

UNEQUIVOCAL FAITH SUSPENDS THE PROJECTILE

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Pinchas

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Pinchas Saw Through a Proper Lens

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Pinchas Put His Olam Haba on the Line for the Sake of Klal Yisroel

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Pinchas Was Able to Do What Most Could Not

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Atonement Brought at the Level of a Kohen

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Not a Question of Hate, But of Survival

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Pinchas' Pedigree

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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 "*Pinchas* has withdrawn my wrath from the Jewish people due to avenging my vengeance in their midst."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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Hashem Helps Us In all of Our Pursuits

Parshas Balak: The Jews were seduced by the Moabite women to worship *Baal Peor* and they subsequently cohabited with these women. As a result of their idol worship and involvement with the Moabite women, “the wrath of *Hashem* flared up against Israel,” a ravaging plague descended upon the Jewish people. In addition to the average Jew’s participation in this desecration of G-d’s name, *Zimri*, the son of *Salu*, the Prince of the Tribe of *Shimon*, cohabited with *Cozbi*, the daughter of *Tzur*, a *Midianite* princess. *Pinchas*, the son of *Elazar*, the grandson of *Aaron*, acted zealously by taking his spear and piercing *Zimri* and *Cozbi* during the act of cohabitation, thus killing both of them. The zealous act of *Pinchas* and his self-sacrifice caused the plague to cease.

Midrash: Under normal circumstances, it would have been impossible for *Pinchas* to survive his attack on *Zimri*. Many miracles transpired in order to allow *Pinchas* to bring about this *Kiddush Hashem*

(Sanctification of G-d’s name). Because of *Pinchas’* zealotry, *Hashem* said to *Moshe*, “*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 in My Vengeance.”

Sforno: When *Pinchas* avenged G-d’s Honor to bring about this *Kiddush Hashem*; the Jewish people did not interfere but remained silent and allowed this *Kiddush Hashem* to take place. This silence was an atonement for their initial non-intervention when they allowed the name of *Hashem* to be desecrated. Prior to taking action, *Pinchas* consulted with *Moshe* saying, “You had taught us that one who cohabits with a non-Jew in a public setting, if one is zealous he is permitted to kill those who are involved in the desecrating of G-d’s name.”

Midrash: Prior to *Pinchas’* statement *Moshe* had forgotten this law that was transmitted to him at Sinai.

Moshe responded to *Pinchas* by saying, “The one who reads the proclamation should be the agent to carry out the order!” As a result of *Pinchas*’ selfless act, he merited that the entire Jewish people should be saved from plague. The question is why was *Pinchas* worthy to have such an opportunity presented to him and to reap such unlimited reward?

Gemara in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: During the time of the evil king *Achov*, he ordered all of the prophets be killed. *Ovadia*, who was a courtier in the court of *Achov*, secretly concealed the existence of one hundred prophets by placing one group of fifty in one cave and another group of fifty in another cave. For a year’s time, *Ovadia* provided for these prophets. Because of *Ovadia*’s initiative, prophecy continued until the beginning of the Second Temple period. *Ovadia* is esteemed to a greater degree than *Avraham Avinu*.

Torah: *Avraham*, “Feared G-d” but regarding *Ovadia*, the verse in Prophets states that he “Feared G-d very much.” *Ovadia* understood that if he acted at that moment, then prophecy would continue: if not – it would have come to an end. The question is, how does one merit to have the opportunity and the clarity to do as *Ovadia* had done in the face of great danger? *Pinchas* and *Ovadia* both merited an opportunity of *Kiddush Hashem*.

Gemara in Tractate *Makkos*: There is a principle in life, “Whatever path that one chooses to walk in life he will be led along that path (by *Hashem*).” For example, if a person chooses (G-d Forbid) to lead a life of crime, *Hashem* will present situations that he can act upon towards that end. If a person wants to lead a life of righteousness then *Hashem* will give him opportunities in that direction. Zealotry is only an expression of one’s internalization of spirituality to such a degree that he is willing to sacrifice his life for *Kiddush Hashem*.

