

Following up on the end of last week's portion, Pinchas, a grandson of Aaron who is known as a great zealot, takes a spear and stabs through an Israelite chieftain who was in the act of consorting with the daughter of a Midianite priest. This act was part of the rampant idolatry that was spreading amongst the Children of Israel and it was only through this violent act that the plague that had struck the people came to an end. In gratitude for his actions, Pinchas is blessed with a covenant of peace by the Almighty.

While some see this covenantal blessing as a way to honour Pinchas for his action's many commentators can't help but notice that a covenant of peace seems like an awkward blessing for someone who acted in such a violent way. They suggest that while Pinchas was to be praised for what he did, there needed to be a simultaneous acknowledgment that Pinchas can and should do better in the future. He should be aspiring towards peace and reconciliation rather than accomplishing his goals through aggressive acts.

As we observe Canada Day today, it is a day of celebration for all that we have accomplished as a nation. It is an opportunity to take pride in the ways that our work has benefitted the world and influenced countless lives. It is, however, also a time to take stock of the means that were utilized to accomplish those objectives and an opportunity to reflect on how we can make amends for what we have done. Just as Pinchas could both be praised for what he did, but also encouraged to acknowledge that a better path may have been possible and certainly should be actualized in the future, so too can we hold both truths in our hands today. The terrible acts of violence and persecution of the indigenous people needs to be reckoned with and the ways that we still have much work to do to make amends for what we have done must be internalized. Being a great nation is not about lauding everything that we do, but is found in the ability to acknowledge the places where we still need to grow and change. The desire to repair the brokenness that we caused is our greatest strength not a national weakness.

On this Canada Day, let us celebrate all that we have done that is worthy of celebration, but let us also realize that the work of actualizing the fullness of this nation is not yet completed. Rather than simply looking backwards, we can commit to being better tomorrow than we were yesterday. Our commitment towards a better future can be our greatest strength and what we choose to honour this day.