



Zealousness Motivated by Love
Parshas Pinchas

It was on a Friday evening in Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk's prayer hall which was full of Jews from around the world who had made a pilgrimage to this holy place to greet the incoming Shabbos, marking Rabbi Elimelech's *Yahrzeit*.

The cantor began to lead the prayers, suddenly, the screeching of halting tires was heard, a bus pulled in at the last minute. It was followed by another two buses. Who has come so late, who was desecrating the Shabbos in such a holy place? It turned out that it was a group of Israeli youths who were on a tour of Poland, they disembarked from the bus in a leisurely but noisy fashion, talking loudly and taking pictures.

Many of the congregants were unhappy about their arrival, as they profaned a holy exalted atmosphere. Some of the congregants began to shout "Shabbas Shabbas."

As the youth continued on, a group of the congregants ran in an attempt to stop them from entering. I saw that mayhem was about to ensue, and so I blocked the path of those running out, telling them I would "take care" of the youths.

I took the 150 youngsters aside and explained to them politely that it was improper to desecrate the sanctity of the Shabbos. The youth understood the situation. I told them that if they wished to stay they would have to respect the Shabbos.

They told me: "Rabbi, we have brought *Kvittel*."¹ I told them I would collect them and place them on Rabbi Elimelech's tomb. One of the youth refused to part with his note: "I have been waiting for such a long time to come here, and have finally made it. Why can't I go in myself?"

When I saw the tears in his eyes I said: "Follow me everyone", and they joined in the dancing and singing of the Shabbos prayers.

After the prayers I spoke to the group that was unhappy with the youth staying with us. I told them about the story of Rabbi Zera:

"In the neighborhood of Rabbi Zera there lived some lawless men. He nevertheless showed them friendship in order to lead them to repent; but the Rabbis were annoyed at his action. When R. Zera passed away, they (lawless men)

said: Until now we had the burnt man with the dwarfed legs² to implore Divine mercy for us; who will do so now? Thereupon they felt remorse in their hearts and repented."³ "This is the power of zealousness motivated by love", I added.

In our weekly parsha we learn about zealotry: "Pinchas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron the Cohen has turned My anger away from the children of Israel by his zealously avenging Me among them, so that I did not destroy the children of Israel because of My zeal. Therefore, say, "I hereby give him My covenant of peace." To receive a covenant from G-d one must have true zealotry, for G-d's sake and with no other intention.

"Pinchas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron the Cohen" - the reason Scripture traces his lineage to Aharon is because Aharon loved peace and sought peace. Aharon knew that not all was perfect with the Jewish People, but his way was the path of peace and love.

We find the same conduct with Rabbi Meir: "There were once some highwaymen in the neighborhood of Rabbi Meir who caused him a great deal of trouble. Rabbi Meir accordingly prayed that they should die. His wife Beruria said to him: How do you make out that such a prayer should be permitted? Because it is written:

"Let hatta'im (sin) cease"? Is it written hot'im (sinners)⁴? It is written hatta'im (sin)! Further, look at the end of the verse: "and let the wicked men be no more." Since the sins will cease, there will be no more wicked men! Rather pray for them that they should repent, and there will be no more wicked. He did pray for them, and they repented."

I ended my address to them with a story about my teacher, Rabbi Aryeh Levin. Once on his way to pray on Shabbos eve he saw a Jew walking with a burning cigarette, which was a desecration of the Shabbos. That person noticed Rabbi Aryeh and immediately hid the cigarette. As if not seeing, Rabbi Aryeh walked over to him and offered to shake his hand. The man dropped the cigarette and resolved to observe the Shabbos. This is the power of zealousness motivated by love.

When I came back to Israel I was told by some of the youth that the experience on Shabbos, including the way they were received by me, made a deep impression upon them made them, and they had decided to become more observant of the Mitzvos.

¹ It is a common practice for Hasidic Jews to place *kvittelach* on the gravesite of a Rebbe or *tzadik* with the belief that the soul of the deceased will pray for them in Heaven. The visitor usually sits beside the grave to write his *kvittel* and meditate on his request, and then tears the *kvittel* and throws it on top of the grave.

² Rabbi Zera's nickname.

³ Tractate Sanhedrin 37a.

⁴ Pres. verb hata (חטא), to sin. The spelling of the word enables a reading which can mean sin or the sinners.