

NHS Sedra Sheet

Pinchas – Jonathan Artman

י"ט תמוז תש"פ – 11th July 2020 – שבת פ' פנחס

Our Parasha this week is named after Pinchas, the son of Elazar and the grandson of Aharon. The end of Parashat Balak concludes by informing us of the descent of the bnei Yisrael, engaging in forbidden relations with Moabite women and worshipping their idols. It was the heroic act of Pinchas, who arose and killed Zimri, a prince from the tribe of Shimon and his consort Cozbi, herself a daughter of a king in Midian, which halted a devastating plague which accounted for the deaths of some 24,000 Jews.

The beginning of our Parasha contains the reward from HaKadosh Baruch Hu for Pinchas and his descendants, "שָׁלוֹם אֶת-בְּרִית לְךָ נָתַן ה'... וְהָיְתָה לְךָ וּלְזַרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו בְּרִית כְּהֵנָּה עֹלָם".

We see that Pinchas was given a covenant of peace and an eternal covenant of kehunah. Pinchas committed an unprecedented act of zealotry on behalf of the L-rd. What made Zimri's act so repulsive is the brazen manner of committing the deed in front of Moshe Rabbeinu, the elders and the children of Israel. The Gemara in Sanhedrin explains that Zimri questioned Moshe Rabbeinu's marriage to Tziporah as a pretext to his taking Cozbi. Our Sages tell us that through an act of Hashgacha Pratis Hashem made Moshe Rabbeinu "forget" the Halacha of killing an offender in the act so that Pinchas would have the opportunity to perform this tremendous Kiddush Hashem. Perhaps we can say that Moshe was left literally dumbfounded by the disrespect and lack of guilty conscience on Zimri's part. We see that Pinchas' deed not only had immediate ramifications in the sense that it halted the plague, but it also had an eternal reckoning for his future descendants as they would be able to perform the priestly duties. We can learn from Pinchas that every time we are given an opportunity to do a Kiddush Hashem we are not only making an impact now we are also potentially making an impact influencing times to come. Indeed, the Parasha is named after Pinchas to emphasise the importance and the reward of someone acting lshem Shamayim and defending the honour of Hashem so decisively.

Nevertheless, our Sages have debated the legitimacy of what Pinchas did, since one might argue that Zimri's transgression should have been reviewed by the Sanhedrin. Indeed the Gemara tells us there were Simeonites who wanted to kill Pinchas to avenge the death of Zimri! However in this specific case the Halacha as stated in Mishnah Sanhedrin 9:6 is that a person who engages in relations with a foreign woman can be executed on the spot by a zealot without a trial. Pinchas' own deliberation is hinted to in Tehillim perek 106 where David Hamelech writes וַיִּעַזְבֵם וַיִּפְלֹגוּ וַיִּתְעַצְרוּ הַמַּגִּפָּה.

As Rav Eliezer points out in Gemara Sanhedrin 44a, the pasuk states vayefalel not vayitpalel. This was a time to immediately act and the word pelilim connotes judges and judgement. Thus Pinchas sought judgement with Hashem, to confirm he was doing the right thing. The Sages tell us that the angels tried to stop Pinchas from killing the sinners but HaKadosh Baruch Hu instructed that Pinchas was correct and to not impede him. The naming of Pinchas' ancestry as the son of Elazar the son of Aaron the Cohen is a defense to the other tribes' accusation that the grandson of an idolater, Yitro, could not be the example of proper conduct! Akeidat Yitzchak explains that this is the true meaning of ה'נָתַן לְךָ וּלְזַרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו שָׁלוֹם אֶת-בְּרִיתִי.

The Chassidic masters from the Baal Shem Tov ztl to the Lubavitcher Rebbe ztl stressed the imperative of sanctifying the physical in this World. Through Pinchas' physical act on behalf of Hashem he sanctified the Heavens Above and the bnei Yisrael below halting the death of thousands of his brethren, bringing the bnei Yisrael to teshuva and restoring them to spiritual purity. May we all merit performing acts of Kiddush Hashem like Pinchas and contributing to Tikkun Olam, amen.