

Jewish people sinned with the women of Moav (as per the wicked plan of Bilaam), *Hashem* was going to wipe out the Jewish people right then and there, without waiting for prayer, without speaking to Moshe and Aharon. Only the quick action of Pinchas stopped this.

פִּינַחֵס בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן אַהֲרֹן הִכְהֵן הָשִׁיב אֶת חֲמָתִי מֵעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאוֹ אֶת קִנְאַתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם וְלֹא כָלִיתִי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאַתִּי – Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon Hakohen turned back My anger from upon the Jewish people by acting zealously on My behalf in their midst. Thus I did not destroy the Jewish people in My zealously.

Pinchas acted out the zealously that *Hashem* was going to. Had Pinchas not done so, it would have been the end.

Why was this sin so very severe? Why was it worse than the sin of the *Eigel*?

Let's say there is a fight in the family. One spouse acts wrongly toward the other, and a fierce quarrel breaks out. They might even break windows in their rage. But in the end, they make up and things quiet down again. Even if it doesn't happen immediately, when Erev Yom Kippur comes, they will work things out and life will go on. The sin of the *Eigel*, the rebellion of Korach and the faithless report of the *Meraglim* were all serious sins. But *Hashem* forgave us nonetheless. This is how it is when things stay inside the family.

The sin with the women of Moav was a totally different story, It was not "within the family." It was an act that entailed leaving the Jewish home. Going out of the family circle. This was an unforgivable

sin. This is why Pinchas needed to act out *Hashem's* zealously. If Pinchas had not picked up the spear to do what he did, *Hashem* would have needed to act, and it would have been the end.

This is because a Jew is not someone who puts on *tefillin*, or even someone who has *yiras Shamayim*. A Jew is like *Hashem's* wife, so to speak. [And if the wife leaves home to go to someone else, the damage is irreparable.]

This explains another point as well. After the story with Pinchas, *Hashem* gave a new name to the Jewish people.

חֲנוּךְ מִשְׁפַּחַת הַחֲנוּכִי לְפִלּוּא מִשְׁפַּחַת הַפְּלִאִי –
Chanoch of the Chanochi family, Palu of the Palui family.³

Hashem called them by His own name, so to speak. Every Jewish family got a *yud* and the end of their family name, and a *hei* at the beginning, to show that they are clean and pure. י"ה is one of *Hashem's* Names.

Let's say a woman from the Stein family marries a man from the Gold family. Before she marries she is "Chani Stein." After she marries she is called "Chani Gold." She is "Mrs. Gold" now. This is how it was with the names of Chanoch, and Palu, and all the others. Before the Giving of the Torah, they were called the Chanoch family and the Palu family. But after the Giving of the Torah, when the Jewish people became like *Hashem's* wife, so to speak, He called each family by His Name.

This is also the meaning of the words we say in *Tefilah*: – "ושמך הגדול והקדוש עלינו קראת: *Tefilah*:"

³ Bemidbar 26:5.



Your great and holy Name upon us.” The name יהודי, “Jew,” is the four letters of *Hashem’s* Name, plus the letter *dalek*, which represents דלות, “meagerness.” [We make ourselves small and “meager” in relation to *Hashem*.]

The literal translation of the name יהודי, “Jew,” is “Mrs. *Hashem*.”

What does this mean?

When a woman is called “Mrs. Gold” it means that even if she works and even if she has a good

position in the company, the center of her life is her husband and children. She goes to work in order to support the family. The real center of her life is the home.

So it is with a Jew. His life is one of partnership with *Hashem*. He gets up in the morning and goes to sleep at night with *Hashem*. He eats with *Hashem*. And so with everything he does. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is like our “husband,” so to speak. He is the center of our life. ●

Your Inner Zealot

בְּקִנְאוֹ אֶת קִנְאָתִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם. (במדבר כה, יא)

By acting zealously on My behalf in their midst. (*Bemidbar* 23:11)

Sefer Mesilas Yesharim explains what it means to be a קנאי, a “zealot”:

Zealousness is a subcategory of love for *Hashem*. It is when a person is zealous for *Hashem’s* holy Name. He hates those who hate *Hashem* and attempts to subdue them any way he can, so that *Hashem* will be served and His honor will be increased....

It is obvious that someone who loves his friend cannot bear to see his friend being hit or cursed. He will surely come to his friend’s assistance. Similarly, someone who loves *Hashem’s* Name cannot bear to see it being desecrating, *chas v’shalom*, and His commandments being transgressed.¹

Now, there is a *mitzvah* in the Torah of הוֹכִיחַ – “You shall surely reprove your fellow.”² This *mitzvah* requires us to care, to make sure that also our fellow Jew keeps *mitzvos* and follows *Hashem’s* ways. But zealousness goes beyond this. Zealousness means that if a person sees others

transgressing *Hashem’s* Will, he cannot hold himself back and keep his quiet. He gets intensely stirred up, his heart is on fire, he furiously protests the *chillul Hashem*. He pours out fiery wrath on the enemies of *Hashem* even if it entails taking exceptional and unconventional action.

