

# Extremism In Today's Climate

- Nisson Shulman.

We who are Hutz Laaretz read the newspapers and periodicals and will often assume that there is a climate of extremism pervading all of Israel. There are intense opinions on either side if the issue of disengagement. Families are often split on the issue. Husband and wife will often be on different sides. What keeps Israel from descent into civil war? The answer is the remarkable way Israel is dealing with the difference of opinion. Cars display orange pennants or blue and white ones. In that way the driver can make a public statement. And – be recognizing that there are other pennants that he or she acknowledges – agrees to respect the expression of the other's opinion. There are – and will be – demonstrations. There will be hard times ahead when the disengagement actually takes place. But the simple expression of public opinion by affixing a banner to the antennas of a car, diffuses the intensity and somehow makes one hope that there might be little or no violence in the end. This is an expression of hope. And in this spirit I offer the following sermon outline.

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## EXTREMISM:IN TODAY'S CLIMATE

1. We all deplore Jewish violence. Extremism from all sides is abhorrent. I know you will agree that it is unnatural and not Jewish.

2. Yet can't we question this from the beginning of today's portion?

- a. Pinchas: What he did to save the nation.
- b. The setting
- c. His zeal

1. God Himself commends him! And how? BRITI SHALOM! How can an act of violence be an act of peace?

2. I admit to you clearly this appears to be a precedent for zealots!

3. Interesting tradition: PINCHAS ZE ELIYAHU.

4. Yet what happened to Eliyahu? ANI NOTARTI NAVI LAADOSHEM LEVADI... LO BEHAYIL VELO BEKOACH, KI IM BERUCHI... VEHESHIV LEV AVOT EL BANIM...

5. "The Still small voice". What can that mean?

6. Begins to make sense when we read what the Rabbis said about Pinchas.

a. He acted by himself.

b. God's commandment shows that this was the exception, not the rule, otherwise the sages would have condemned....

c. Why is it the exception? Consider the commandment to admonish our neighbor, the commandment upon which a zealot might rely in his zeal to achieve perfection in other people. It is the command, HOCHEACH TOCHIACH, admonish others when they do wrong.

d. But consider the limitations of this commandment as interpreted by Jewish law:

1. The Mochiach, the one who admonishes, must himself be perfect before he can criticize his neighbor!

10. The Mochiach must do so with love!

11. The Mochiach must know when to hold his peace!

12. So Rav Tarfon: "I should be surprised to find anyone living in our time who is ready to accept criticism."

13. So R. Elazar ben Arach: "Nobody today is able to give criticism! They don't know how! They lack the love, lack the worthiness..."

14. Therefore the HAAMEK DAVAR, The Netziv, "No matter how great the motive of the zeal, two things can happen when one employs zeal;

a. Danger to society's discipline;

b. Corruption of the zealot by his deeds. Violence not only breeds violence, but corrupts the soul!."

11. Now Judaism teaches that every faculty in the human being has its place. In each of us is the faculty of anger, although anger is equivalent to idolatry; in each of us is the faculty of hate, though hate is evil; in each of us is the ability to be zealous, though the way we are commanded is patience.

12. Obviously God does not plant faculties in us unless it is for a purpose.

a. Anger is wrong, even equivalent to idolatry; except; except when the anger is to save someone from oppression. Example, the pursuer and the pursued, can't reason and wait, but save the pursued, and make judgments later. The man who is mugged on the street, no questions as to who started it, you stop it, and voice righteous indignation and anger, because in such a case it is good.

b. And hate is indeed evil. We must not hate the sinner, nor even only pray for his return and repentance, but with bonds of love to seek to bring him closer because never does the Lord close off hearts from repentance. But we may hate sin. We may hate evil. And even, in the case of Amalek of old, and Hitler in our time, recognize that there are some who in their beings and person embody the evil that we are taught to hate.

11. And of course, the same is with zeal. Sometimes, as in the case of Pinchas, it is justified.

12. But who is to judge? How are we to know? That's why our Rabbis point out how difficult it is to judge and to know. And they point out how wrong it is to be zealous at a time when the zealot himself is not perfect.

13. Small wonder our sages say no one knows today knows how to give TOCHEMA!

14. Apparently the way of patience is the way we must go. The way of zeal, when sometimes it must be employed, must in almost all instances be left for such as Pinchas and Eliyahu. Otherwise, the person's imperfections and failings are doubly compromised by the zeal, and the act of violence is not a covenant of peace but a deadly sin.

15. When does an act of violent turn into a covenant of peace? When the man who must resort to it is beyond question a man of peace, unblemished as Aaron himself, or in this case, his descendant, Pinchas.

16. So the beracha of Shalom is a kind of antedote....

17. What the Almighty tolerates in Eliyahu HaNavi would be deplored in anyone else. And even Eliyahu is taught the value and the preference of the still small voice. So now we can understand the identification of Pinchas with Eliyahu. Eliyahu's lesson.... The still small voice. The voice of Torah, that is the voice of peace; the teaching, that is the covenant of peace.

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(Submitted by Nisson Shulman)