

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Reflections on Parshas Pinchas - Remembering Once Again Tomer Devorah

Tomer Devorah teaches us how to emulate Hashem and why. Hashem is the Father of the consciousness for each and every one of us. Our souls are rooted in one soul uttered into existence by Hashem. This spiritual reality is the basis for ahavas yisrael, the basis for remembering that we are a people who are considered as one body, with many different limbs and organs.

At this time during the three weeks, when we read Parshas Pinchas, we see that Pinchas who kills Zimri and Cosbi is criticized by his community for taking the matter into his own hands. It is because Torah names him that we know that what he did was l'shaim shemayim. Otherwise how would it not appear to us as a zealousness, such as what we saw when Yitzchak Rabin was assassinated or when Rabbi Elazar Abuchatzeira was stabbed, both of which clearly showed the violation of human life and the killing as a sin and crime.

Pinchas stopped the plague. What he did was good in Hashem's eyes. Yet the Parsha shows us human nature.

No matter how right a value we may have, if we assert it in a way that appears to annihilate a value held by someone else, inevitably we create an underdog and a pool of people who will support the group under attack. The support may not be based on the value itself, but rather the support will be to protect the underdog's liberties.

The intention of this article is to go deeper with conflict resolution in general by taking it ultimately to reviving a deeper value that has been lost since the time the first Temple was destroyed.

Much can be learned from the progress of various causes over history to bring attention and sympathy to their values and positions. The human brain is constructed uniformly. When people feel threatened, the self preserving part of the brain attacks back, and this speaks to the emotions of every person, that there must be a need to protect the one feeling attacked. Everyone identifies with the "victim" and looks to be protective and nurturing, regardless of whether they agree or not with the value. Whether logical or right or not, it is the kindness within human nature that favors the underdog.

What keeps both sides in opposition is something that has been forgotten and lost due to the destruction of the first Temple, something that overlooks the most obvious basic common ground there is. Both values are coming from people made in the image of Hashem. Being made in the image of Hashem means that within each person are Hashem's attributes of mercy. When we hold our esteem based on the extent to which we bring out the attributes of mercy - loving, forgiving, overlooking, patience, bearing insult, and casting sins into the sea - and we identify our survival as within Hashem's hands alone, the issues simplify for we are forced to perceive the value of our adversary and enter into a path of seeing how to consider each other and ultimately benefit each other in a more unifying way. Refusal to see ourselves as made in Hashem's image, a refusal to see that bringing out the attributes of mercy is vital, usually leads to attempts to annihilate the other point of view.

Reactive attempts to annihilate the value of those we disagree with backfire. And that is because there is a spiritual reality to the world, one where Hashem is in total control one hundred percent of the time. A visualization would be that of a fish tank with a glass divider, on one side a goldfish, and on the other side a pirhana. The pirhana might press against that glass wall all day, but only if the fish bowl owner lifts the glass wall with the goldfish be vulnerable to the pirhana. Hashem is the owner of our fishbowl, dear readers. It is He alone Who we need to serve. It is one thing to have doubts, that is part of the

human experience. But to deny its truth is the sad blindness that is the result of the destruction of King Solomon's temple, a place where it was not possible to deny Hashem's existence and control over the world.

It is surely within our skill group to remember that we are made in Hashem's image and that He creates us and our world, despite the reality that we no longer have a visual way and a physical place to experience this reality. Therefore it is within our skill group to show Hashem, by our choosing to emulate His attributes of mercy, that we have internalized an experiential reality of His Truth and Existence.

So let us mourn the temple and let us bring ourselves to the place of remembering that when we find within ourselves that we are made in Hashem's image, and when we come to realize that because we have that intrinsic value we are capable of bringing Hashem's attributes of mercy into the world, perhaps we can resolve whatever differences are in need of conflict resolution and come together with ahavas yisrael, by seeing our shared root, in a way that will shine such a light in the heavens that Hashem will see we love Him and His Children and bring a speedy redemption.