

## Parashat Pinchas

### Does Pinchas Serve as a Model for 'Price-tag' Activism?

#### Unanimous Outrage against Jewish Terrorism

The Gay Pride parade in the city of Be'er Sheva was cancelled last Wednesday in protest of Israel's High Court of Justice banning the parade from passing through a central street. The reason for the ban was to avoid violence, such as what happened at Jerusalem's Gay Pride parade last summer, when Yishai Schlissel murdered a 16-year-old girl, Shira Banki. Prior to the parade, Yishai had distributed a letter that read, "It is the obligation of every Jew to keep his soul from punishment and stop this giant desecration of G-d's name next Thursday [at the gay parade]."

When my husband told me this news, my first reaction was, "People will say that the murder had a positive effect." "That's exactly what Hertzog and the 'leftwingers' are saying," responded my husband. While, I am far from upset about the cancellation of the Gay Pride parade, I firmly oppose anyone taking the law into their own hands, justifying murder or even stone throws in the name of the Torah. The only exception is if, G-d forbid, our own lives are directly threatened, as it states, "Whoever comes to kill you, you must arise to kill him" (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 58a*). It is only for this reason that my husband, unfortunately, needs to carry a gun. For years, Bat Ayin has struggled to clear its reputation of being particularly extremist and 'a bunch of Jewish terrorists.' Contrary to public opinion, most of Bat Ayin's residents, like myself, strongly oppose murders such as that of Shira Banki, the Arab teenager in 2014, and Yitzchak Shamir in 1995. I totally share the sentiment of Rabbi Joel Zeff, a new addition to B'erot's faculty: "I can think of no greater desecration of the name of G-d, no more egregious perversion of the Torah, than that committed by these young men [who murdered the Arab teen from Shuafat]. Their unforgivable crime is compounded by the inestimable damage it has done to Israel's already uphill battle to gain understanding for its struggle against terrorism. My only (small) consolation is the unanimous outrage against this barbaric act expressed by the entire spectrum of Israeli society" (Rabbi Joel Zeff, *Parshat Pinchas: Zealot or Cruel Murderer?*).

#### Erroneous Comparison between Arab Terrorism and 'Price-tag' Activists

The few acts of Jewish terrorism over the years have caused the world at large to erroneously equate the injustices done against Jews to that against Arabs in Israel. I remember discussing this issue with one of my leftist minded family members who claimed that, "Jews and Arabs are equally guilty, since violence committed by Jewish Israeli settlers and their supporters against Palestinians and Israeli security forces is just as bad as Arab terrorist acts." Wikipedia even defines a term called 'Israeli settler violence.' Just as the Middle East conflict in general is blown out of proportion in the news with the demonization of Israel, so are the 'Price-tag' acts greatly exaggerated. In reality, only a minority of the so-called 'Palestinians' have the courage to stand up against Arab terrorism, while Jewish terrorist supporters comprise an extremely small minority of Israelis. "Demographically and organizationally, price taggers stand on 'the fringe of the fringe' of the settler world. Estimates suggest they number in the mere hundreds. The coordination (if any) of attacks is informal and spontaneous" (*The Simple Jew: The 'Price Tag' Phenomenon, Vigilantism, and Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh's Political Kabbalah*, Tessa Satherley). Conversely, the majority of the Arab world, and particularly the 'Palestinians, support terrorism and the murder of Jews. Their leaders call to publically celebrate the murderers and name streets after them.

### Hashem Sanctions Pinchas as a True Zealot

The example of Pinchas, in this week's parasha has been used as a role model for zealotry. The Torah recounts that Zimri, the head of the tribe of Shimon, was publicly engaged in immoral behavior with a Midianite woman called Kasbi. Hashem sends a severe plague as a punishment. While, Moshe remains passive Aharon's grandson, Pinchas, decides to act on his own, grabs a spear, kills the offending couple and stops the plague. Subsequently, G-d grants his covenant of peace to Pinchas as a reward for his zealotry:

#### ספר במדבר פרק כה

(י) וַיְדַבֵּר הַשֵּׁם אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (יא) פִּינָחָס בֶּן אֱלֵעָזָר בֶּן אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן הִשִּׁיב אֶת חַמְתִּי מֵעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקַנְאוֹ אֶת קַנְאוֹתַי בְּתוֹכְכֶם וְלֹא כָלִיתִי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקַנְאוֹתַי: (יב) לָכֵן אָמַר ה' לְךָ אֶמְרָה הַנְּבִי נִתַּן לּוֹ אֶת בְּרִיתִי שְׁלוֹם: (יג) וְהָיְתָה לוֹ וּלְזָרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו בְּרִית כְּהֻנָּה עוֹלָם תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר קָנָא לְאֱלֹהָיו וַיִּכַּפֵּר עַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

“Hashem spoke unto Moses, saying: ‘Pinchas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aharon the Kohen has turned My wrath away from the children of Israel, in that he was very jealous for My sake among them, so that I did not wipe out the children of Israel in My jealousy. Wherefore say: Behold, I grant him My covenant of peace. It shall be for him, and his descendants after him, a covenant of an everlasting Kehuna; because he was jealous for his G-d, and made atonement for the children of Israel” (*Bamidbar 25:10-13*).

### Who can Walk the Tightrope between Zealotry and Murder?

The question remains whether latter-day price-tag zealots are justified in modeling themselves on the case of Pinchas. The rabbis of the Talmud recognized that they could not abide a society in which individuals justify violence in the name of Torah. Therefore, they greatly limited the cases where individuals may act out of zealotry. As far as I know, there are only two cases where the principle of *בו פוגעים /kanaim pogim bo* – “zealots may slay him” applies: 1. When a person curses G-d's name with the name of a false god (Rambam, *Laws of idol-worship* 2). 2. Whenever a man has relations with a gentile woman in public, i.e., the relations are carried out in the presence of ten or more Jews (Rambam, *Forbidden Relationships* 12:4). There are many limitations within these limited cases: For example, any zealot, who strikes the transgressor the moment he withdraws after having sinned, is considered a murderer. This is why Pinchas was careful to kill the offenders in the midst of relations. Malbim notes, that it was a miracle that everyone saw that they were killed while engaging in the forbidden act, as otherwise, Pinchas would have been accused of murder. The difference between a true zealot for the sake of Hashem and a murderer is such a minute hairsbreadth that without the many miracles done for Pinchas, he may have easily been considered a murderer by the Rabbis. This is why the Torah has to testify regarding Pinchas' pure intentions for the sake of Hashem's honor. Not an iota of self-righteous indignation or personal revenge tainted Pinchas motivation. Which modern day 'zealot' can claim to be a true zealot like Pinchas? Who can fulfill all the qualifications that renders him a true zealot, sanctioned by Hashem himself for the ability to walk on the tightrope between murder and zealotry?