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**SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL *ZT”L***

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**Is the Zeal of Pinchas to be Emulated?**

Translated by Kaeren Fish

Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon, the kohen, turned back My anger from Bnei Yisrael, in his zeal for My sake among them, so that I did not destroy Bnei Yisrael in My zeal. Therefore say, Behold, I give him My covenant of peace. (*Bamidbar* 25:11-12)

There are people who by nature are zealous. Such people are zealous about everything, in every sphere. There are people like this who are immersed in some type of extremism, and when they move over to a different ideology, they become just as extreme in that view.

Some maintain that Pinchas had this sort of zeal in his personality. As Rashi explains:

The tribes scorned him, saying, “Look at this one, whose mother’s father used to fatten calves for idolatry – and he has killed a price of a tribe of Israel!” Therefore the text traces his lineage back to Aharon. (Based on *Sanhedrin* 82)

The text traces Pinchas’s lineage back to Aharon – the same Aharon who, as we know, was a “lover of peace and pursuer of peace” (*Avot* 1:12). The Torah wants to tell us that Pinchas had not inherited his trait of zeal from Yitro, but rather from Aharon himself. Yitro was a figure who was altogether extreme: “There was not a single form of idolatry which he had not practiced” (*Mekhilta*, *Yitro*). Yitro jumped from one religion to the next, diving into each with enthusiasm and extremism. Aharon, in contrast, was a personality who was altogether at peace, a personality altogether devoid of extremism. Nevertheless, it is precisely this sort of personality that sometimes arrives at an extremism that flows from truth, from spontaneous zeal for God.

Rambam writes:

One who is zealous is not permitted to harm [a Jew who lies with a gentile], except as the action is being performed, like Zimri, as it is written, “[the man of Israel] and the woman, through her belly” (*Bamidbar* 25:8). But if he had already separated himself, one does not kill him. And if one kills him, he himself is to be killed. And if one who is zealous comes to the court to ask permission to kill him, he is not given permission – even as the action is being performed. (*Hilkhot Issurei Biah* 12:5)

An act of zeal can only take place “as the action is being performed,” and it can only emerge from true spontaneity (not after seeking permission or clarifying legal issues), out of true zeal for God.

In our generation the problem is that people are generally apathetic; nothing shakes their equilibrium. They view others desecrating Shabbat in public, and feel no twinge in their heart. Once I was in the United States and I saw a Christian priest on television, talking about ‘the Mother, the Son…’ etc. I was completely shaken by this kind of talk. I couldn’t listen to it. The people sitting in the room, though observant Jews, continued drinking their coffee, sensing nothing.

People become apathetic and nothing shocks them. We must feel zeal in certain areas. This does not mean that our zeal need necessarily be demonstrated outwardly – sometimes outward demonstrations only bring harm; one must know, from a halakhic point of view, when rebuke is necessary, when it is permissible, and when it is forbidden. However, all of that is only on the outside. Inside ourselves, we dare not remain apathetic. We must be zealous for God.