

Vayoel Moshe

Parashat Pinchas

A collection of talks and lessons, on the weekly Parasha and Holidays, from the scion of the holy lineage, Rabbi Yoel Pinto, son of our holy and esteemed Admor, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, Chief Rabbi of Morocco. Torah thoughts, novelties and explanations, precious teachings to illuminate the Parasha and Holidays, rich with novelties in all realms of the Torah, esoteric reflections, from throughout the weekly portions and Holidays. • Issue no. 8 • Parashat Pinchas, 5784



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In the end of last week's Parasha and at the beginning of this week's Parasha the Torah tells of the abominable acts that Am Yisrael did with Moav. It tells of their falling for the persuasion of the Moavites to worship idols. Worst of all, however, the Torah tells of the sin the Zimri Ben Salu committed with Kozbi Bat Tzur, the Midianite. When Zimri carried out this act, sadness and trembling filled the hearts of Am Yisrael. For Am Yisrael was unable to grasp how a man of God, who was a leader of an entire tribe could commit such a spiteful act against God. Due to their state of shock, nobody arose to protest his act. However, Pinchas Ben Elazar Ben Aharon Hakohen arose with zealotness for the word of God, and impaled Zimri and Kozbi. Consequently restoring the honor of God, and saving Am Yisrael from being wiped out.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 82a) expounds upon this and reveals another detail as to what happened during that episode. The Talmud says that Am Yisrael wished to punish Zimri for his

actions, yet, they temporarily forgot what the law states regarding one who behaves this way. However, Pinchas did not forget the law; on the contrary, he remembered it very clearly. He went to Moshe Rabbenu and said to him "Uncle, when you descended from Mount Sinai you taught us that the law states that one who acts this way "zealots attack him". Meaning, that even though in order to execute someone, the Sanhedrin (court of judges) must analyze the case prior to his execution, in this case one whose heart is zealous for the honor of God may execute without a case. Pinchas thus asked Moshe Rabbenu why nobody stood up to fulfill this law. Moshe Rabbenu responded to him that all of Am Yisrael forgot this law, and only you remembered it. It is thus your mission to fulfill it.

Why did Moshe Rabbenu not do anything to remove God's wrath from Am Yisrael

Many of the commentaries were bothered by the following ques-

tion. Why did Moshe Rabbenu not kill Zimri himself? Moshe Rabbenu was surely concerned for the honor of God and wished to remove the bad decree from upon Am Yisrael. Why did Moshe Rabbenu not act upon these feelings? Furthermore, Moshe Rabbenu surely knew of the wrath that was caused by this action. Throughout history, we saw that Moshe Rabbenu would entreat God to remove any anger from upon Am Yisrael, why was it any different this time? If one would answer that Moshe Rabbenu forgot this Halacha and thus he did not act upon it. This is difficult to accept, for Pinchas reminded him of it. The fact that Pinchas came to discuss the issue with Moshe Rabbenu, reveals that Pinchas wanted Moshe Rabbenu to be the one to execute Zimri. Yet, Moshe deflected for he did not want to be the one to perform this act.

Pinchas received three gifts for removing God's wrath from upon Am Yisrael

Many answers were given to

this question. I would like to suggest an additional approach. Our sages teach that Pinchas received three gifts that were not originally intended for him. These gifts were granted to him because he risked his life in honor to preserve the honor of God, and to save Am Yisrael.

Pinchas received the Kehuna (priesthood) because he removed God's wrath.

One of the three gifts Pinchas received was Kehuna. Even though Pinchas was the son of Elazar Hakohen, and the grandson of Aharon Hakohen who had received the Kehuna from God previously, he himself did not receive Kehuna status. Rather, he was only considered part of the Levi dynasty. The Maharal in his work "Gur Aryeh" explains why Pinchas did not receive the Kehuna even though he was from the Kohanic dynasty. When Moshe Rabbenu anointed all the Kohanim with the anointing oil, Pinchas was a young child and not ready for the responsibilities of a Kohen. Therefore, he was not anointed. When Pinchas removed God's wrath from upon Am Yisrael, God gifted him that he and his descendants receive Kehuna status.