Since *Pinchas* and *Ovadia* lived their lives in pursuit of *Kiddush Hashem* to the highest degree, they merited the opportunities where they were able to actualize that yearning through *Kiddush Hashem* – by saving the entire Jewish people or guaranteeing the perpetuation of prophecy. When a person’s life is devoted completely to *Torah* the classification of such a person is “*Tohroso umnaso*,” (His profession is *Torah*, as per the *Talmud*). This is a person who invests every waking moment to *Torah* study. Since this type of person yearns only for spiritual growth, *Hashem* will provide

him every opportunity to bring this to fruition. *Pinchas* and *Ovadia* were people who lived their lives only to sanctify *Hashem*’s name; therefore, in each of their contexts, the opportunities presented themselves.

How to Recognize the Cause Rather than the Symptom

Torah: As a result of the zealous act of *Pinchas*, *Hashem* did not destroy the Jewish people because, “*B’kino es kinosee* (when he – *Pinchas* – zealously avenged My Vengeance)...”

Rashi: Since *Pinchas* was angered to the same degree that *Hashem* should have been angered, *Klal Yisroel* was not destroyed. Because *Pinchas* experienced *Hashem*’s pain as a result of the *Chilul Hashem* that was perpetrated by *Zimri*, *Hashem* did not need to express His Wrath. If *Pinchas* had not responded to the *Chilul Hashem*, then the Jewish people would have been destroyed (G-d Forbid).

We see from the incident of *Pinchas*, that if there is a public *Chilul Hashem* and no one is pained sufficiently to respond, then *Hashem* will respond to the desecration of His name. When *Hashem* intervenes to awaken us He brings about compelling situations which force us to address the cause of our problem. If a person regards these difficulties as mere happenstance, then *Hashem* will force the person to recognize the problem by increasing the severity of these misfortunes. However, if we preemptively recognize our shortcomings and are pained by them to the point of repenting, then *Hashem* will not need to intervene.

Gemara in Tractate *Avodah Zarah*: *Yitzchok*, our Patriarch, enacted the afternoon prayer service (*Mincha*). The verse, “*Yitzchok* went out into the field *l’suach* (to speak)” means that he prayed.

Ritva (an earlier *Talmudic* Commentator): It is known that *tzaddikim* (devoutly righteous) pray on behalf of their generation and not themselves. They pray for forgiveness and enlightenment for their generation and that spiritual shortcomings will be recognized and proper initiatives will be taken to correct them. Why does the *Torah* sage pray for his generation while the average person prays only for himself or those with whom he is associated? The answer is – the average person is consumed with his own needs and concerns

and therefore is only sensitive to what he does or does not have. However, if one would feel the pain of others, he definitely would pray for them.

The *tzaddik* and *Torah* sage, who lives his life for the sake of G-d and the Jewish people, is focused on the needs of the Jewish people and therefore prays for their well being. If we look beyond ourselves we will recognize the spiritual failings of *Klal Yisroel* and the community and address them. If we do this, then *Hashem* would not need to react because we would already be dealing with them. Just as *Hashem* refrained from punishing the Jewish people because of *Pinchas'* intervention, so too, *Hashem* would refrain from punishing the Jewish people because of our intervention. This can be accomplished through *tefilla* (Prayer), increased *Torah* study, or *teshuvah* (repentance).

We pray every day that *Hashem* should give us understanding to comprehend His Will and to serve Him. If during prayer we are truly in touch with what we say and are able to internalize these realities, we could easily recognize and address our own spiritual shortcomings and those of our community. There would be no need for *Hashem* to intervene with a "wake up call" (G-d Forbid). There would be no reason any longer to pray for what we do not have (such as livelihood, health, success, etc.) because if we address and correct our shortcomings then all of our other needs will be provided.

Having the Proper Mindset

Torah after *Baal Peor*, which caused 24,000 Jews to perish by plague: "You should harass the *Midianites*."

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: Since the Jewish people are later told to destroy the *Midianite* people, (in *Mattos*, a later portion), "Harass the *Midianites* and destroy them," what is the purpose of *Hashem* commanding *Moshe* at this point tell the Jewish people, "You should harass the *Midianites*"? The Jews who remained alive after the plague needed to be atoned for the lust that they had in their hearts after witnessing the *Baal Peor*. The Jews who were exposed to the *Baal Peor* and the seductive behavior of the non-Jewish women were affected to a great degree. Although the event had passed, they still had the lust in their hearts.

A person is not able to do *teshuvah* and be fully forgiven unless he is fully purged from that desire.

