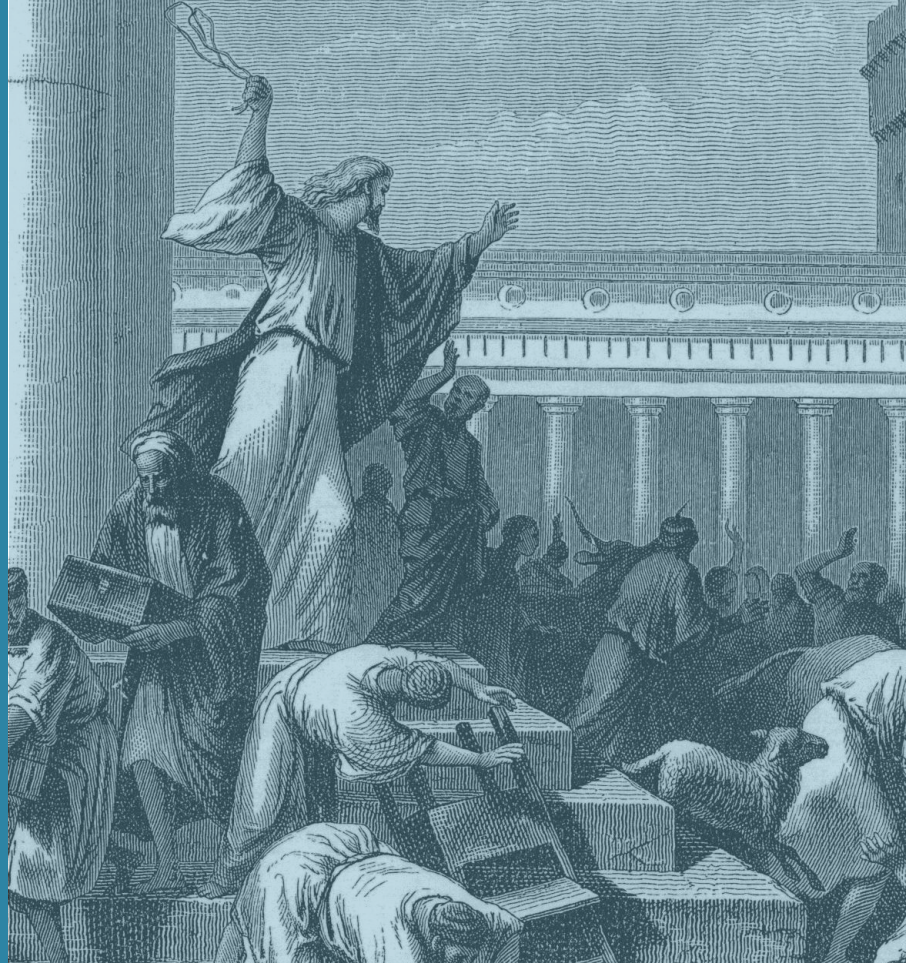


# Good Jealousy and Bad Jealousy

*Parashat Pinchas*



## Parashat Pinchas

This week's Torah portion is in part, very monotonous, with a list of names and families making up the majority of the text. While at the same time, it is rather rich in content. This parasha is named after Phinehas, and his zeal which can be interpreted as jealousy, stopped the plague that had killed 24,000 people.

Further on in the parasha, we encounter the census as well as the division of the land according to the tribes. We learn about the daughters of Zelophehad and the laws of inheritance. In this week's reading, there is a turnover of leadership and Joshua is appointed as the leader after Moses. Most of the holidays of Israel can also be found in this parasha, such as Yom Kippur, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Passover and more.

## The Fine Line between Correct and Unacceptable Jealousy

Parashat Pinchas is not an easy parasha, especially Phinehas' action, which is difficult and unclear - including the reward from God. The question that

each person asks himself is, where is the right balance or the fine line between healthy, righteous, and correct jealousy, and between unacceptable, offensive, racist, fanatical, and impure jealousy.

Jealousy can be simple and clear with children. For example, “Why does he have more toys than me?” “Why is he allowed to stay up late and I am not?” These are the typical questions kids ask when they see what others have. Suddenly, whatever they possess becomes not good enough.

Jealousy is always affected by our surroundings, we see what others have and then we want it for ourselves.