Pinchas received a long life for removing God's wrath

The second gift Pinchas received was that he would live a long life. Pinchas lived longer than anyone in his generation. He was even a judge after the death of Yehoshua and the elders. The Radak (Divre Hayamim 9:20) says that Pinchas lived more than three hundred years. Moreover, the Seforno teaches that long life was granted to Pinchas when God uttered the words (Bamidbar 25:12)

הִנְנִי נֹתֵן לּוֹ אֶת-בְּרִיתִי שְׁלֹמִים

"I hereby give him my covenant of peace". The reason that one becomes ill and eventually passes away is due to the fact that

man's body is composed of many different parts. When they do not work in sync it damages the body and ultimately leads to one's demise. The blessing of peace that was given to Pinchas was that all his parts work together in peace and keep him healthy.

Pinchas merit to become Eliyahu who will make peace between God and Am Yisrael before the redemption

The third gift Pinchas received was that of meriting to be the one who makes peace between God and Am Yisrael before the coming of Mashiach (the redemption). The Yalkut teaches (Remez 771) "God said to Pinchas "Just as you made peace between Am Yisrael and I, and removed my wrath from upon them, so too in the future will you be the one to make peace between my children and I. As the verse states (Malachi 3:23-24) "Behold, I will send you Eliyahu the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of God, that he may turn the heart of the fathers back through the children, and the heart of the children back through their fathers". Pinchas will be Eliyahu that will make peace before Mashiach.

The reward for removing God's wrath consisted of three gifts: Kehuna, long life, and being the reporter of the redemption. If Moshe Rabbenu were to be the one to execute Zimri, he would have received these three blessings. We can now understand why Moshe did not want to be the one to carry out the execution. Throughout Moshe Rabbenu's entire life he only strayed from the word of God twice, and even those two times the deviation was minute. Even so, God punished him very harshly, as God does to those close to him.

The Kehuna belonged to Moshe Rabbenu and God took it away from him

The first time that Moshe Rab-

benu strayed from the word of God was when God appeared to him in the burning bush and insisted that he lead Am Yisrael out of Egypt. Moshe Rabbenu initially refused because of his great humility. The verse there tells that God became angry with Moshe. Our sages teach (Zevachim 102b) that Moshe Rabbenu was supposed to receive the Kehuna, yet, when he initially refused to accept his role as the leader of Am Yisrael God passed over the Kehuna to Aharon.

The days of Moshe Rabbenu were shortened and he did not merit to enter Eretz Yisrael

The second time that Moshe Rabbenu strayed from the word of God was when God commanded that he speak to the stone in order that it bring forth water. Moshe Rabbenu, however, hit the stone instead. God was angry with Moshe Rabbenu, and thus he was punished that he would not enter Eretz Yisrael, and that his days would be shortened.

Moshe Rabbenu could have retrieved what was taken from him by executing Zimri but he did not want to pressure God

Two of the gifts that were given to Pinchas originally belonged to Moshe Rabbenu. God took them away as a punishment for straying from His will. We can now understand why Moshe Rabbenu did not want to be the one to execute Zimri. For if he were to be the one to perform the act, God would be compelled to give back what he took from him. Even though Moshe Rabbenu surely wanted to have the Kehuna in his family, and be able to live a long life and enter Eretz Yisrael. Moshe Rabbenu had an opportunity to retrieve what was taken from him, yet, he accepted his punishment with complete faith in God.

Why does Eliyahu need to make peace between God and

Am Yisrael if God is already at the point where he is content enough to redeem them?

Moshe Rabbenu had the opportunity to become the one who would make peace if he would have executed Zimri. Yet, since Pinchas was the one who executed him he will be the one who makes peace. We must now understand Moshe Rabbenu's not caring to be the one who makes peace between God and Am Yisrael before Mashiach comes. The answer may be that being the one to make peace between God and Am Yisrael seems rather insignificant if God is already content enough that He decided to redeem Am Yisrael. If He accepted their prayers for Mashiach, he is clearly at peace with them.