Of course, a *kannai* needs to be very careful that his protest should be made at the right place and the right time and the right way, so his act of zealousness should in fact increase Heaven’s honor and sanctify *Hashem’s* Name, rather than causing a desecration of His Name.

Being a *kannai* for the Name of *Hashem* is not limited to vigorous protests against others. It applies to oneself as well. If a person sees that the *Yetzer Hara* is getting the better of him and pushing him into a certain *aveirah*, he should forcefully and powerfully arouse the spirit of zealousness against himself. He should rebuke the *Yetzer Hara*, and set limits and precautions on himself, so he will not do the sin again.

For instance, *Chazal* recount³ that a certain pious man saw a hole in his field’s fence on *Shabbos* and

1 *Mesilas Yesharim* 19.

2 *Vayikra* 19:17.

3 *Shabbos* 150b.

made a mental decision to mend the hole. Then he remembered that it is *Shabbos* and such decisions are not to be made. So he resolved never to repair that hole.

This is an example of a person being a *kannai* against himself. When he saw that he had stumbled, that he had belittled the honor of *Shabbos*, he penalized himself to never repair the hole in his field's fence, even if it will cause him great loss. In this way he showed how much he cared about the holiness of *Shabbos* and the honor of *Shamayim*.

Another example is the story of a certain *bachur* in *Volozhin yeshivah*, a *talmid chacham*, whose friend asked him a question in *Halachah* in the middle of a meal, and he didn't know the answer. He was so perturbed by his own lack of knowledge that he got up in the middle of the meal and hurried to

the *beis midrash* to sit and learn with tremendous constancy for seven years, until he became a great and outstanding *talmid chacham*.

This is another example of a person being zealous against himself. He felt that he had slighted Heaven's honor by his lack in Torah knowledge, and did not rest until he perform a great and disproportionate act. This act was directed not toward others but toward himself, in zealousness for *Hashem's* Name.

This is how it should be for anyone in whose heart burns love for *Hashem*. His zealousness should be directed primarily toward himself, for every way in which he feels he is slighting the honor of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and His Torah. He will thereby increase the honor of Heaven, like Pinchas and *Eliyahu Hanavi*. ●

PARSHAH TOPIC



True Peace

פִּינְחָס בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן הָשִׁיב אֶת חֲמַתִּי מֵעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאוֹ אֶת קִנְאַתִּי בְּתוֹכָם וְלֹא כָלִיתִי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאַתִּי. לָכֵן אֶמַר הַנְּנִי נֹתֵן לּוֹ אֶת בְּרִיתִי שְׁלוֹם. וְהָיְתָה לּוֹ וּלְזֶרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו בְּרִית כְּהֵנָּה עוֹלָם תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר קָנָא לְאַלְקֵינוּ וַיִּכְפֹּר עַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: (במדבר כה, יא-יג)

Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon Hakohen, turned back My anger from upon the Jewish people, by acting zealously on My behalf in their midst. Thus I did not destroy the Jewish people in My zealousness. Therefore say, "Behold, I am giving him My covenant of peace." It will be for him and for his descendants after him as an eternal covenant of priesthood, since he was zealous for his G-d and atoned for the Jewish people. (*Bemidbar* 25:11-13)

Peace and Priesthood

What Pinchas did was among the most outstanding acts in Jewish history.

We all know that *Kehunah* was granted to *Aharon*

Hakohen. He received priesthood for himself and for his descendants throughout the generations. But Pinchas himself could not thereby be a *kohen*. Because when *Hashem* appointed Aharon to be *kohen*, He said to him that he and his four sons will

be *kohanim*. But Pinchas had already been born before that. Thus, Pinchas was not born to a *kohen* and also was not appointed as a *kohen*.

That was Pinchas' situation. All who will be born afterward will become *kohanim* by paternal inheritance. Only he did not thereby become a *kohen*.

However, Pinchas opened a new door to *kebunah*. He received a special gift from *Hashem*, Who made with him a *ברית כהונת עולם*, an eternal covenant of *kebunah*. *Hashem* said to him, so to speak: I love you and I want to make a *bris* with you and your descendants, that you should be connected to Me forever and ever.

Hashem gave him two gifts: peace and priesthood. Pinchas and his descendants will be *kohanim* forever, and they also will have *shalom* forever.

What is *shalom*, peace? All sicknesses are a result of an imbalance in a person's body. And *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* promised Pinchas that within his physical body, and surely in his spirit and soul, there will always be peace and balance. This is why Pinchas lives forever. As the Midrash says,¹ Pinchas is *Eliyahu Hanavi*, who never died. He lives forever and he will bring *Mashiach*.

