



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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Pinchos

Zealotry for Other Jews

Right after World War II, there was a treaty between Russia and Poland that granted all Polish citizens who had fled to Russia during the war permission to leave Russia and return to the land of their birth.

During that time, Russia was under Communist rule, under which all religion was illegal. Anyone caught studying Torah, or involved in kosher meat, or conducting circumcisions, or any other religious custom, would be sentenced to decades in a labor camp in Siberia.

On top of that, nobody was allowed to leave Russia. The entire U.S.S.R. was essentially one big prison. Chabad Chassidim who sacrificed their lives to protect the Jewish spark suffered terribly along with their families, whether due to keeping Shabbos, kosher, building a sukkah or keeping any other mitzvah.

So when the Chabad Chassidim trapped in Russia heard about this treaty that allowed Polish citizens to leave Russia, they decided to use the opportunity: They decided to forge Polish passports and leave Russia as Polish citizens.

Obviously, it was very dangerous at that time to be living in the Soviet Union under the dictatorship of Stalin, and so by Jewish law it constituted *pikuach nefesh*, or a life-threatening emergency, in which case the Torah allows you to break almost all its rules, including those against lying and forgery.

It's scary to think about it, but those of us who live here today, in this free country, cannot at all understand what it was like to live under a dictatorship. You had to keep all your plans completely secret—and on top of that, you had to bribe officials to issue the passports, and then the border guards to not look too carefully at the fact that the names and faces didn't quite match, and so on with an endless list of details. Especially, since the "Polish citizens" didn't even speak a word of Polish.

And so, several hundred Chabad families succeeded in escaping Russia at that time.

The one person behind this entire emigration operation was a woman who was affectionately known among the Chasidim as Muma Sarah. To their great pain, she herself did not manage to escape Russia. She was arrested, and she died in the Soviet prison system.

In those days, the Chasidim needed a lot of money to escape across the border. There was one Chasid named Reb Mendel Futerfas. He approached Rabbi Zalmen Kazen, (Mume Sarah's son) who was then a young man, and told him that he had come to borrow money for the escape operation—and he promised the young Rabbi

Kazen that the Chasidim would pay him back when they got out of Russia and made it to the United States.

So Rabbi Kazen loaned him 500 dollars—a huge sum in those days and all the more so in the Soviet Union—but he asked him to give him a written receipt that validated the loan.

There was a newspaper on the table. Reb Mendel tore out a sheet from the newspaper and wrote on it that “this certifies that Rabbi Kazen loaned me \$500,” and he signed it.

Rabbi Kazen and his wife and kids then left Russia with their fake passports and eventually got to the United States. But R’ Mendel Futerfas (like Rabbi Kazen’s mother) did not manage to get out of Russia, since he stayed behind to try to save as many more Jews as possible. He too was nabbed by the Russian secret police and ended up sitting in prison for many years.

It was only in 1965 that Rabbi Mendel Futerfas finally got out of Russia.

In 1975, ten years later, Rabbi Futerfas paid his first visit to Cleveland—to fundraise for Russia’s remaining Jews—and, of course, he was thrilled to meet Rabbi Kazen again. Rabbi Kazen took out a small piece of folded paper and said to R’ Mendel, “You remember how 30 years ago in Russia, I loaned you 500 dollars? I still didn’t get them back.”

But Rabbi Futerfas said to him, “If I had only been able to at the time, I would have borrowed 1,000 dollars from you and then, we might have been able to save even more Jews.”

Well, that ended the conversation for then.

A year went by, and Rabbi Futerfas again came to Cleveland to collect money for Russian Jewry—and he again met Rabbi Kazen.

Again Rabbi Kazen reminded him about the loan, adding a loan must be repaid! So this time, Reb Mendel took out \$500 from his pocket and handed it to Rabbi Kazen, and Rabbi Kazen handed him back the receipt—the same old folded piece of newspaper that he had kept for over 30 years straight.

But then, Rabbi Kazen took those very same 500 dollars that he had just received, added to it a respectable sum of his own money, and returned it to Rabbi Futerfas, this time as a donation.

In this week’s Torah portion, we read about “kanaim.” Zealots.

Our Parshah tells us about Pinchas, a kanai, and our Haftarah tells us about Eliyahu HaNavi, Elijah the Prophet, who also was zealous for the sake of his G-d.

What’s interesting is that G-d’s reaction to these two situations was different.

With Pinchas, our Parshah (Bamidbar 25:12) tells us that G-d praised his act of zealotry: "I hereby give him My covenant of peace." Not only that, but G-d then proceeded to appoint him as a kohen, a priest.

On the other hand, , G-d told Eliyahu HaNavi to appoint the prophet Elisha in his place—essentially, G-d relieved Eliyahu of his mission as a prophet.

Now seemingly, it's not understood why Pinchas got blessings, priesthood and long life, while Eliyahu was relieved of his duties!

But the difference between Pinchas and Eliyahu is this: They each had different goals in being zealots.

Pinchas saw that there was an epidemic ravaging the ranks of the Jewish Nation—and to save the Jewish Nation, he put his own life in danger to stop the epidemic. As our Parshah tells us, G-d Himself testified to the effectiveness of Pinchas (Bamidbar 25:11): "Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aaron the Kohen 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."

Eliyahu HaNavi, on the other hand, was concerned about G-d's Honor, and thus ran away to Mt. Sinai, hid in a cave and protested before G-d that the Jewish Nation was not keeping the Torah, had stopped doing circumcisions, and so on.

While Eliyahu worried about G-d, Pinchas worried about his fellow Jews.

As the Mechilta, a Midrashic commentator, tells us, "Eliyahu demanded respect for the father, not for the son... G-d said to him, 'I do not want your prophecy.' " Instead, G-d loves those who are kanaim for their fellow Jews—people to whom other Jews make a difference.

Rabbi Mendel Futerfas and the Mume Sarah were kanaim cut from the same cloth as Pinchas. They put their lives in danger and sacrificed themselves to save other Jews—and it is this kind of kana'us, this kind of zealotry, that G-d loves. And such a person is not only loved by G-d, but is also loved by people too.