



## PARSHAS PINCHAS – JEROME LEIBOVICI

When Pinchas killed Zimri and Kozbi, a tremendous controversy erupted among the Jewish people as to whether his actions were honorable or immoral. The Talmud Yerushalmi states that the Bnei Yisrael wanted to excommunicate him for these killings. This week's parsha begins with Hashem testifying to the correctness of what Pinchas did. Firstly, due to Pinchas' actions, the devastating plague that had taken twenty-four thousand lives, stopped. Secondly, Hashem placed His stamp of approval upon Pinchas by graciously giving him the "covenant of peace". It is interesting to note that most soferim write the וְיָשָׁלֵם with a split to symbolize that peace that results from violence, even if required, is defective. The Medrash states that there were eighty kohanim in the first Beit HaMikdash and three hundred kohanim in the second Beit HaMikdash that descended from Pinchas. The gematria of shalom with a split ו, transforming it to a ׀, gives three hundred and eighty.

Most importantly, Hashem appointed Pinchas a kohen and endowed his bloodline with eternal priesthood: " And it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood, because he took vengeance for his G-d, and he atoned for the Children of Israel" (Bamidbar 25:13).

Rashi explains how priesthood was only given to Aharon and his children, and their offspring. However, Pinchas who was born prior to this bestowal wasn't a kohen until now; it is taught in Zevachim (10b) that he didn't become a kohen until he murdered Zimri.

The MaHaRaL in the Gur Aryeh asks an obvious question on Rashi: Why wasn't Pinchas anointed as kohen with everyone else? He answers that Pinchas was too young at the time to deal with the responsibilities of a kohen and so it would have been inappropriate. And when he halachically became an adult, it wasn't possible to anoint him since the anointing only could take place when the Mishkan was anointed.

The Torah Temimah offers a different answer to the Gur Aryeh. He explains that we learn in Masechet Bava Basra (160b) that kohanim are intrinsically hot-tempered and demanding by nature. Had Pinchas been a kohen at the time he murdered Zimri then the Bnei Yisrael would have accused him of murdering Zimri out of anger rather than zealotry for Hashem, however as he was not a kohen, they could not have this claim on him.

The Pri Tzadik points out a problem with the posuk above: How could Pinchas retroactively become a kohen? He would have not been able to become a kohen any other way, since Hashem would have not changed the laws concerning kohanim just for Pinchas. The Pri Tzaddik answers his question from the Zohar: "After Pinchas acted zealously ... and the tribe of Shimon came after him in anger, his soul left him, at which time the two souls of Nadav and Avihu (Aaron's sons) entered him" (Zohar, Parshas Tzav 14b). In other words, instantaneously the body of Pinchas both lost its previous soul and inherited two older ones: the souls of Nadav and Avihu. It was Nadav and Avihu who had died when they offered the "strange fire" back in Parshas Shemini. Now, according to the Zohar, it was the souls of Nadav and Avihu that had transformed Pinchas into someone who could, in effect, retroactively become a kohen. In other words, concludes the Pri Tzaddik, Pinchas' entrance into the kehuna did not constitute a change in Hashem's law, but the continuation of it.

This proposes a new idea that is touched on by the Ba'al HaTurim, who states that Pinchas eventually became Eliyahu HaNavi. Generally, reincarnation means that a soul comes back in another lifetime and in a new body and usually unbeknownst to the person himself. However, this is usually only after the person has died and "returned" to the ground. Nevertheless, this had not been the case with Pinchas, whose life wasn't interrupted for one moment. Instantaneously as Pinchas' own soul left him, the souls of Nadav and Avihu entered him; according to the Arizal, when Eliyahu's time came, that soul also entered Pinchas' body while he was living.

Arizal explains that the act of incorporating new souls in a person's body occurs often in history, mostly for reasons only Hashem knows. He sends the souls of previous tzaddikim down as an "additions" to living individuals, sometimes for a short duration, sometimes for the rest of a person's life. Usually it is special souls being given to extraordinary people who have a major role to play in Jewish history. Not only does this help to understand how Pinchas later became a kohen, but it also teaches us that it is a mistake to judge people by what the physical eye alone sees. We can judge actions, but it is very hard to judge souls, if not impossible. This is something only Hashem can do.