



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

## The Week After Pinchas

What a dramatic story there is in the Pinchas episode, but what happened to Pinchas afterwards?

Maybe he settled back into kohanic obscurity and led an uneventful life. According to another view, he was crucially involved in the next great episode which the Torah narrates, the story of two and a half tribes - Reuven, Gad and half of Menasheh - who wanted to stay east of the Jordan and be prosperous whilst the rest of the people moved into Eretz Yisra'el.

True, when needed, these tribes came to help the people conquer the land but then declined to settle anywhere but in today's Jordan. Not only were the other tribes surprised at this apparent disloyalty, but there was huge indignation when the dissident tribes erected an altar which the others thought was meant for idolatry.

A delegation was despatched with a strong message from the other tribes. The delegation were ready for two possibilities - diplomatic negotiation, and if this did not work, the threat that the rest of the people

would go to war against the dissidents. The dissidents convinced the delegation that they had no idolatrous designs, nor did they wish to sever themselves from the people's destiny.

The leader of the delegation was Pinchas, who came back to B'nei Yisra'el with the message that war had been averted.

The moral of the story is not only national solidarity but that Pinchas lived up to the award that God had given him, to follow a covenant of peace and be a peace-maker amongst his brethren.

## FIVE WOMEN

Twice in the Torah - including the end of this week's portion - we meet the five daughters of Tzelofchad.

Their father had died without sons, and the daughters said it wasn't fair. Why should Tzelofchad's memory be lost just because he had no male heirs?

It's one of the great female protests in early Israelite history. There were other female protests over the centuries, such as the question, "Since women are exempt from positive mitzvot linked to a specific time, why should we be denied the right to hear the sound of the shofar on Rosh HaShana?"

History records that women's advocacy was often successful. It certainly was with the daughters of Tzelofchad.

We might have thought that the text would simply report their protest as a class action - "This is the story of Tzelofchad's daughters". But no: their names are spelled out in detail. Not only was their argument conceded, but we know precisely who they each were.

The reason is bound up with their plea: "Why should the name of our father be eradicated?" Because they were so concerned for their father's name, they were rewarded by having their own names recorded and honoured. -OZ

**Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH**