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YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Pinchas

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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Obliterating The Silence Of The Condoned

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1. Zimri, Prince of the tribe of Shimon, cohabits with a Midianite Princess publicly – causing a plague to ensue.
2. There were 24,000 casualties due to the public desecration of G-d's name.
3. Pinchas' act of zealotry, spearing them at the point of cohabitation, ceased the plague.
4. If not for Pinchas' act of zealotry the Jewish People would have been consumed by G-d's wrath.
5. Seforno: The liability of the Jews was that they remained silent during the desecration of G-d's name.
6. The silence was considered a condonation.
7. Remaining silent when Pinchas avenged G-d's vengeance was a correction on the original silence.
8. Seforno: The liability of the Jewish People at the time of the golden calf was their silence allowing the calf to be built and worshipped.
9. Their correction was their silence when *Moshe* summoned those who are for G-d to kill the idolaters.
10. Although *Levy* was the smallest of the Tribes, they did not interfere.

Unequivocal Faith Suspends the Projectile

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1. "Pinchas has withdrawn my wrath from the Jewish people due to avenging my vengeance in their midst."
2. Rashi: He avenged my vengeance and was enraged with my rage.
3. Pinchas internalized G-d's pain due to the extreme desecration of His name.
4. Due to Pinchas' zealotry, the plague that consumed the 24,000 ceased.
5. Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh: The concept of supplication is rooted in the attribute of mercy.
6. When the Attribute of Justice is unleashed, there is no place for mercy.
7. Midrash: Pinchas planned his attack against Zimri; his intention was to kill and be killed.
8. Only selfless dedication and faith is able to quell the attribute of Justice.
9. G-d told *Moshe* to tell the Jewish people: Only due to the zealotry of Pinchas for the sake of My honor, did I retract my wrath (Justice).

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Pinchas



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Zimri's Extreme Breach of Morality

Torah: Zimri, the Prince of the Tribe of Shimon, publicly desecrated G-d's Name by cohabiting with Cozbi, a Midianite Princess. Pinchas through his act of zealotry, avenged the vengeance of G-d by killing Zimri and Cozbi.

Midrash: "The Torah is taken aback by the behavior of Zimri, the son of Salu. King Solomon writes, 'One who breaches a fence deserves to be bitten by a snake.' The forefather of Zimri (Shimon) had avenged promiscuous behavior.

"Torah: After Dinah had been defiled by Shechem, the Prince of Canaan, his community had entered into a covenant with her family and agreed to have all their males to be circumcised. On the third day of their recovery, Shimon and Levy, taking advantage of their infirmity, through an act of zealotry killed all the males of the community (including Shechem and his father Chamor) to avenge the defilement of their sister. Zimri,

the Prince of the tribe of Shimon had breached the fence that his forefather had established, when he openly cohabited with Cozbi."

The Torah is taken aback and is in wonderment by the detestable behavior of Zimri, because he was a descendant of Shimon who acted zealously to establish the safeguards for morality. Since every person has the power of choice to behave as he chooses (to be evil or righteous), why is the Torah taken aback by Zimri's behavior, regardless of the person from whom he descends?

Gemara in Tractate Bava Kama: There is a story about Chananya Chofeir Gumos (Chananya the water cistern digger). Chananya dug water cisterns throughout the Land of Israel to provide water for the Jewish people when they journeyed from Babylon and other locations to Jerusalem to celebrate the Festivals three times a year. It occurred that his daughter had fallen into a well and it was uncertain if she had drowned.

They went to consult with *Reb Chanina Ben Dosa*, who was the *tzaddik* of the generation. The first hour after she had fallen into the well, he said that she was still alive. After the second hour, he said that she was still alive. After the third hour, she emerged from the well unharmed. They returned to *Reb Chanina Ben Dosa* and asked him, "How did you know that she was still alive, despite the likelihood of surviving such a mishap?" He responded, "It is not possible that the water that her father provided for the Jewish people, (who had performed a great *mitzvah*) should be the cause of the death of his daughter."

Gemara: "And the son of *Chananya Chofeir Gumos* died of thirst."

Tosafos: "If he had performed a *mitzvah* by providing water for the Jewish people how is it possible that his son should die as a result of being denied water? G-d should have provided him with water, as *Chananya* provided water for the Jewish people when they had ascended to the Temple Mount. Regarding the child of *Chananya* it is not possible that his daughter should die through drowning because the water was provided by him for the Jewish people. The water was the object of the *mitzvah*. However, regarding his son dying of thirst, where the cause of his death was unrelated to the object of the *mitzvah*, it is possible that the *mitzvah* will not protect that individual."

Shimon, the son of *Yaakov* the forefather of *Zimri*, through an act of zealotry, destroyed the city of *Shechem* to establish morality for the world. His action should have availed Divine Protection for his descendants so that they should not succumb to the temptations of sexual impropriety, as cohabiting with a gentile woman. The *Torah* is therefore taken aback, that although *Shimon* had expressed his zealotry in this area, despite the danger that he had entered into in order to sanctify G-d's Name, his descendant failed in this area. *Zimri* failed on the most extreme level. *Shimon's* merit did not protect his grandchild. Why did the merit of *Shimon* not protect *Zimri* his descendant?

Chazal: "One should not believe in himself until the moment he is no longer alive."

Midrash: G-d does not associate His Name with a person, regardless of his dimension of holiness, during his lifetime. This is demonstrated through *Avraham* and *Yaakov* our Patriarchs. G-d did not associate His Name with *Avraham* and *Yaakov* during their lifetimes,

despite their exceptional level of sanctity and unique levels of spiritual accomplishment. This is because it is always possible for one to regress spiritually and follow the path of evil, regardless of one's merits. Within the context of free choice one can fail until the last moment of his life; however, regarding being harmed by something through which a *mitzvah* was performed, that is different. Thus, *Zimri* had choice to succumb to temptation, which he did.

In addition, the zealous act of *Shimon* and *Levy*, although it was to eradicate the breach of immorality, was not a simple matter. Factually, they destroyed *Shechem* without consulting their father *Yaakov*. If their act of zealotry was purely for the sake of G-d, they should have consulted with their father *Yaakov*. The fact that they chose not consult with him, caused their selfless act of zealotry to be spiritually deficient. Therefore, even if such a zealous act could have potentially protected *Zimri* from succumbing and failing so seriously in this area, the merit of his forefather was deficient to do so.

Pinchas' Qualification as Priest

Torah: "*Pinchas*, son of *Elazar*, son of *Aaron* the *Kohen*, turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume the Children of Israel with My vengeance."

Rashi: "G-d said, 'He (*Pinchas*) avenged My vengeance.' He was enraged with My rage." The basis for *Pinchas's* zealotry was that he experienced G-d's pain as a result of *Zimri's* desecration of G-d's Name by openly cohabiting with *Cozbi* the Midianite princess. The sole motivating factor for *Pinchas's* zealotry was that he fully internalized G-d's pain and thus expressed His rage. *Pinchas* thus killed them through his act of zealotry without considering the consequences or the threat to his own safety.

Chazal: Had G-d not performed numerous miracles on his behalf, *Pinchas* would not have lived.

Torah: "Therefore, Behold! I give him My covenant of peace (completeness). And it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood, because he took vengeance of his G-d, and he atoned for the Children of Israel." Had it not been for *Pinchas's* act of zealotry, the Jewish people would have been destroyed. If that were to happen, existence would

have ceased to be. As the *Torah* states, “*Bereishis bara Elokeem...- In the beginning G-d created...*”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: “The word ‘*Bereishis*’ should be interpreted to mean ‘It is for the sake of ‘*reishis* (the choicest)’ G-d created existence, for the sake of the *Torah* itself that is referred to as ‘*reishis*.’ The Jewish people are also referred to and are classified as ‘*reishis*’...” Meaning, the objective and sole purpose of Creation is to be the setting for the fulfillment of the *Torah*, by the Jewish people, who are the only nation qualified to actualize it. Therefore, existence only continues to be because of *Pinchas*’ act of zealotry that caused the Wrath of G-d to be quelled and retracted from the Jewish people. Thus the continuation of existence is attributed to *Pinchas*.

Torah: “...and he atoned for the Children of Israel.” Meaning, due to *Pinchas*’ act of zealotry he brought about atonement for the Jewish people. The function of the *Kohen* (Priest) is to facilitate the atonement process on behalf of the Jewish people. Only the *Kohen* is qualified to do this, through his service in the Temple. Since *Pinchas* brought about the greatest level of atonement on behalf of the Jewish people, to make them worthy to continue to exist, although he was born a Levite and not anointed to be a *Kohen*, he ascended to a level to be qualified to be the priest.

Aaron and his sons were initiated and installed to be the priests by being anointed with the anointing oil. The one who was truly qualified was *Aaron*, the brother of *Moshe*. His four sons, only were chosen to be the *Kohen* by G-d because they were the sons of *Aaron*. *Pinchas*’ ascent to be the priesthood is unrelated to the fact that he was the grandson of *Aaron* and the son of *Elazar* who were priests. He was qualified to be the *Kohen* in his own right, as *Aaron* his grandfather was. *Pinchas*’ children will thus be priests because of him. *Pinchas* was thus the equivalent of his grandfather *Aaron*, regarding the status of his children.

