

matters. The following incident, which took place about thirty-five years ago in a *frum*, observant *yishuv*, underscores this idea.

The day began like any other, with the man of the house leaving early for *Kollel* where he would spend the entire day. The mother sent off her five older children to school, while she remained home with Motke, their youngest.

It was a beautiful morning, so the mother let Motke play on the balcony – six floors above the street. Every few moments, she would take a quick look to make sure Motke was doing well and not getting into any mischief. Suddenly, she turned around and did not see Motke. She immediately ran to the balcony, where she saw two little hands holding on to the bottom railing of the protective fence surrounding the balcony. The mother immediately ran over and placed her hands between the lattice and held on to Motke for dear life.

This is how she remained – bent over, arms outstretched, holding on to her young son. Half an hour passed – then an hour – two hours and she kept on holding. No one on the street looked up, despite her screams for help. She asked Motke to try to kick off his shoes in the hope that they would fall and alert a passerby to look up. Motke listened; the shoes fell, and a passerby kicked them to the side, as he continued on his designated course. No one bothered to look up.

Three hours – four – five – five and a half hours passed, until one of the storekeepers looked up to close the security gates over his store. He saw a frightening scene: a young boy hanging on to his mother, his legs dangling in the air, six stories above the street. He immediately contacted the fire department, which was able to reach the boy and bring him in. The mother had held on for five and a half hours, an almost superhuman feat. “How did you do it?” a reporter asked. “What is your question? He is my son!”

A powerful lesson is to be derived from this story. Hashem loves us all, because we are His children. Regardless how long and how far – He will always be waiting there for us. He is our Father. We are His children. It is only natural.

Horav Nissim Yagen, zl, offers an inspiring analogy which illuminates the importance of reaching out to those who are lost and alienated in order to help them find their way home. A powerful king who possessed treasuries filled with enormous wealth had one son, who was obviously very special to him. One day, while on a jungle safari, the crown prince lost his way, and no one could locate him. Search parties were sent out, every form of tracking device was employed, all to no avail. The prince was lost. The king became more depressed with each passing day, as he began to despair of ever seeing his son alive again.

In an attempt to raise the king's spirits, one of his distinguished ministers brought the king a beautiful gold watch. “Who cares about a gold watch when my son is lost?” the king declared. Another minister conveyed to the king the wonderful news that he had captured ten provinces and annexed them to the country. “For my part, take all of my

money and all of my provinces and give me back my son!” the king yelled. “I want nothing but my son. Without my son, nothing has any value to me!”

When a Jew sins, it gives Hashem great pain. Every sin has great significance and, undoubtedly, when we are able to convince someone to refrain from performing a specific sin, it is wonderful. If, however, we are able to turn a person around to bring him/her back to Hashem and say, “Hashem, we have found Your prince/princess,” the Almighty derives much satisfaction.

Imagine a soldier who was taken captive by terrorists: if his parents were to discover that they had the winning lottery ticket, would it make an impact? Certainly they would be happy, but as long as their son suffers under the hands of terrorists, no amount of money will excite them. They want their son. So, too, Hashem wants and waits for all of His lost children.

Va'ani Tefillah

רפאנו ד' ונרפא – Refaeinu Hashem v'neirafei. Hear us Hashem and we shall be healed.

We petition Hashem to heal us, because only His remedy will heal our afflictions. His ability is unlimited – in contrast to the human physician who can do only so much. This, explains the *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, is why the Torah writes (with regard to human remedy), *V'rapo yirapei*, “And healing, he shall heal him” (*Shemos 21:19*). A human being must heal again – and again – until he achieves success. This “success” comes only with Divine assistance. When we speak to Hashem we say (only once), *Refaeinu*, “Heal us” – and *v'neirafei*, “We will be healed.” Hashem's healing is immediate, without delay, without relapses.

This is an important principle to take to heart and ruminate over, especially when receiving a human remedy. We can never forget that the health care practitioner is nothing more than Hashem's agent; he is powerless in his own right, without Divine intervention. Thus, regardless of who the physician may be and the degree of success that he has achieved, without Hashem, he is nothing. Our prayer should be to Hashem that He guide the human healer to success.