Therefore *Hashem* commanded the Jewish people, "You should harass the *Midianite* and see them in the most detestable light." The Jew should despise them for what they represent. As a result of this mindset, there will no longer be any trace of that previous experience, and then the Jew can be fully atoned through *teshuvah*.

Dovid HaMelech (King *David*): "I shall hate those who hate You (*Hashem*)."
Meaning, if we do not despise those who are contrary to G-d, then we are susceptible to the influences of those people. There is no "middle of the road" or neutral position regarding not being influenced by something which is not in accordance with the Will of *Hashem*.

Gemara in Tractate *Avodah Zarah*: There is a Negative Commandment "*Lo seichaneim*" which it explains to mean "Do not speak graciously about a non-Jew (for the sake of admiration)."

Rambam: The reason one is not permitted to esteem a non-Jew for this sake is because one might come to regard that person's values and beliefs as also "carrying weight." Although the non-Jew might be the "best doctor" or the most "brilliant lawyer," he also possesses an ethical, moral, and belief system by which we cannot be swayed. If one esteems the non-Jew, he becomes susceptible to the subtle influences of that person. The only way we can prevent ourselves from being negatively influenced and affected by things that are contrary to *Hashem's* Will is to consciously disdain them.

At the end of the Book of *Devarim*, *Moshe* refers to the idols of the nations as "their dung and their putrid rodents." Citing the *Midrash*, *Rashi's* commentary says that idolatry is as detestable and despicable as "dung and putrid rodents." The question is if idolatry is perceived this way, how could one be affected by it? The answer is – if one did not experience idolatry as if it were "dung and putrid rodents" then there is a possibility that one can be affected by it. We need to see "wrong" in the most extreme negative light. The reason for this is not simply because *Hashem* said that we should not engage in it, but rather, it is because *Hashem* commanded us not to engage in it that it is intrinsically detestable. It is only if our internalization is at this level that we can have relevance to holiness.

The Importance of Appreciating Who You Are

Torah: After the plague, *Hashem* tells *Moshe* and *Elazar*, (the son of *Aaron*), they should conduct a census of the Jews. When enumerating the paternal family names of the Jewish people, the *Torah* adds to each name the letters “*hay*” and “*yud*.”

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: The nations of the world came to disgrace the Jewish people by claiming, “why are the Jews tracing their pedigree to prove their purity? One would think that when the Jews were slaves in Egypt and the men’s lives were dominated by the Egyptians – is there a question that the Jewish women’s bodies were also in the possession of the Egyptians?” Meaning, it was thought that the Jewish women were surely defiled by the Egyptian men. Therefore the nations of the world claimed that it was absurd for the Jews to pride themselves on their pedigree. In order to counter this false claim *Hashem* added His holy Name of “*yud*” and “*hay*” to the names of each of the families to personally attest to the purity of the Jewish people.

Rashi quoting the words of *Dovid HaMelech* (King *David*) in *Tehillim* (*Psalms*): “*Shivtay K’AH aidus l’Yisroel* (the tribes of G-d - who attests to Israel).” *Hashem* personally attests that the Jewish people are the tribes of Israel. The question to ask is – why should we be concerned about the claim of the nations of the world regarding our pedigree? Another question to ask is, how do we ourselves know that we are descendants of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs?

The reason why *Hashem* must attest to our pedigree that we descend from the Patriarchs is in order for us to fully appreciate and comprehend our special potential. Because *B’nai Yisroel* (the Jewish people) descend from the Patriarchs (*Avraham*, *Yitzchok*, and *Yaakov*), who were the equivalent of living angels, we have unlimited spiritual potential. *Hashem* wants us to know with absolute certainty that we are the direct descendants of the Patriarchs so that we do not view ourselves as the other nations of the world but rather as the “tribes of *Hashem*.”

Many difficulties stem from the fact that a person does not know how special he truly is. If we would understand and appreciate our own specialness then we would treat our prayers differently. We would understand that it is because of who we are that *Hashem* is attentive to

our prayers. For example, when the Jews approached the territory of Edom in the fortieth year in the desert, *Moshe* sent a message to *Edom* stating that when the Jews were in Egypt they cried out to *Hashem* and He heard their plea.