Aaron merited the priesthood because *Moshe* had forfeited it as a result of his dialogue with G-d at the burning bush. *Moshe* initially attempted to extricate himself from the position of redeemer of Israel because he felt that if he were chosen it would offend his older brother *Aaron*, who had acted as G-d’s prophet for the Jewish people. Although *Moshe*’s intent was pure and admirable, demonstrating an unusual level of humility by rejecting the position of “redeemer”; nevertheless

due to his obstinacy to G-d’s wish, it was considered to be a disrespect. He thus forfeited the priesthood.

G-d said to *Moshe*, “Although *Aaron* is your older brother, he will come out into the desert and greet you with joy in his heart when he will hear that you are the redeemer of Israel.” Although *Aaron* was *Moshe*’s older brother and the prophet of G-d for the Jewish people, he experienced joy in his heart because his brother *Moshe* was chosen by G-d. Not only was there no trace of envy, *Aaron* rejoiced upon hearing that his brother *Moshe* was chosen to be the redeemer.

Midrash: “*Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* says, ‘G-d said, ‘The heart that rejoiced over the greatness of his brother, will merit the precious stones (of the breastplate) to be placed upon it. As it states, ‘*Aaron* should carry the names of the Children of Israel on the breastplate of judgment on his heart...’” The *Torah* identifies the location of the breastplate to be upon the heart of *Aaron*, which indicates the unique status and dimension of purity of *Aaron*. It was only because *Aaron* was fully negated to G-d’s Will, that was not envious of *Moshe* and he was able to experience joy in his heart regarding *Moshe*’s appointment as redeemer. He was thus chosen to be G-d’s officiant as the priest. Similarly, *Pinchas* was able to internalize G-d’s rage and pain and thus act as a zealot because he was totally negated to G-d. *Pinchas* thus qualified to be the *Kohen* in his own right, as *Aaron* was qualified to be the *Kohen*.

The Enablement of *Pinchas*

Torah: “*Pinchas*, son of *Elazar*, son of *Aaron* the *Kohen*, turned back My (G-d) wrath from upon the Children of Israel...” The *Torah* traces *Pinchas*’ lineage back to his grandfather, *Aaron* the *Kohen*, which is unusual (the *Torah* usually identifies a person only by his immediate forbearer).

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: The reason the *Torah* traces *Pinchas*’s lineage to his grandfather *Aaron*, is to address the claim that the Jewish people had against *Aaron*. When the rabble began to encourage the Jewish people to form a deity at Sinai (because they had believed that *Moshe* had died), *Aaron*’s nephew *Chur* attempted to stop this initiative and prevent the Jewish people from participating in idolatry. Because of his attempt, the rabble reacted to *Chur*’s opposition and killed him.

Gemara: After Aaron witnessed that his nephew was murdered (slaughtered) by the rabble, he decided to participate in the process of the building of the golden calf, only to be a delay tactic, until Moshe would return. After seeing what the rabble had done to Chur, he understood that if he were to oppose them, he too would be murdered. Ultimately, through his participation in the gathering of the gold, the golden calf was formed quickly through the sorcery of the rabble. Due to Aaron's participation in the building of the golden calf, he had a degree of culpability. As a punishment, two of his most special sons, Nadav and Avihu were taken by G-d. Their death was an atonement for his participation.

After Moshe descended from the mountain and saw the Jewish people engaged in the sin of the golden calf he broke the Tablets and gave the order to kill all those who had participated in the idolatry. As a result of the participation in the golden calf, there was a substantial loss of life.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: Since Aaron participated in the golden calf, there was a segment of the Jewish people that had a claim against him saying, "Because of what you have done, the Jewish people incurred many casualties!" Thus, there was negative perception of Aaron because of the tragedy that he had wrought upon them. When the Torah traces the lineage of Pinchas back to Aaron the Kohen, regarding his act of zealotry, which quelled the Wrath of G-d against the Jewish people, it was a vindication of Aaron. Pinchas, being a grandchild of Aaron, was the cause of the entire Jewish people being saved from the Wrath of G-d and continue to thrive until the end time. Pinchas's act of zealotry thus redeemed his grandfather Aaron from any claim.

Pinchas, the grandson of Aaron had many unique and special qualifications that allowed him to act as a true zealot. Firstly, he was willing to die to bring about a sanctification of G-d's Name.

Chazal: Had it not been for numerous miracles that G-d had performed on his behalf, Pinchas would not have survived. How was Pinchas able to overcome the concern for his own life, despite the fact that he would be killed due to his act of zealotry?

Rashi citing the Jerusalem Talmud: Regarding the families of the Levites, although initially there were many more families, after the passing of Aaron, we find

that five of the original families that were part of the tribe of Levy are no longer mentioned. The Jerusalem Talmud explains that after the passing of Aaron, the clouds of glory dispersed, thus leaving the Jewish people vulnerable.

As a result of this, the Jewish people chose to return to Egypt. Elazar, the father of Pinchas, being the prince of the Levites, gave the order that at all cost the Jewish people must be prevented from returning to Egypt. As a result of this, a battle ensued and five of the Levite families were killed in battle. Although the tribe of Levy was the smallest of the tribes of Israel, they were willing to put their lives in jeopardy, for the sake of G-d. Pinchas, the son of Elazar inherited this characteristic of bringing sanctity to G-d's Name, despite the cost factor of forfeiting one's life.

Torah: There were 24,000 Jewish casualties due to the incident of Baal Peor, when the Jewish people engaged with the Moabite women. Initially a plague ensued that would have destroyed the entire Jewish people. After Pinchas killed Zimri and Cozbi by impaling them with his spear, he "brought G-d to judgment." He claimed that the plague must cease when he presented Zimri and Cozbi upon his spear before G-d. Although by making such a claim against G-d, Pinchas jeopardized his spiritual accomplishments and relevance to the world to come, he was willing to forfeit his own eternity for the sake of the Jewish people.

This characteristic of zealotry and self-sacrifice in the spiritual realm was a characteristic that he inherited from Aaron, his grandfather. Aaron only participated in the sin of the golden calf because he wanted to save the Jewish people from eternal spiritual destruction. After he had seen how the rabble had killed Chur, he understood that if he were to interfere with their wishes, he too would be killed. Since Aaron was a priest and a prophet, there is a law that if one kills a priest and a prophet, there is no atonement for such a sin. Thus, Aaron was willing to put his own share in the world to come and relevance to eternity in jeopardy for the sake of the spiritual survival of the Jewish people. This characteristic was reflected by Pinchas.

Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the Kohen was able to act as he had regarding his physicality and spiritually only due to the characteristics that he inherited from his father and grandfather. Thus, the blotch on Aaron's record was removed because

had it not been for Aaron's characteristics that were transmitted to *Pinchas*, the Jewish people would not exist. Thus, the claim against *Aaron* was resolved.

The Unfathomable Ramifications of a Mitzvah

Torah: "G-d spoke to *Moshe* saying, 'Harass the Midianites and smite them...' G-d commanded *Moshe* to destroy the Midianites because they had plotted to destroy the Jewish people. However, the Moabites were not to be attacked and destroyed.

Rashi citing *Chazal*: "Why were the Moabites not equally deserving to be destroyed? They instructed their daughters to seduce the Jewish people to lead them to the idolatry of *Baal Peor*. Their intent was to bring about the ultimate destruction of the Jewish people. Nevertheless, the Moabite nation was left unharmed. Why was this so? It was because *Ruth*, the Moabite (the granddaughter of *Balak*) needed to come into existence, as is stated in the *Gemara* in Tractate *Bava Kama*."

Gemara in Tractate *Sanhedrin* states, "*Reb Yehudah* said in the name of *Rav*, 'It is worthwhile to engage in *Torah* and *mitzvos* even if it is not with a pure intent (*shelo l'shma*). Because when one engages in a *mitzvah* *shelo l'shma* it will lead to the performance of a *mitzvah* with a pure intent (*l'shma*). Where do we find an example of this? It was *Balak* who had brought forty-two offerings to G-d (when he built the altars) that he merited to have *Ruth* the Moabite as his descendant. From here we see the great value of a *mitzvah*, even if it was performed not with a proper intent." The offerings that were brought by *Balak* were with the specific intent to supplicate G-d to allow *Bilaam*, the evil one, to be able to curse the Jewish people. Despite *Balak's* negative intent, the *mitzvah* generated and established a worthiness and merit that allowed *Ruth* to be his descendant. She ultimately became the grandmother of King David and the progenitor of *Moshiach*.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos* citing a verse: "You should bring desolation upon the land..." One should not read the word in the verse as "*shamos*- desolation" but rather it should be read as "*sheimos*- names." From here, we learn "*shma k'gorim*" that the name that one possesses determines one's destiny. The *Gemara* continues, "The reason *Ruth* was given her name "*Ruth*" because she was destined to have a grandson

who would sate G-d with song and praise (*yeraveh HaKadosh Baruch v'shiros v'tishbachos*)." Within the name "*Ruth*" lies the spiritual potential of King David who would author of Psalms.

