



Sicha Summary

Chelek 18 | Pinchas | Sichas 3

The Context:

The Haftorah of *parshas Pinchas* is the opening of the book of *Yirmiyahu*. What is the thematic connection between Pinchas, his actions in this *parshah*, and Yirmiyahu's prophecy in the haftorah?

The Seed of the Explanation:

The book of *Yirmiyahu* introduces the prophet Yirmiyahu and his project to inspire the Jewish people to repent by conjuring up scenes of the future destruction of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. By contrast, the prophet Yeshayahu exhorted the people to repent by envisioning the future redemption. (See *Bava Basra* 14b)

This difference between these two prophets stems from the times in which each of them lived: Yeshayahu lived during a time when the Temple stood and Divine revelation was relatively common; Yirmiyahu lived through the destruction of Jerusalem — a time of “darkness and concealment.” (*Sefer Hasichos* 5703, p. 140)

A similar distinction can be drawn between Pinchas and Moshe. Moshe often intervened on behalf of the Jewish people, but he did so by invoking Divine mercy. Pinchas intervened on behalf of the Jewish people by engaging in a violent act that placed his physical life in danger. Thus, Pinchas and Yirmiyahu both focused on communicating with the people and inspiring them in the midst of darkness.

The Explanation:

To explain: When G-d threatened to destroy the Jewish people after the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe prayed to G-d, asking Him to exercise His capacity for mercy. Moshe was prepared to sacrifice his spiritual existence by demanding that G-d “erase me from Your book” if G-d would not forgive the people.

When the Jewish people were dying from a plague due to their idolatrous practices and immoral relationships with Midianite women, Pinchas intervened by killing Zimri — a vocal leader of the rebellious Jews — and his paramour. The plague immediately ceased.

G-d proclaimed that Pinchas “turned My anger away from the children of Israel by zealously avenging Me among them, so that I did not destroy the children of Israel...” (*Bamidbar* 25:11) G-d rewarded Pinchas and his descendants with an “eternal covenant of priesthood.” (*Bamidbar* 25:13)

In contrast, Moshe did not merit to have his children succeed him. Why did Pinchas’ actions warrant an “eternal covenant of peace,” while Moshe’s intervention did not?

The difference lies in their respective modes of Divine service. Moshe worked to channel Divine light into the world, himself, and the people. It was in character for Moshe, therefore, to ask G-d to remove His decree by drawing down Divine mercy to the earth. The drawback of this intervention is that when Divine light overwhelms humanity, it does not bring about an intrinsic change in the unrefined human character. Thus, the elevation is temporary, and when the inspiration leaves, the world reverts to its previous state. Moshe’s intervention did not have “everlasting” effects on the Jewish people.

Pinchas, on the other hand, worked with the people from within their place of confusion and sin, literally wrestling with the Zimri in order to encourage the people to repent. When the people redeemed themselves from their darkness by their own effort, the change was permanent. Pinchas thus

earned an “everlasting covenant of peace” because his efforts elicited real change within the people.

Thus, Yirmiyahu’s prophecies of destruction complement *parshas Pinchas*, for they both evoke our capacity to redeem ourselves from within our own state of exile.

More specifically, the opening verses of the Haftorah encourage us to view ourselves as being capable of transforming our darkness, even if we are doubtful of our abilities.

Even though we feel that “I know not to speak for I am a youth,” G-d assures us that “When I had not yet formed you in the womb, I knew you, and when you had not yet emerged from the womb, I had appointed you; a prophet to the nations I made you,” meaning, we are born with Divine ability to overcome any opposition. (*Yirmiyahu* 1:5-6)

Therefore, “Fear them not, for I am with you to save you” (*Yirmiyahu*, 1:8) — G-d is with the Jewish people every step of the way, empowering us to transform our own darkness into the light of redemption.