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: *Moshe* was communicating to the Edomites that the reason why *Hashem* listened to the outcry of the Jewish people was because of the blessing our Patriarch *Yitzchok* gave to his son *Yaakov*. The blessing was: “The voice is the voice of *Yaakov*.” This means that the power of the Jew lies in his mouth, which is through prayer. Therefore, when we pray we must believe that *Hashem* will listen because of the blessing of *Yitzchok*. If we would truly internalize and believe in the power of our prayers we would all pray differently.

Hashem associated His name with the names of the families of the Jewish people so that we should understand and appreciate that we possess great spiritual potential inherited from our holy Patriarchs. The only reason why the entire world is continuously focused on the Jew, despite our inconsequential number, is because we descend from *Avraham*, *Yitzchok*, and *Yaakov*. If we were to channel the energy that emanates from our spirituality in a proper manner we would affect the world in a profoundly positive way and ultimately bring about redemption.

How can one Merit Teshuvah

Torah: “The sons of *Korach* did not die.”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The reason they did not perish along with *Korach* and his community was because “They had contemplations of atonement (*teshuvah*) in their heart.”

Yalkut (*Midrash*) in *Korach*: “Why did the sons of *Korach* merit to be saved?” When *Moshe* entered into *Korach*’s tent, *Korach*’s sons were sitting alongside their father. When they saw *Moshe Rabbeinu* enter the tent they were in a quandary. Should they acknowledge his presence and disgrace their father or should they remain seated and violate the law of acknowledging a *Torah* sage? They decided to stand for *Moshe* despite their father’s disgrace.

Midrash: “Because they stood for *Moshe* they immediately had stirrings of *teshuvah* in their hearts.”

We learn from this that having the ability to do *teshuvah* comes from understanding one's wrong behavior, which only comes about if one has special merit. The sons of *Korach* were able to have that level of clarity and inner strength only in the merit of their acknowledgment of *Moshe's* presence.

Chofetz Chaim z'tl in the *Mishna Berurah* (the Laws of *Tisha B'Av*): The reason why the four fasts of the year were enacted (17th of *Tammuz*, the 9th of *Av*, Fast of *Gedalya*, and the 10th of *Teves*), was to commemorate the tragedies which came upon the Jewish people on those days. The reason we put ourselves in a deprived state is to introspect and arouse ourselves to do *teshuvah*. By remembering the days of tragedy in this manner, we become sensitized to be able to recognize the wrongs of our ancestors and ourselves.

Chofetz Chaim: "The most important aspect of these fast days is not the fast itself, but rather the introspection which leads to *teshuvah*."

Chofetz Chaim citing the book of *Yona*: When the community of *Nineveh* fasted and did *teshuvah*, "*Hashem* saw their ways." Meaning, *Hashem* did not see their sackcloth and fasting (it was not primary) but rather their change in behavior as a result of doing *teshuvah*. Fasting is only the context in which introspection and *teshuvah* take place. If one is occupied with activities other than introspection and self-analysis, he is taking hold of what is secondary (regarding the fasting) and is missing what is primary. We see from *Chazal* that one does not come to *teshuvah* easily. One needs special merit.

Rambam in the Laws of *Teshuvah*: In order for one to do proper *teshuvah* one needs to have deep remorse for doing the wrong and a commitment to never repeat that wrong again. If so, how does one merit being able to do proper *teshuvah*?

Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers): If a person is engaged with the needs of the community, he should be involved for the sake of *Hashem*. If one does this for the sake of *Hashem*, not only will his own merit contribute to the success of his endeavor but the merit of the entire community will contribute to his success. *Chazal* established communal fast days during which all of us must fast together to commemorate the tragedy that fell on that particular day. We fast as a Jewish people; we do *Vidui* (confession) as a Jewish people. It may be that it is these days of communal

praying and fasting for the sake of the *Klal Yisroel* that give each of us the merit of the entire community to do *teshuvah*. If one wants to repent as an individual it is very difficult; however, if one has the merit of the community then it becomes much more attainable.

Acknowledging the Good (*Parshas Chukas*)

Torah: The Jews complained to *Moshe* about the *Mann* (Manna) saying, "...our soul is disgusted with this insubstantial food." In response to their complaints, *Hashem* sent venomous serpents to bite them, and there were many casualties.