In loving memory
of our parents and brother
Cy and Natalie Handler
3 Av 5772 - 24 Teves 5771
Jeremy Handler
19 Tammuz 5766
by the Handler Family

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Parashas Pinchas

תשע"ז

פרשת פנחס

**פנחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן השיב את חמתו... לכן אמר הנני נתן לו את בריתי שלום
Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen, turned back my wrath... therefore say: Behold! I give him My Covenant of peace. (25:11,12)**

When an opportunity for greatness appears, most people remain spectators, afraid to make that critical move due to fear of failure, indifference, or just plain laziness. One person, however, will emerge from within the crowd and seize the moment to grab the opportunity. As a result, he will save the day and change the course of his own life. Zimri, Prince of the Tribe of Shimon, blatantly carried out an act of moral turpitude, and, had Pinchas not immediately and decisively intervened, *Klal Yisrael* would have suffered even greater losses than it did. It took extraordinary courage for Pinchas to act as he did. It is not as if there were no other leaders present. Pinchas took the initiative: he asked Moshe *Rabbeinu* and was directed to take action. Why Pinchas? Where were the others?

Perhaps the others did not feel that they were worthy of being *kannaim*, zealots. Perhaps they did not feel they had a strong enough sense of *I'shem Shomayim*, for Heaven's sake. Perhaps they were nervous about the outcome. Perhaps they felt that, if Moshe did not deem it appropriate to take action, who were they to make demands? Perhaps... We all have excuses for backing down. *Baruch Hashem*, there was a Pinchas who had the clarity of mind, the resolute courage and decisiveness, to act. What was there about Pinchas that made him stand out above and beyond the rest?

Pinchas was a descendant of Levi, who, together with his brother, Shimon, destroyed the city of Shechem in moral outrage over the violation of their sister, Dinah. Why? It was a *chillul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem's Name, to treat a Jewish girl in such a base, repulsive manner. To violate a Jewish girl is not only a personal tragedy – it is a natural calamity. It is an affront to the girl – her family – the Jewish People – Hashem. Levi and Shimon did not allow this to go unrequited.

When the people sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe sought out those who were prepared to stand by him and slay the perpetrators. The tribe of Levi came forward. While there are always those who would exact vengeance, how many would do so repeatedly for the sake of Heaven? Only *Shevet Levi*. It was in their blood.

Pinchas was also a descendant of Yisro, who some might feel presented a somewhat negative influence on his pedigree. Perhaps not. Veritably, Yisro did, at one time, worship every idol, but this was all a part of his search for the true G-d. He was a truth seeker who did not tolerate

anything but the pristine truth. This attribute best describes the zealot: he seeks the truth (regardless of how one cloaks this misrepresentation of “authentic”). Truth is an absolute. Deviation is false. Pinchas saw Zimri committing a deviant act of flagrant immorality. Zimri embellished his turpitude “outreach” as a new way to save the people. “Bend a little,” he declared. Pinchas countered, “No!” His heritage could not tolerate adjustment to the law. Zimri was undermining the Torah and Moshe. To stand there and do nothing was to acquiesce. Pinchas took his spear and expressed the *halachic* response to this flagrant desecration of Hashem's Name.

Seizing the moment is not necessarily about zealotry. Moral leadership requires quick decisions, immediate responses, often under the most precarious circumstances. The zealot, as we see with Pinchas, maintained moral clarity, acting immediately and decisively. Obviously, to succeed in such an environment one must know what is proper and correct, and be prepared to run full force to overcome whatever obstacles lie in the way, so that he can realize success. Some people, sadly, are prepared to act, but ill-prepared to know what is right. *Zerizus*, alacrity – without knowledge of the *halachah* or the common sense to discern what is right – is as great an impediment as indecisiveness.

Many of us have potential locked into ourselves, resting peacefully on the back burner until that moment surfaces when we either continue sleeping – or we act. We are presented with a window of opportunity to transform potential into destiny. We were unaware of Pinchas until Zimri came along, and Pinchas acted. It was all potential until that moment. If we are up to it – we should seize the moment. It is transformative.