## **Does Positive Jealousy Exist?**

Here at Netivyah we strive to help those in need. This year, we are working with 130 families, offering them weekly support with groceries. Most of these families have many children, and the main problem that the Welfare Bureau deals with is related to the next generation, to the teenagers in these families.

These teenagers see what their classmates are wearing, their brand new smartphones, and they get invited over to their big houses. The result is that most teenagers who come from families in financial hardship, resort to using recreational drugs or alcohol in order to numb their senses and reduce the pain caused by their family’s situation. Sometimes, they turn to minor crimes and theft, so that they can have what their classmates possess. In addition, the school dropout rate for these kids is very high.

Is there such a thing as positive jealousy? If so, what is it?

## **Jealousy That Causes Competition Can be Used Positively**

Jealousy that leads to competition forces people to transcend themselves, to work harder developing their ability in order to reach heights that would not have achieved otherwise. As the talmudic saying goes:

*“Jealousy among teachers increases wisdom.” – Bava Batra 22a*

We often do not take action or give enough effort due to laziness, although in our minds we know that we should do more. This is often the case with our education, volunteering, or with taking life seriously and investing in the home and family.

When I see my friend advance or succeed, it makes me want to improve and be like him. It arouses in me a jealousy; a positive jealousy that leads to progress and success.

## The Dangers of Envy

However, jealousy is also a dangerous thing, and it has existed in human beings since the beginning of history. We read and learn of the instance when Cain could not overcome his jealousy:

*“...but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.” – Genesis 4:5 [NIV]*

Cain fulfilled and executed his jealousy without much thought:

*“...While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.” – Genesis 4:8b [NIV]*

Later on we read about the brothers who hated Joseph and who were jealous of him. Their feelings towards him were so strong that it caused them to try and murder him, although they decided to sell him into slavery instead in the end.

Another case of jealousy that led to murder can be seen with Saul's envious feelings toward David. When David came back from battle and the women praised him more than Saul, Saul became jealous of the honor that David had received. In fact, later on he threw a spear in an attempt to harm David.

## God Gives Us Everything We Need

The New Testament teaches us that God gives everyone exactly what He needs. For example, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul compares us to the body which has many parts, each of which has a different function. Each one has

a different gift and everyone is important, all of us are important to the surroundings and the community. Likewise, the community is important to the body of Messiah.

If we want to serve but do not know how or in which area, then the things that we have or do not have may give us a clue. For example: musical talent or artistic ability can direct us to a certain path, intellectual abilities direct us to another. Compassion or sensitivity can cause us to help others. The abilities and talents that we have are the tools we need to realize our purpose, which in turn is designed to build up the kingdom of heaven, and to build each other, and allow one another to grow and draw nearer to the Almighty.

If we look at it in this way, then the possessions or the talents that our neighbor has are entirely irrelevant to us. There is no point in making comparisons, since they are totally unrelated to the purpose of our lives. Just as the baker does not envy the tailor's sharp scissors.

## **The Line Between Religious and Fanatical Jealousy**

Now we come to the impossible question of religious jealousy, which means being jealous for God. We even have an example from Yeshua the Messiah Himself, who became angry and was jealous for God's house, the Temple, and turned over the tables of the money changers there and cast out the merchants with a whip (Matthew 21).

The difficult question is, where do we draw the line between religion, extremism, fanatical jealousy, and pure, godly jealousy?

I am very afraid of the idea of godly jealousy because the line that separates correct jealousy from fanatical religious jealousy is a hairbreadth - you almost can't distinguish between the two. A person who enters into the pursuit of religious jealousy can quickly, with one step, cross the line and move to religious fanaticism, which is dangerous and harmful to those surrounding him.

## **Zeal for the Right Time and Place**

Let us return to Phinehas' jealousy and what happens after the act:

*“Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites. Since he was as zealous for my honor among them as I am, I did not put an end to them in my zeal. Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him.” – Numbers 25:11,12 [NIV]*

This covenant of peace was God's response to Phinehas' act, it was actually a demand for the zealot to move over to a heritage of peace and acceptance of those different from him forever. God was saying that maybe your zeal was right for this day and hour, and we should emphasize that it was right.

However, God says we must not turn these attributes into the policy of nation, and in fact, we see here the divine declaration that the world can only be conducted in peace.

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## **The Teachings of Messiah Yeshua *in a Jewish Context***

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