

Torah Tidbits – July 7, 2014

This week's portion is Pinchas, who may have been the first zealot. At that point in the history of the Israelites, it was pretty clear that somebody should do something about the leaders who were completely willing to do something inappropriate right in front of Moses. Moses wasn't, and the other leaders weren't, and while they might have been willing to wait for God to take action, Pinchas wasn't. He took it upon himself to be judge, jury and executioner, hoisting the proof of wickedness in front of the entire camp (thereby publicly embarrassing the families of those displayed in this fashion).

Pinchas is rewarded, perhaps, by being granted a separate Covenant with God. Yet - the description of the Covenant is one of peace, spelled within every Torah scroll with a broken letter "vav." My own particular Midrash on this at this moment is that Pinchas punished the guilty in such a way that required God to participate, yet it was also in such a way that it implied a lack of faith in the system as a whole, of which God was a pretty big part. Those who imagine that they are channeling the spirit of Pinchas in this era would do well to remember that Pinchas was neither an avenger nor a "revenger." Pinchas executed the guilty without benefit of trial, and in today's society that would make him somebody who is engaged in breaking the sixth of God's ten statements.

On a different topic, I think it is always appropriate during this Torah portion to remember the daughters of Zelophchad. They did not let the semblance, or even the reality of a patriarchal society keep them from demanding recognition of their family's rights of inheritance in the Land of Israel.

God recognizes the justice of their claim, and there is nothing in the text to indicate that this recognition is half-hearted in any way. I invite you to draw your own conclusions from this.