It is interesting to note that all evil will come to an end, at the time of *Moshiach*, who is the direct descendant of King David. *Bilaam* and *Balak* both wanted to destroy the Jewish people, each for his own reason. If they would have succeeded in their evil intent, existence would have come to an end. *Balak* built altars with the intent to bring about the end of the Jewish people; rather than facilitating the intent of *Balak*, the effect of these altars, he merited to be the forbearer of *Moshiach*. Although the Moabites were instrumental in wanting to destroy the Jewish people, G-d spared them because *Ruth* needed to be brought into existence. Why G-d spare the Moabite people if He could have simply cause *Ruth* to descend from another nation, other than Moav?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh in *Ki Seitzei*: At the time of the sin of *Adam*, *satan* had captured some of the most special souls. *Ruth*, the Moabite was one of them. However, because *Balak* had performed a *mitzvah*, his reward for his action of the sacrifices allowed him to be the beneficiary of that special soul. It was thus released into the Moabite people.

The entire Moabite people were spared, despite the fact that they had participated in the same evil as the Midianites. It is because *Balak* needed to be rewarded for the *mitzvah* that he performed. We see that although *Balak's* intent was evil, the building of the altars will bring about the ultimate good, which is the coming of *Moshiach*. A Jew should understand and appreciate that any *mitzvah* that he performs, despite its deficiency in intent, has unlimited value which cannot be fathomed. As we see regarding the *mitzvah* of *Balak*, the king of Moav.

The Importance of Pedigree

Torah: *Zimri*, the Prince of the Tribe of *Shimon*, publicly desecrated G-d's Name by cohabiting with *Cozbi*, a Midianite Princess. *Pinchas* acted zealously to avenge G-d's Honor by killing *Zimri* and *Cozbi*. He pierced them both with a spear while they were engaged in their disgraceful sexual act. When the *Torah* identifies *Pinchas* it traces his lineage back to *Aaron*,

his grandfather, as the *Torah* states, “*Pinchas*, son of *Elazar*, son of *Aaron* the *Kohen*, turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume the Children of Israel with My vengeance.” Had *Pinchas* not acted as he did, the Attribute of Justice would have destroyed the entire Jewish people. As the *Torah* states, “...He (*Pinchas*) pierced them both...and the plague was halted from the Children of Israel. Those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: “Why does the *Torah* need to trace *Pinchas*’ lineage back to *Aaron*, his grandfather? It is because after *Pinchas* had killed *Zimri*, he was ridiculed and disgraced by the Tribes of Israel for killing a Prince. They had said, ‘How can a person who descends from a grandfather (maternal grandfather was *Yisro*) who stuffed calves for idolatry have the audacity to kill a Prince of Israel?’” Therefore, the *Torah* needs to trace his lineage to *Aaron* the High Priest in order to communicate his prestigious pedigree.

How could the Jewish people ridiculed *Pinchas* when his act of zealotry had saved them from G-d’s destruction? One would think that the Jewish people would have extolled and praised him for his selfless heroic act. In fact *Chazal* tell us that in order for *Pinchas* to have succeeded he had to have merited multiple miracles in order for him not to be killed. Despite all that had transpired, the Jewish people perceived *Pinchas* in a negative light and therefore ridiculed him.

It is true that *Pinchas*’ act of zealotry had saved the Jewish people from G-d’s destruction; however, their criticism of *Pinchas* was directed at him as a person. They claimed that if *Pinchas*, who was a commoner, could kill a prince of Israel it was an indication that he was a person who does not esteem or revere anyone of stature. Because if *Pinchas* in fact did, he could not have been able to kill *Zimri*, despite the heinousness of his behavior. He was thus categorized as a person who possesses an uncouth character. Therefore the *Torah* needed to trace his pedigree to *Aaron*, the High Priest in order to establish him as someone of prestigious pedigree so that he should be perceived for what he truly was.

Chazal: Many miracles were performed on *Pinchas*’ behalf. Why did he merit such miracles? It is often that one merits miracles because of the special merit of his forbearers. When *Pinchas* set out to avenge G-d’s honor, he understood that unless he would merit Divine Protection, he would be killed. He succeeded in his mission because G-d had protected him. In order for us to understand and appreciate the source of his merit, the *Torah* needed to trace *Pinchas*’ lineage back to *Aaron*, the High Priest. Thus, *Pinchas* was not only unique because of what he had brought about, but also because of his special quality of pedigree.



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