Pinchas Saved Us

What did Pinchas do to deserve all this?

בְּקִנְאוֹ אֶת קִנְאָתִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם וְלֹא כָלִיתִי אֶת בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאָתִי – By acting zealously on My
behalf in their midst. Thus I did not destroy
the Jewish people in My zealotry.

Bilaam was the great enemy of the Jewish people. Balak hired him for money to wipe out the Jewish people and not leave a trace of them. Bilaam indeed tried in all sorts of ways to do so.

He tried to curse them with the impure forces that were at his service. Then he tried to get *Hashem* to punish them by pointing out their sins. He tried other methods, too. There was nothing he did not

try in order to harm the Jewish people. And he did not succeed.

After trying everything, Bilaam said to Balak: Listen, we must admit that there really is no way for I or anyone else to destroy the Jewish people. The only one who can do it is the Jewish people itself.

כָּל כְּלֵי יוֹצֵר עֲלֶיךָ לֹא יִצְלָח – Any means
brought against you will not succeed.²

There is nothing in the world that can destroy the Jewish people except for the Jewish people itself.

So Bilaam advised Balak that if he succeeds in getting them to sin by committing *zenus*, they will thereby destroy themselves, because *Hashem* will wipe them out totally.

Balak took Bilaam's "wise" advice. He hired the Midianite women and they caused the Jews to sin. As a result, *Hashem* was about to wipe out the Jewish people, if Pinchas had not picked up a spear and attacked Zimri, who was sinning with the Midianite princess, and killed both of them. This is what saved the Jewish people forever.

And what reward did Pinchas receive?

He became *Hashem's* friend, and he became *Eliyahu Hanavi*, who lives forever. Every time *Hashem* makes a covenant with a Jewish child through *bris milah*, when a Jewish child becomes connected to *Hashem*, Pinchas (*Eliyahu*) is there, to testify that the Jewish people remain connected to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

Evaluating Aveiros

Let's take a deeper look at the incident with Pinchas and Zimri. As we know, Zimri committed a sin with a non-Jewish woman named Kozbi, the daughter of Tzur, who was a prince of Midian.

There are two ways we can evaluate *aveiros*. We can look at the severity of the sin, or we can look at its punishment. They are not always commensurate. Regarding the severity of Zimri's sin, the Rambam says as follows:

1 Yalkut Shimoni 771.

2 Yeshayahu 54:17.

This sin [of relations with a non-Jewish woman], although it is not punishable by death at the hands of *beis din*, should not be treated lightly. Rather, it causes a loss that no other forbidden gender relationship causes. This is because a child born from another forbidden gender relationship is considered the father's son or daughter in every way, and is considered a Jew, although he is [in most cases] a bastard.

However, a child born from a [Jewish father who had relations with a] non-Jewish woman is not considered the father's son or daughter.... This causes attachment to the non-Jews, from whom *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* separated us, and causes turning away from *Hashem*....³

The Rambam taught us here that the sin of relations with a non-Jewess is worse than all the *arayos*, all the forbidden gender relationships mentioned in the Torah. There is no sin as bad as a Jewish man having gender relations with a non-Jewish woman.

Why is it so bad?

Because there is no physical or spiritual way by which a Jew can turn himself into a non-Jew. Even if he eats pork and every other forbidden food, even if he desecrates *Shabbos* many times, he remains a Jew. No part of him turns non-Jewish. When he does *teshuvah*, he retains the potential to become one of the greatest Jews of the generation.

³ *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Issurei Biah* 12:7.

There is only one way that a Jew can take a part of himself and make it non-Jewish, and that is by having gender relations with a non-Jewess. In such a case, his child, who is a part of his being and essence, is a non-Jew. This child will never be able to return to the Jewish people. Even if he converts to Judaism, he will become a new person, not the child who was born to his father. Consequently, this child is lost to the Jewish people forever.

Now let us consider the punishment that the Torah accorded to this sin.

If a married Jewish woman commits adultery, she is liable for the death punishment. And so it is with other forms of *arayos*. By contrast, the Torah states no punishment for he who has relations with a non-Jewess. If he will be brought before *beis din*, they will not hear the case, because there is no punishment they can give.

Furthermore, where does it even say in the Torah that it is forbidden? This is subject to a disagreement among the *Rishonim*. Some say that the source is the verse that states **לֹא תִתְחַתֵּן בָּם**, "You shall not marry them."⁴ Others say that this verse refers only to women of the seven nations of Canaan, but the prohibition on marrying women from other nations is not mentioned in the Torah. It is rather a *Halachah l'Moshe miSinai*; it is part of the Oral Torah. It is alluded to only in a verse in *Sefer Yechezkel*.

The *Shelah Hakadosh* explains this latter view by saying that such an act is so repugnant to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that He did not even want to mention it in the Torah. ●

⁴ *Devarim* 7:3.