Moshe Rabbenu cannot redeem Am Yisrael until they fulfill the Torah in its entirety since he was the one who taught it to them

The reason that Eliyahu specifically needs to be the one to make peace between God and Am Yisrael before the coming of Mashiach can be extrapolated from the following lesson taught by the Or Hachaim (Parashat Tetza-

veh). The Or Hachaim quotes passages from the Midrashim and the Zohar that state that Moshe Rabbenu will be the redeemer of Am Yisrael from exile. This is the reason that the exile has lasted so long for Moshe Rabbenu does not want to redeem a group of idlers. Moshe Rabbenu does not want to redeem a group of people who he taught the Torah to and warned about not leaving exile until they fully comply with the commandments of the Torah. By warning against reducing in following the commandments, Moshe Rabbenu was instrumental for them entering exile, and thus cannot be the one who takes them out until they fulfill all the words of the Torah. If Moshe Rabbenu will not redeem us until we actually deserve it, why do we pray to God to redeem us even if we do not deserve it?

Eliyahu will cause Am Yisrael to do Teshuva (repentance) so that Moshe Rabbenu can redeem them

Eliyahu coming to make peace between God and Am Yisrael will be him causing them to do Teshuva. He will cause them to repent with all their heart and soul.

They will accept upon themselves to fulfill all the commandments and become fully righteous. Subsequently, Moshe Rabbenu will be able to redeem them. We can now understand why we pray for God to redeem us even though we don't deserve it. Our prayer is for Eliyahu to come and cause Am Yisrael to fully repent prior to Mashiach so that Moshe Rabbenu could redeem us.

Moreover, it is now clear why Moshe Rabbenu did not execute Zimri and thus become the one to make peace between God and Am Yisrael in the future. As mentioned above, Moshe Rabbenu was an unfit candidate for this process. Rather, Eliyahu needed to be the one to prepare Am Yisrael for Mashiach.

From this we can learn the greatness of Moshe Rabbenu, his unwavering faith in God, and his love and devotion to Am Yisrael. Even though he could have retrieved what was taken from him, he held back for the greater good. Moreover, he saw that if he were to be the one to make peace it would cause more harm than good, and thus he held back.

Pinchas did not merit the Kehuna (priesthood) until he executed Zimri for only because he wasn't a Kohen was he able to remove God's wrath from upon Am Yisrael (the Jewish People)

This week's Parasha records one of the most poor examples in the history of Am Yisrael's behavior. The year forty after Am Yisrael left Egypt had arrived, which by then all of the sinners were wiped out. Whoever was left were the righteous and the just. At that point, God wanted to lead them into Eretz Yisrael and fulfill his promise. However, the Satan saw their righteous ways and wanted to cause them to falter. He corrupted them to mingle

with the Moavites. Soon thereafter, the Moavites began influencing Am Yisrael to sin in the worst of ways.

Not only were the Moavites successful in corrupting the laymen; rather, their influence even reached the chief of a tribe. Zimri Ben Salu, the chief of the tribe of Shimon had illicit relations with Kozbi Bat Tzur the Midianite. God saw this and was angered to the point where he wanted to erad-

icate the entire Am Yisrael. However, Pinchas arose and saved all of Am Yisrael from being wiped out by impaling Zimri and Kozbi. God rewards the righteous, and thus He commanded Moshe Rabbenu to inform Pinchas that he would be receiving reward for his great deed. The gift was that Pinchas would become a Kohen along with his future descendants. Moreover, our sages teach that most of the Kohanim that served in the Bet Hamikdash

were descendants of Pinchas.

Even though Pinchas was a descendant of the family of Kehuna he did not become a Kohen until he executed Zimri

The Talmud teaches (Zevachim 101b) that Pinchas did not receive Kehuna until he executed Zimri. Even though Pinchas was the son of Elazar Hakohen, and the grandson of Aharon Hakohen who had received the Kehuna from God, he himself had not received Kehuna status. Rather, he was only considered part of the Levi dynasty. The Maharal in his work "Gur Aryeh" explains why Pinchas did not receive the Kehuna even though he was from the Kohanic dynasty. When Moshe Rabbenu anointed all the Kohanim with the anointing oil, Pinchas was a young child and not ready for the responsibilities of a Kohen. Therefore, he was not anointed.