I recently read an incredible story about someone who took advantage of this transformative moment – literally saving the lives of a group of Israeli soldiers, who succeeded through the Divine guidance and miraculous assistance of Hashem to hold off the might of the Syrian Army, thus turning the tide of the *Yom Kippur* War. Emek HaBachah, the Valley of Tears, a valley deep in the Golan Heights in northern *Eretz Yisrael*, was the scene of an incredible battle which clearly bespeaks *neis*, miracle, at every juncture. A small group of soldiers, *meatim*, a few, against the *rabim*, many, battled for their lives and our Land – and survived. While the soldiers in their tanks risked everything that day, there was one hero, who, albeit not a soldier, was prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice and saved the moment. His *z'chus*, merit, is outstanding, but his ability to seize the moment represents the “fuel” which fired up the miracle.

The battle of Emek HaBachah raged. The Israeli Army had 35 tanks – one battalion – surrounded by 650 Syrian tanks armed to the teeth. In addition to their being severely

outnumbered, their fuel supply was extremely low and their ammunition was even lower. In the middle of the battle, a few tanks began pulling back to reload and gas-up. They had been struggling against a greater number, far more superior forces, with what seemed like an endless supply of ammunition and fuel.

When the battalion commander saw the couple of tanks pulling back, he immediately issued orders that they should hold their ground – even at the risk of running out of fuel. The young lieutenant countered that he was almost out of fuel and shells. The commander ordered him to stay put, and, if they had no ammo left, to move around, raise dust, and accompany it with machine gunfire. If they ran out of fuel then they should rotate their turrets. Under no circumstances were they to pull back. The moment the Syrians would see tanks leaving the battlefield, they would assume the Israelis were retreating. This would embolden them to come in with everything and rout the Jewish soldiers. The tanks stayed in their places.

A truck driver who was back at the fuel depot heard the interchange between the commander and the lieutenant. He quickly jumped into his fuel truck and drove into the heart of the battle, under a constant barrage of shells, with no armor for protection – just to fill up the tanks! If he would have been hit, he would have been vaporized. Yet, the moment was there, and he seized it. This hero was the medium through which the outcome of that battle was altered. Hashem makes the miracle. He was waiting for that person, that “Pinchas,” who was willing to risk everything – his life – in order to save his People.

פנחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen. (25:11)

The Torah traces Pinchas’ lineage to Aharon HaKohen. What about his maternal grandfather, Yisro? The Torah appears to gloss over his connection to Pinchas. *Rashi* explains that, as usual, people must find fault with the hero who saves the day. Otherwise, they might look bad, since, after all, why did they not take action? As usual, we put down the individual who acted decisively because it bothers us that he did – and we did not. They brought to our attention that Pinchas descended from Yisro, the Midyanite Priest, who fattened calves for *avodah zarah*, idol-worship. How could such a man, who descended from a pagan priest, have the audacity to kill a Jewish prince? Thus, the Torah mentions only the aspect of his *yichus*, pedigree, which descends from Aharon HaKohen.

As an aside, Yisro’s search for the truth was indeed his greatest virtue. He refused to settle into believing that G-d could be found in mortar and stone. Thus, he served them all until he was firmly rooted in his belief that there is only one G-d: Hashem. People, however, due to their limited ability to think outside the box, view everyone who does not conform to convention as being a heretic, a usurper; in fact, Yisro was a gentile who was seeking his way to the truth.

Nonetheless, the Torah praises Pinchas for being the son of Elazar, the son-in-law of Yisro, who fattened calves for idol-worship. This was a reason for Pinchas to stand down. What would people say? He would be condemned as an out of control extremist who came from a dysfunctional lineage. What right does he have to involve himself in “Jewish” areas? Who is he to rise up and speak against a Jewish prince? Let him go to his grandfather’s home in Midyan and help fatten some cows. Despite the

abuse, Pinchas jumped into the fray to save the day.

The fact that Pinchas was willing to risk his life to suffer abuse in order to act *l’shem Shomayim*, for Heaven’s sake, seems insufficient reason for him to garner such praise. He did what any committed Jew who witnesses a flagrant desecration of Hashem’s Name should do. That people will demean his lineage or slander his true intentions is not a reason to shy away from what is the true course of action. So Pinchas risked his life; so Pinchas was willing to suffer shame; so what? This is what being a committed Jew is all about. Is this reason for a pat on the back?

