

PINCHAS (NUMBERS 25:10-30:1)

Mosquito Repellant

2006 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

“You’re kidding with me, right?”

“No, Dad, I mean it.” You really can’t hear it?”

“Not a thing. You really hear something?”

“It’s loud and annoying to hear! You really don’t hear it?”

My son and I were sitting at my computer, listening (or TRYING to listen) to a sound he had just downloaded. “Mosquito Tone” is a high pitched sound, audible to those under forty, that was designed to keep teen-agers away from inappropriate places. Teen-agers fought back by turning it into a ringtone that can be heard by students in the classrooms, but not their forty-plus-year-old teachers.

And it works!

My son’s 17-year-old ears heard it perfectly. Yet, try as I might, I couldn’t get my almost-half-century-old ears to pick up anything at all. I guess I’m getting old! After my son left my office, a 34-year old co-worker walked in. “Do you hear this,” I asked.

“Ouch!” he cried. What IS that?!” A 60-year old walked in. Nothing.

What is plain and obvious to some of us goes totally ignored and unnoticed by others.

The people of Israel sinned gravely. Idolatry and immorality were rampant in the Camp of Israel. As a result, G-d’s wrath was kindled against His People and He sent a plague into the camp. People were dying by the thousands. No one could figure out what to do.

No one but Pinchas. He double-checked with his teacher Moses, to make sure he remembered the law correctly. Then he picked up a spear and killed two of the sinners.

Was he right? Was it the correct thing to do, to carry out a death sentence against two people who were apparently not deserving of the death penalty?

Apparently, Pinchas did the right thing. How do I know? It’s obvious. G-d immediately ended the plague as soon as Pinchas killed those two people.

Instant cause and effect. You hit a light switch and a light goes on. You hit it again and the light goes off. Israel sins and G-d sends a plague. Pinchas kills the sinners and the plague ends. He did the right thing. It's obvious.

Pinchas was a hero. He saved his nation. G-d proved that with a miracle. Yet, in spite of the clear Divine endorsement of his actions, Pinchas was reviled by many. It took an additional announcement by G-d to confirm what should have been obvious to all:

G-d spoke to Moses, saying, "Pinchas ... turned away my wrath from the Children of Israel when he zealously avenged My vengeance among them, so that I didn't destroy the Israelites in My vengeance."
(Numbers, 25:10-11)

It should have been clear for all to see. Yet, it wasn't until G-d clarified the facts that people understood.

(For more details on Pinchas' actions, see "Righteous Indignation vs. Abortion Clinics".)

Yes, what is plain and obvious to some of us goes totally ignored and unnoticed by others.

That's why many in our government are prepared to confer "rights" upon terrorists, frustrating our ability to defend ourselves from them. That's why "respected" newspapers feel justified in releasing national security secrets, further endangering our troops and citizens.

That's why an Israeli government ignored the obvious folly of kicking thousands of their own citizens out of their homes, giving them as a gift to our enemies as a new base for terror operations.

That's why you can have nations of the world who react in horror when Israel tells her enemies that you can't kidnap our soldiers and bomb our cities with impunity.

And that's why, after two millennia of living in the Diaspora, we can still fool ourselves into thinking that our survival is anything less than miraculous.

We are, once again, in that 3-week period of mourning leading up to Tisha B'Av, the anniversary of the destruction of both Temples. We are still under siege from our enemies all around us who seek to destroy us.

A little over a month from now we will begin our daily blowing of the Shofar to remind us that Rosh Hashanah is around the corner. The sound of the Shofar is there to remind us to prepare for the Day of Judgment and to ask G-d to watch over us. Will we listen to the "ringtone" of the Shofar, or will we turn a deaf ear?

What is plain and obvious to anyone who is paying attention is that we must pray with all our hearts to our Father in Heaven. We must pray for the safety of our brethren in Israel and throughout the world. We must rededicate ourselves to G-d's Torah, and hope that He will choose to listen to our prayers.

After everyone left my office, I closed the door. I turned the volume up all the way, put my ear up to the speakers and sat very quietly. I clicked the "Play" button and listened very closely to see if I could hear the Mosquito Tone. Outside my office, someone yelled, "CUT IT OUT!"

Then I heard it! Very faintly at first, but if I listened carefully I was able to just make out a high pitched tone. How do you like that! These old ears still work after all!

You're never too old to hear G-d's call. Are you listening? Are you REALLY listening?

Have a great Shabbos.

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