This surely caused Pinchas great sadness, for he wished to serve in God's home as well. Pinchas did not do anything wrong to deserve not to serve as a Kohen; on the contrary, it seemed rather consequential. If we examine the difference between Pinchas and his brothers we see that Pinchas was from the legacy of Levi, and they were from the legacy of Kehuna. This had actual physical ramifications that caused him embarrassment and feeling out of place. Certain foods and offerings were only allowed for the Kohanim. Thus, Pinchas could not eat from the foods or even from the utensils that his family ate from. One can only imagine the isolation he felt for those thirty nine years from when his family was anointed as Kohanim until he was.

Why did God withhold the Kehuna from Pinchas for thirty nine years?

We must further investigate why God withheld the Kehuna

from Pinchas for this span of thirty nine years. Surely Pinchas prayed to God to serve as a Kohen. Why then did God not accept his prayers?

A Kohen cannot use the Holy Names of God

The answer to this can be found in a teaching of our teacher and master, the Admor, may God protect him. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Yoma 3:7) tells of a doctor who lived in the city of Tzipori who knew the Shem Hameforash (God's full name, which is unknown to us). This doctor wished to reveal the name to Rabbi Yossi Bar Chama, yet, Rabbi Yossi refused to hear. Rabbi Yossi explained to the doctor that anyone who knows the Shem Hameforash cannot partake in any form of donation. Rabbi Yossi was from the offspring of Aharon Hakohen and would thus receive Terumot and Maasrot. He therefore did not want to know the Shem Hameforash. The Korban Ha'eda explains the following reason why one who knows the Shem Hameforash cannot partake in donations. He says that if one at one point the donor will stop giving, we are concerned that the receiver will be angry with him, and kill him using the Shem Hameforash. The holy Admor extrapolates this from the verse (Tehillim 9:11)

וַיִּבְטְחוּ בְךָ יְיָדַעֵי שְׁמֶךָ

which translates to "and those who know your Name shall trust in you". Those who know God's name must trust solely in God, and not in others who give. This explanation is taught in the work of Rabbi Chaim Palachi, Lechayim Beyerushalayim quoting the students of the Arizal, as well.

Pinchas was not killed when he executed Zimri because the Holy Names of God protected him

Based on this, we can explain

why throughout those thirty nine years Pinchas was not anointed as a Kohen. The Talmud records (Sanhedrin 82b) six miracles that happened to Pinchas that prevented Pinchas being killed by Zimri or the people of the tribe of Shimon. These miracles took place because Pinchas used the holy Names of God. We see that Pinchas knew these holy Names because of the following anecdote that is taught in the Targum Yonatan (Bamidbar 31:8). The Targum states that when Bilam saw Pinchas he performed witchcraft and flew into the air. In order to catch him, Pinchas used the holy Names of God to fly into the air.

God withheld granting Pinchas the Kehuna so he could save Am Yisrael

The only way Pinchas could have known these Holy names was if he was not a Kohen who would partake in donations. We now see why God withheld the Kehuna from Pinchas for all those years. If he was a Kohen he could not have saved Am Yisrael by killing Zimri, for he would not have been able to use the holy Names of God for protection.

This teaches a valuable lesson for us to keep in mind. At times a person feels like he needs something, and he calls out to God to give it to him for many years, and he is not answered. It seems to him that God has forsaken him, as David Hamelech said (Tehilim 119:82) "My eyes pine for Your word, saying, "When will You console me"? A person may be surprised by this. Why is the merciful God doing this to him? Why is God withholding what he is asking for? A person must always remember that God sees the whole picture, and it is for man's own good that he is withholding what he is asking for. God will eventually answer one's prayers in the greatest way possible.