

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת פינחס

פינחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן השיב את חמתי מעל בני ישראל בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם ולא כליתי את בני ישראל בקנאתי
“Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon the Priest turned back my wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when he zealously avenged My vengeance among them, so I did not consume the Children of Israel in My wrath” (25:11)

The letter “yud” in the name Pinchas is written smaller than usual. What is the significance of this small letter? Without the “yud,” the name can be read as if the “yud” is not there and becomes two words, “pen chas,” “do not have mercy.” This symbolizes the great deed that Pinchas did. When he saw Zimri with the Midianite woman, he did not allow his instinctive feelings of compassion to prevent him from doing what had to be done. He killed them despite the fact that it went against his natural tendencies.

The posuk writes that Pinchas avenged the vengeance of Hashem. R' Moshe Feinstein explains that Pinchas did what Hashem should have done himself. Hashem left many things in this world incomplete and left them for mankind to complete. Hashem could have struck down Zimri, but He left the task for someone else to step up and do it himself. Hashem has provided mankind with the raw materials in this world to attain perfection. It is up to people to grab on to these opportunities and take advantage of them. Another illustration of this idea is the bris milah. The removal of the foreskin is the perfection of the human form. Hashem could have arranged that man be born circumcised and be created in an already perfected state. Instead, Hashem left man with an imperfection and commanded Avraham to "walk before Me and be perfect." He left it to mankind to make the effort to bring about his own completion. The mark of the circumcision on the person's body is an everlasting reminder that we are to constantly look to perfect ourselves and the world around us. We should take the initiative and hear the call of Hashem in the unperfected aspects of the world. There are many things in life that Hashem has left for us to do.

(Perhaps this is why Eliyahu is the "malach habris," the angel of the bris milah, and plays such a central role in the bris milah ceremony. The midrash teaches that Pinchas and Eliyahu are the same person. Since Pinchas was willing to sacrifice his life for the ideal that the bris milah is meant to teach us, it is only fitting that he be directly involved in transmitting this lesson to all future generations. - MG)

לכן אמר הנני נתן לו את בריתי שלום

“Therefore, say: behold, I give him My covenant of peace” (25:12)

Why did Hashem bless Pinchas with peace as a reward for his actions? The Meshech Chochma writes that Pinchas was blessed that he would be a peaceful person. Committing a murder can lead a person to acquire undesirable character traits, such as stubbornness and cruelty. Even though the deed was done for a good reason, these bad

middos could unwittingly creep into his persona. In order to prevent these traits from taking root as a result of his zealotry, Hashem gave him a blessing of peace to counteract them. We learn from this that a person should not worry about side effects that may result from doing the right thing. One who does a mitzvah will know no wrong and Hashem will protect him.

Hashem makes a similar promise with regard to the destruction of an "ir hanidachas," a city whose population worships other deities, down to the last inhabitant. The posuk (Devarim 13:18) states that such a town must be completely destroyed and then says that Hashem "will give you mercy." One character trait of a Jew is his compassion. A person is influenced by his actions. If the Jews wipe out an entire city, it is possible that they will develop a taste for violence and will lose their Jewish identity as merciful people. Therefore, Hashem promises that if they kill in order to do a mitzva, He will give them mercy and they will not lose their compassion. When a person does a mitzva, nothing bad happens to him. In this situation, because it is the will of Hashem, the violent actions will not affect them and, even more so, they will be blessed with more compassion. One should never be afraid of a mitzva, even for noble reasons. In the case of the idolatrous city, the Yetzer Hara wants people to feel that they cannot kill because it will harm their character. This is just the plan of the evil inclination.

The Seforno says that Hashem blessed Pinchas with peace from the angel of death. Pinchas lived at least until the end of the era of the Judges and some sources say that he was also Eliyahu HaNavi, who never died but instead ascended to heaven while still alive. As a result of his tremendous sacrifice in order to defend the honor of Hashem, he merited long life, possibly even immortality.

וּשְׁם אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמְּכָה אֲשֶׁר הִכָּה אֶת הַמְּדִינִית זִמְרִי בֶן סָלוּא נָשִׂיא בֵּית אָב לְשִׁמְעוֹנִי

“The name of the slain Israelite man who was slain with the Midianitess was Zimri son of Salu, leader of a father's house of the Simeonites” (25:14)

The names of the perpetrators are only now revealed, at the conclusion of the story. R' Moshe Feinstein explains that we are concerned about the natural desire that people have to emulate the deeds of important people. If, in the middle of the narrative, it was revealed that they were important individuals, people might decide to follow their example. Now, after they have been killed, it is no longer a concern that people will learn from them and their identities can be disclosed.