Horav Henach Leibowitz, zl, explains that *kavod*, honor, esteem (what others think of you), has a compelling effect on a person’s actions. One will sooner endanger his life than risk the opinion others have of him. Thus, if Pinchas were to be prepared to be disgraced for Hashem’s Name, this is compelling reason for accolade.

Honor means more to some than it does to others. In some cultures respectability and virtue have overriding significance. Thus, if an individual is willing to suffer disgrace in order to save the life of another person – especially someone whom he does not know, a member of another culture, a religion alien to his own – it indicates that this person is of an exalted nature. Such a person is a hero. To be a hero demands both risk and sacrifice. At times, heroes sacrifice their career, future, family – even their lives. According to the *Rosh Yeshivah*, to be willing to sacrifice one’s reputation, to accept disgrace in order to help others, takes a very special person.

Chione Sugihara was such a person. He was a Japanese consul who risked his career and his future to save six thousand Jews at the beginning of World War II. Sugihara gave Jews entry visas, which was against the orders of the Japanese government. As a result of his actions, he lost his job and respectability in much of Japanese society. He was neither Jewish, nor was he beholden to the Jews. He was simply a good person (Heaven-sent) who was prepared to throw everything away because he felt the Jews were being mercilessly persecuted for no reason other than that they were Jewish.

One has to understand Japanese/Samurai culture to appreciate his sacrifice. Sugihara was raised in the strict Japanese code of ethics which included: love for the family; living for the sake of the children; accepting duty and respectability; and never bringing shame upon the family. His undertaking brought terrible shame upon himself. He did not care. He was saving lives. His story is one of the great miracles of World War II. Much of the European Torah that was transplanted from the Lithuanian *yeshivos* was due to his heroic efforts.

The German invasion of Poland filled Lithuania with Jewish refugees seeking an avenue of escape. There was one problem: travel between countries was restricted unless one had a transit visa. The second problem was that very few countries were willing to issue these visas. One summer morning in late July, 1940, Consul Sugihara was overwhelmed with the multitude of Jewish refugees waiting by the door of the consulate. These men and women were acutely aware that their only hope for salvation was in the east, and the only person who could help them was Sugihara. In order to issue a visa, Sugihara required permission from the Japanese Foreign Ministry – a permission which had been denied three times. He now confronted the major decision of his life: Does he save Jews?

This choice would likely result in extreme financial hardship for him. He would probably be fired and worse – disgraced, never able to work for the Japanese government again.

One look into the eyes of the desperate Jews who stood before him, and his decision was made. His wife helped and, together, they wrote 300 visas per day. They did not stop to eat, as long as people stood before them, day and night. The visas took the refugees through Moscow, and then by Trans-Siberian rail to Vladivostok and then on to Japan, where many remained until the end of the war.

In 1945, the Japanese government formally shut down Sugihara. He was banned from ever serving in the diplomatic service. His career and his honor were shattered in Japan. (His heroism, however, will be forever etched in the annals of Jewish history as a righteous of the gentiles who risked everything to help the Jews.) He and his family were forced to leave Lithuania, and, as punishment for his illegal actions, he spent two years imprisoned in Romania. Upon finally returning to Japan, he was a disgraced person. He worked at odd jobs to support his family. Although he never called attention to his wartime efforts on behalf of the Jews, he took deep pride in having responded positively to the call of his conscience. He never gave up helping. Indeed, as the train took him from Lithuania to be imprisoned in Romania, he was still signing visas and throwing them out the window. Sugihara was willing to suffer a lifetime of disgrace for the opportunity to be the medium for granting a “lifetime” to 6,000 Jewish refugees. Disgrace? He said he would rather suffer the disgrace of man than stand in disgrace before G-d.

פנחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן השיב את חמתי מעל בני ישראל בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen, turned back my wrath from upon Bnei Yisrael, when he zealously avenged My vengeance among them. (25:11)

Pinchas did not act in a vacuum. The entire nation witnessed his actions. What were they doing? Some were (of course) complaining and disparaging his lineage, claiming that his motives were impure. According to *Targum Yonasan*, the rest cried and recited *Krias Shema*. They cried, explains *Chezuni*, because Moshe *Rabbeinu* had instructed them to kill the perpetrators who had sinned with the Midyanite women. It was a difficult order to carry out. *Shevet Levi*, who were once again empowered to be the righteous executioners, did not seem to have an issue (earlier) when the order came to kill the offenders who had worshipped the *eigal*, Golden Calf. Yet now, they had cried. Why?

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, distinguishes between the philosophical anathema of idolatry and the moral repugnance of licentiousness. There is no question that the sin of worshipping idols demonstrates a mutinous attitude towards Hashem. Immorality, albeit inappropriate, is an accepted way of life in some societies. After all, who is to stop two consenting adults? To kill a dear friend, close relative, because he/she acted immorally, demands enormous sensitivity to *mitzvos* and an overwhelming love of Hashem. The average Jew does not understand why a person commits immorality, but he does understand that people have urges, passions, strong desires. Once they play out these urges in their minds, they might later also act them out in reality. Idolatry is abominable. It depicts the

worshipper at his lowest point. It is not something that presents itself rationally. Thus, when the order came to kill the perpetrators, it was not as difficult a task to execute as the call to kill those who had liaisons with the Midyanite women.

The only one who understood that both behaviors represent a *chillul Hashem*, profanation of Hashem’s Name, was Pinchas. He understood that cohabiting with a gentile/pagan is tantamount to worshipping its idols. Pinchas understood the truth that, once an activity lacks *emes*, truth, there is no difference what it is. Falseness is falsehood, regardless of the way it is packaged.

Shevet Levi was comprised of holy human beings; albeit holy, they were still human beings. When the *meraglim*, spies, returned with their slanderous report of *Eretz Yisrael*, the nation wept. It was unwarranted, but they still wept. They were worried; they were concerned. They, too, would lose their exalted position of leadership. Someone else would benefit from what they had worked so hard to achieve. So, they wept. When it came to vengeance over the Golden Calf, they came forthright. Concerning the *meraglim*, where their own honor might have been impugned, they took their time. They even wept together with the mutineers. Why? It was a sin to which they too could relate.

We must confront the reality that, in our eyes, not all sins maintain the same level of malevolence. There are sins that we have come to “accept,” to “tolerate.” This is a sign that the moral degeneration of society has taken its toll – even on us! We see assimilated Jews and are even good friends with them. Yet, we are not seriously aggrieved by their spiritual behavior – or lack thereof. We have lost our sensitivity to certain *aveiros*, sins. The righteous indignity that should prevail with us is no longer there – or, perhaps, it is no longer “righteous.”

ובני קרח לא מתו And the sons of Korach did not die. (26:11)

The sons of Korach were (originally) in the thick of the dispute against Moshe *Rabbeinu*. *Rashi* explains that, at the very last moment, they repented. Regardless of how far one has drifted from Jewish observance, how distant he has strayed from traditional life and Torah values, he can return and be reinstated. People think that once they have rejected the Torah way it is impossible to come back. This is categorically incorrect. The *Ponevezer Rav, zl*, was about to leave on a journey to the United States. His revered *Rebbe*, the *Chafetz Chaim*, *zl*, was still alive. The *Rav* went to the *Chafetz Chaim* to bid him farewell and to solicit his blessing for a successful journey. While they spoke, the *Rav* asked the *Chafetz Chaim* for a message to convey to American Jewry. The *Chafetz Chaim* instructed him to convey that it is quite simple to repent. All one has to do is to regret the past and take upon oneself to alter his lifestyle for the future, or – in today’s vernacular – “Move on!” Ruminating over the past only engenders depression. It is time to make up one’s mind and move on.

A parent never gives up on a child – regardless of the pain and the hurt the child has caused him. Hashem is our Heavenly Father, Who waits “up” for all of His children to return home. When they do return, it matters not how far away they have been or the pain and hurt they have caused, as long as they are home, safe and sound. That is all that