Gemara in Tractate *Avoda Zarah*: When the Jews complained about the *Mann*, *Hashem* said, "You are ingrates who descend from an ingrate." This is referring to the fact that the Jews are descendants of *Adam*, who transgressed *Hashem's* Will and ate from the tree of knowledge. When *Hashem* confronted *Adam* and asked him, "Why did you eat from the tree of knowledge?" *Adam* responded by saying, "I ate because of the wife you have given me." This implied that *Hashem* is the cause of his failing.

The reason why *Hashem* provided *Adam* with a wife was so she could be his helpmate and assist him in achieving purpose. However, in his response to *Hashem*, *Adam* turned around this act of kindness which *Hashem* had done for him and portrayed it as a curse. Because of this, *Hashem* called *Adam* an "ingrate." The same is true regarding the Jews in the desert who complained about the *Mann*. *Hashem* gave the Jews the gift of the *Mann* so that they would be sustained in the desert. This miracle food nourished them and prepared them for their rise to a new spiritual dimension upon entering the Land of Israel.

There were other benefits besides the spiritual ones. After eating the *Mann*, it was miraculously absorbed in their innards. This meant that they would not be inconvenienced by leaving the camp to their bodily functions. The *Torah* states that the camp of the Jew must remain "Holy (Clean)," therefore, if one needed to do his bodily functions, he would have had to go outside of the camp.

The gift of the *Mann* was a true blessing from *Hashem*. However, the Jews (like *Adam*, their forefather) not only

did not recognize the blessing but they complained and said, "...our soul is disgusted with this insubstantial food." This is why *Hashem* called the Jews "...ingrates who descend from an ingrate." Usually, it is understood that an "ingrate" is a person who received a great deal from a benefactor and when asked for some degree of reciprocity, he behaves as if he never received anything. It might be said that this is because he has a "short memory" and he does not want to recall all the good that was done for him. However, in the case of *Adam* and the Jews in the desert (regarding the *Mann*), the lack of their gratitude was much more serious. *Hashem* performed a great act of kindness for the Jewish people by providing them with the *Mann*.

The failing of the Jews was not that they did not appreciate its value and blessing, but rather, they characterized it as a detriment and something of a destructive nature. This situation is the equivalent of a patient who is in need of a life-saving blood transfusion and accuses the doctor, when piercing his skin with the transfusion needle, that he is there to kill him. *Adam*, and the Jewish people in the desert, were the recipients of the greatest gifts of *Hashem*, and nevertheless, they both perceived their blessings as a curse. This is a more serious offense than the "ingrate" who forgets the past because this is turning the blessing into a curse – turning good into evil.

This is similar to what the *Rambam* writes in *Hilchos Teshuvah*: A person's perception can become so distorted that he will say, "night is day and day is night – good is evil and evil is good." *Hashem* has given us invaluable gifts in the form of *Mitzvos*. *Hashem* knows our every need from a physical and spiritual perspective. He has provided us with parameters that are in our best interest.

Nevertheless, people view *Mitzvos* as a burden that infringes on their lives. *Shabbos*, which is "a semblance of the World to Come," is perceived as an

inconvenience. A Jew is a Prince who requires special and delicate treatment in every respect to ensure his proper spiritual development. *Hashem* provides the Jew with every aspect of his needs, yet people behave as if they were ordinary.

Mishna in Tractate *Berachos*: "Just as a person blesses *Hashem* for the good, he must bless *Hashem* for the bad." Meaning that when a person experiences good fortune, he must say the blessing of "*Shehecheyonu*." If he experiences misfortune or tragedy, he must say the blessing of "*Dayan HaEmes*" (*Hashem* is the true Judge)." Why did *Chazal* legislate the blessing of "*Dayan HaEmes*"? The answer is, if G-d forbid, a

person experiences misfortune and does not identify and recognize that this misfortune is truly in his best interest, then his reaction and response would be classified as an "ingrate." One would be saying that *Hashem's* blessing is, in fact, a curse.

It is analogous to a person who has a gangrenous limb that must be removed to save the person's life. In fact, the removal of the limb is the greatest kindness that one could do for this individual. It is a life-giving procedure. However, if the patient would see the removal as causing him tremendous pain and loss, then this is the statement of a true "ingrate." He is calling the ultimate blessing the ultimate curse. Therefore, this promulgation of the blessing "*Dayan HaEmes*" was of the utmost importance to us as a Jewish people so that we should not be classified as "ingrates."



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