, I don't want to feel that I am "working" to keep the Torah. I wish to feel that I am serving HaShem.

The difference between work and service is not one of semantics – it is intrinsic and substantive.

One gets up in the morning to go to work. One who serves never sleeps!

A worker puts in his hours then changes his mental gear in order to apply himself to other things in his life. One who serves, continuously identifies himself with the ideal at hand – strategically and tactically.

Pinchas was raised in the aura of his grandfather Aharon, the Kohen HaGadol, who was the personification of peace and ahavat Yisrael (love of fellow Jew). The man Pinchas, reared in shalom, was so fundamentally moved by the sin of Zimri, that he reacted in opposition to his natural inclinations and took a spear to kill Zimri and the woman he was with.

HaShem honored Pinchas with an unprecedented one time reward – becoming a Kohen. Why just this?

In Bamidbar 4,22-23 we are told of the assignments given to the family of Gershon, the Levite:

[illegible]

Take a census also of the Gershonites by their families and clans. Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to work at the Tabernacle.

*This is the work of the Gershonite clans in their carrying
and their other works*

In Shemot 28,1 the Torah states regarding the Kehuna:

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Bring to you Aaron, your brother, and his sons from among the Israelites so they may serve Me as priests, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aharon.

The Torah defines the appointment of the Levites as “working”, whereas, the Kohanim as “serving”.

The Levi concludes his one-week “call-up” of work every six months in the Bet HaMikdash and returns home to his family to continue his private life, and waits for his next “call-up”.

The Kohen concludes his one-week “call-up” of work every six months in the Bet HaMikdash and returns home to his family. However due to the laws of tuma and tahara and much more which engulf a Kohen every moment, and the other limitations imposed upon him, a Kohen can never, even for a moment, escape his conscious status of Kehuna. The Levi works to fulfill his

specific assignments unique to the Bet HaMikdash, a Kohen serves the Kehuna 24/7 wherever he is.

HaShem knows the motives, emotion, intentions, passion and inspiration behind every word and deed of man. HaShem knew that Pinchas' neshama is to "serve" without personal considerations or fear of social implications. Pinchas was a Kohen by his inherent orientation, and deserved to serve as one officially and halachically. Pinchas is the Prophet Eliyahu whose anger was aroused by the iniquities he saw in society and caused the death of 450 priests of the idol Ba'al. Eliyahu could become angry as Pinchas did with Zimri, but he was also a man of peace and love. He is witness to every brit mila, and is the welcome guest at every Pessach seder; he appears at dramatic moments to save the Jewish people – he is a Kohen.

Working vs. Serving

The Jewish nation is now divided between those who live in HaShem's Holy Land and those who reside in the galut.

The Jews in the galut are divided between those who have thrown off the mantle of sanctity, and the Jews who are observant in various degrees. Regarding the non-observant and assimilated, unless HaShem intervenes dramatically in their lives, they are beyond hope.

The observant Jews, from the most elementary level to the spiritual leaders are in the best case "workers" of Torah. But they cannot achieve the level of "serving" HaShem. Like one who has fallen into quicksand who cannot extradite himself but continues to go under, the Jew in galut cannot soar above his gentile surroundings, values and influences. The proof is the very fact that they choose to remain in galut when the gates to the Holy Land are open to them.

A fundamental difference (one of many) exists between the general public in Eretz Yisrael and the observant in galut.

If things remain more or less as they are now, a religious family in the galut will have at least one son or daughter who will leave the Torah, and can look forward to many grandchildren who will intermarry. Whereas, in Eretz Yisrael a family that does not observe the Shulchan Aruch can expect to have children and certainly grandchildren who will return to the Torah.

The difference is based again on “working” for the Torah as apart from “serving” the Torah. One who lives in Eretz Yisrael cannot escape the Yiddishkeit surrounding him. Ivrit, the language of the Tanach that we speak and the associations our language constantly relates to are religious concepts. And the enemy who sees all of us – regardless of our adherence to the Torah – as “Jews” define our presence here as “serving” Judaism 24/7.

It will take a great deal more than my weekly writings to awaken our brothers and sisters to leave the galut for their return home.

We are in need of a man like Pinchas to awaken the nation to break out of their lethargic, listless, torpid, apathetic, phlegmatic and sightless indifference to the world around them and realize that Jewish life in the galut is dying.

The sands of time are running out. Eretz Yisrael awaits you as a mother awaits the return of her son from the war.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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