רְאוּבֵן בְּכוֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן חֲנוּךְ מִשְׁפַּחַת הַחֲנֹכִי לְפָלוּא מִשְׁפַּחַת הַפְּלָאִי
“Reuven the firstborn of Israel – the sons of Reuven: of Chanoch, the Chanochite family; of Palu, the Paluite family” (26:5)

Rashi says that the nations of the world were ridiculing the Jews for dividing into families by their fathers. They mocked that this was pointless because the Egyptians surely had seized some of the Jewish women at times and thus their descendants did not share the same father. Therefore, each family name is surrounded in the Torah by a “yud” at the end

and a “hey” and the beginning so that they each contain the name of Hashem, thereby bearing Hashem’s stamp of approval on the validity of their heritage.

Why does the Torah only disprove the mockery at this point in time, forty years after they left Egypt? After Zimri sinned with the Midianite woman, there was a concern that this mixture between Jews and non-Jews had also happened in the past in Egypt. Because of this, it was necessary to put the rumor to rest at this time.

The Kli Yakar notes that Hashem's name is appended to the names of three actual tribes: Reuven, Shimon and Zevulun. These three tribes needed the extra assertion that they were pure because extra suspicion was attached to them. Reuven had been involved in an incident with Bilha, Shimon was the main culprit in the recent debacle with Midianite women and Zevulun would be the traders in Eretz Yisrael that would travel around to other societies and would face temptation in foreign lands. Therefore, Hashem's stamp of approval is found on the names of these tribes, in addition to their individual families.

Why was this two-letter name of Hashem chosen out of all the possible names? The Kli Yakar explains that this name is representative of the relationship between man and wife, who share this name of Hashem between them. The words "ish" and "isha" share two letters, but "ish" contains a "yud" and "isha" contains a "hey." This indicates that when a husband and wife live together, the Divine Presence dwells among them, as represented by this two-letter name of Hashem. This name, when appended to the names of the Jewish families, indicated that all the children among the Jewish people came from this type of marital relationship. They came from a home that contained the Divine Presence.

**והקרבתם אשה עלה לה' פרים בני בקר שנים ואיל אחד ושבעה כבשים בני שנה
תמימם יהיו לכם**

“You shall offer a fire-offering, an elevation-offering to Hashem: two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs within their first year, unblemished shall they be for you” (28:19)

The Kedushas Levi explains this posuk in the following manner: If a sacrifice is brought to Hashem with an “ishe,” with a fiery enthusiasm and with much feeling, only then it will be an “Olah LaHashem,” an offering before Hashem. The mere act of bringing a sacrifice to Hashem is meaningless without the proper feelings behind the act. If we only had the same enthusiasm for mitzvos as we have for aveiros and other time-wasting nonsensical activities, we would be able to attain amazing spritual heights.

This week is Shiva Asar B'Tamuz and the beginning of the Three Weeks of mourning for the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash. We must remember that the outward signs of mourning are not the most important facet of our observance of the Three Weeks. Rather, repentance and introspection is at the core of this period of time. One who goes through the external motions without allowing them to lead him to internal changes has missed out on a golden opportunity.

ובחדש השביעי באחד לחדש מקרא קדש יהיה לכם כל מלאכת עבדה לא תעשו

יום תרועה יהיה לכם

“In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, there shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall do no laborious work, it shall be a day of shofar-sounding to you” (29:1)

Rosh Hashana is referred to as the "Day of the Teruah" because of the mitzvah to blow the shofar. The gemara on Rosh Hashana 16 explains that the shofar must be a ram's horn in order to evoke the memory of Akeidas Yitzchak and thereby remind Hashem of the great merit of our illustrious ancestor at the moment of our judgment.

The Dubno Magid explained this concept with the following parable. There was once a king who went hunting in the forest. He spotted a wolf in the woods and tore off in hot pursuit of his mark. After a wild chase he lost the wolf only to discover that he had also lost his way in the process. He wandered helplessly in the forest for a few days until, as he was on his last legs, he was found by the watchman of the forest, who saved him from certain death and brought him out of the woods. As a reward, the king elevated the watchman to an important post in the government. Later on, the watchman rebelled against the government and was sentenced to die. When he was given one last request, he asked to wear his watchman's clothing to the execution. When the king saw the watchman being led to his death wearing the very same clothing in which he had saved the king's life, the king was overcome with mercy and pardoned the watchman.

This is what we aim to accomplish when we blow the shofar from a ram's horn. When Hashem sees the horn of the ram, He is reminded of how our ancestors were such pious people and, even though we may have sinned, His mercy will be aroused and He will pardon our wrongdoing.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

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