

Pinchas – D’var Torah
July 7, 2018
Lindy K. Lurie
Temple Aliyah, Needham

Shabbat Shalom.

In this week’s Parsha, Pinchas we read about Aaron’s Grandson, Pinchas.

Pinchas publicly slays a prince from the tribe of Shimon who took a Midianite woman **intentionally** to dishonor the tabernacle. Pinchas is congratulated as a hero and he & his descendants are rewarded with the covenant of peace and everlasting priesthood. After that, there is a counting of the Israelite people, then we hear about how Moshe will be able to go to the mountain overlooking the land of Israel, but not be able to enter. Finally, we hear about the sacrificial offerings for the three pilgrimage holidays: Pesach, Shavuot & Sukkot – as well as Rosh Hashana & Yom Kippur

It was hard for me to pick out one thing to talk about in my drash since the parsha is **so** rich. What I want to focus on is the part that disturbed me **the most**. The “boom in your face” part at the beginning of the parasha when Pinchas savagely kills two people & then **REWARDED** for performing this heinous act.

This really got me thinking- especially as a parent of two young daughters, as a daughter and granddaughter myself. ***Do we inherit the bad (or good) from the actions of our parents?***

In Numbers Chapter 25 verse 13 V’hayta Lo Oolezar-o Acharav, Brit Kehunat Olam, Tachat Asher Kina Le’Elohav, Vayichaper Al B’nai Yisrael ---And it should be unto him & his descendants after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was jealous for his god and made atonement for the children of Israel

So Pinchas & his descendants after him were gifted brit shalom (the covenant of peace) and Kehunat Olam (everlasting priesthood) because Pinchas killed two people. MURDERED. SLAYED IN PUBLIC. SPEARED STRAIGHT THROUGH.



What did the Bible mean by this? As a Judaic Studies major in college, I learned about the Historical-Critical Method of bible study. This was something new for me to consider, as all throughout my life I had taken the biblical stories very literally. As children, we think about things in such concrete, tangible ways. Take Noah for example, the flood, his ark, animals marching two by two, the rain letting up, the dove and the rainbow. It's easier for us to learn that way – when the stories are easy to imagine just as they are written.

For the first time, I learned that perhaps these stories were not all necessarily literal, but rather - were designed by the writers of the Torah to teach us important lessons that we carry through our lives. So the first time I read through Pinhas, I had to take a step back & *Maybe* not take it so literally. Because it's hard to read this story and say WOW! What a hero! Pinhas KILLED and he & his descendants will be rewarded forever. No matter how bad he thought the Shimonite prince and the Midianite woman were, that was pretty tough to see in print.

Pinhas thought he was doing what was right. And in some ways he was. The Israelites were corrupted in idol worship & sexual immorality so it was the impetus for that plague to end. BUT, just because you **THINK** you know what's right, doesn't mean that you know everything there is to know.

When our ancestors mess up, we might inherit the bad they did. They may not be punished in their lifetime, but their descendants could pay the price. In thinking about my own heritage, this reminds me of all the good Jewish-German dialogues in the works today, through the American Jewish Committee, Brandeis and so many other groups. These types of conversations can spark true change. Nazis from 3 generations ago had committed such unspeakable crimes against us Jews and other marginalized groups in Europe. Now, today, 80 plus years later, Grandchildren & great grandchildren of Jewish families affected by the Shoah can have meaningful dialogue with the Nazi's grandchildren to form some common bonds. So, in this sense, of course we bear the weight of some of that through our inherited traumas, but it makes me hopeful that after such devastation & tragedy, future generations are able to face the bad and look for some good.

There was another way someone's descendants made a difference in a positive way in Parashat Pinchas.

In Chapter 27, we learn of b'not- Zlophechad - The daughters of a man named Zlophchad. The bible tells little about Zelophchad himself, other than he died while the Israelites were wandering on their way to the Promised Land. Zlophchad had no sons, and there was no process for who would receive someone's inheritance if they died without any sons. Patriarchy (shake fist)! So Zlophechad's inheritance was going to NOBODY. In a different way than Pinchas, Zlophchad's daughters stood up for what was right so his inheritance could stay in the family. They were interested in inheriting their father's inheritance of course - to change things for themselves- BUT they ended up changing the law so that **future** generations of families with only sisters could reap the benefits of their work. Feminism (happy fingers!!)

Chapter 27 v. 6-8 – “V’el B’nai Yisrael, TeDaber Leymor: Eesh Kee-Yamooy, ooVen Eyn lo – V’acartem Et Nachalato Le’Veeto. “and god said... And you shall speak unto the children of Israel Saying – if a man die and have no son, then you should cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter.”

In closing, We never truly know how our actions could impact future generations. The more good we do, the more it can effect change around us for the betterment of others. We should strive every day to do all the good that we can. Not just for us but for those who come after us... To create a better world for our children and our children's children, and our children's children's children.

Forever and ever.

This is the lesson of Pinchas.

Shabbat shalom.