

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES

Parshas Pinchas

July 21, 2005

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

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Yad Avraham Institute
New York
July 21, 2005

B"H

Parshas Pinchas

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita
Dean

1. The Importance of Understanding Who We are

The Torah enumerates the names of the tribes as part of a new census that was taken of the Jewish people after the plague. The Torah states, “***B'nei Reuvain: Chanoch mishpachas ha'chanochee l'falu mishpachas ha'paluee... The sons of Reuvain: of Chanoch, the Chanochite family, of Pallu, the Palluite family...***” When the verse lists the families of the tribes, the Torah adds the letters “hey” and “yud” to their names. Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “The nations of the world were disgracing the families of the Jewish people. They had said, ‘Why are they presenting their pedigree when it is obviously false. Do you think for one moment that their mothers were not defiled by the Egyptians? If the Egyptians controlled, persecuted and dominated the bodies of the Jewish males in bondage, is it not logical to say that they defiled their women? Therefore G'd associated His Name “Yud and Hey” with the tribes to indicate that He personally attests to the fact that the Jewish people are not illegitimate. But rather, their pedigree is pure.”

G'd's response to the claim of nations of the world does not refute their perception of the Jewish people. G'd's statement is contrary to their understanding of reality. If this is so then what is the value and significance of G'd associating His name with the families of the tribes?

The mitzvah of the parah adumah (red heifer) is a statute that has no relevance to rational thinking. It is a self-contradictory law. The red heifer purifies the one who carries the most intense level of spiritual contamination and simultaneously contaminates the one who is pure. The Torah states, “***Zos chukas ha'Torah... These are the statutes of the Torah...***” The Midrash explains, “It is a decree from before Me and you are not permitted to question it.” Meaning, the Torah is stating, because of its inner contradiction, that one should not attempt to process its internal workings because it is beyond human comprehension. Similarly, although the perspective of the

world may not be flawed in a rational sense, G'd attests to the fact that the Jews are pure. This fact must be understood and accepted by the Jew as much as he must accept the statutes of the Torah- despite his inability to comprehend them. Thus, the association of G'd's Name with the families of the tribes is only for the Jew to understand and appreciate who he is.

It is important for the Jew to know that his pedigree is pure because the Divine Presence only associates Itself with those who are of pedigree. The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin tells us that the only people who were eligible to be conscripted into the army of King David were those of pure pedigree because victory only comes upon those who are associated with the Divine Presence.

At beginning of the Portion of Bereishis, the Midrash cites Reb Yitzchak who asks, “If the Torah is a book of law and obligations why does it start with the historical accounting of creation? It is because ultimately the nations of the world will condemn the Jewish people for taking that, which is not theirs. Their right to the Land of Israel will be contested. Thus, G'd begins the Torah with a detailed accounting of Creation and the various generations who were subject to Divine Justice (the generation of the Great Flood, and the Generation of dispersion). This indicates that the world is for G'd to give and to take. G'd chose to give the Land of Israel to the Jewish people as their eternal portion.” Whether the world accepts this as fact or not is irrelevant. It is for the Jew himself to recognize and understand his inalienable rights to the Land. As one must believe in the authenticity of Torah as being the Word of G'd, so too must he accept as fact his pedigree as pure and his relationship to the Land and G'd.

2. Perception of Oneself

The Torah states, “**Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the Kohen, turned back My wrath from the Children of Israel...**”

Rashi cites the Midrash which states, "It would have been sufficient for the Torah to tell us that Pinchas was the son of Elazar. Why does it need to trace his lineage back to Aaron HaKohen? It is because the tribes had protested: 'How does he have the right to kill a prince of Israel when he descends from a pedigree that fattened cows to be used for idolatry.' Thus, the Torah identifies Pinchas as a person of great status because he descends from the prestigious line of Aaron the High Priest."

The Torah tells us that at the time of the sin of Baal Peor, a plague came upon the Jewish people, which killed 24,000. The plague only ceased because of the zealotry of Pinchas when he had killed Zimri the prince of the tribe of Shimon. Had it not been for the Pinchas' zealotry, the Jewish people would have been consumed by the plague. How then could the tribes criticize Pinchas for killing a prince?

A prince was an individual of unusual status. He represented his tribe regarding the issues of the Jewish people. He was a person who was awed and revered because of his status. The only individual who could criticize or reproach a prince was one of equal status. They needed to be on a peer level. If one who was not of that status was able to reproach a prince, it is an indication that he truly does not value an individual on that level. The tribes did not understand how Pinchas, of a lesser pedigree, was able to approach Zimri and act as zealously as he had. They could only conclude that Pinchas truly did not perceive the prince as a special person. The criticism of Pinchas was not that he had killed Zimri, which saved the Jewish people, but rather that he did not value the princes that should have been revered and awed. Therefore, the Torah identifies Pinchas as a person of a greater pedigree- the grandson of Aaron the High Priest. Thus, Pinchas saw Zimri as his peer. Aaron, the grandfather of Pinchas was the spiritual equivalent of the entire Jewish people and thus, was of a greater status/dimension than any prince.

In truth, Pinchas was able to kill Zimri, not because he saw himself as his peer, but rather he was a true zealot who negated himself for the sake of G'd's Glory. Thus, when he witnessed the public chilul Hashem (desecration of G'd's Name) being perpetrated by Zimri, nothing mattered at that moment other than G'd's Glory. Zimri's status or the manner in which Pinchas was being perceived at that moment had no relevance to his behavior.

King Solomon tells us in Proverbs that in the face of chilul Hashem (Desecration of G'd's Name), honor and

status does not exist. Pinchas internalized this to the core of his being. The Jewish people at large did not appreciate and understand the motivation of Pinchas' behavior because they were not zealots. Therefore, the Torah responds to the misperception of Pinchas – revealing his prestigious pedigree.

The Torah tells us at the beginning of the Portion of Bo that G'd said to Moshe, "**I have hardened his heart...in order to but these signs of Mine in his midst and so that you may tell over in the ears of your son and son's son that I made a mockery of Egypt...And you will know that I am G'd.**" Why is it important to convey to our children that G'd made a "mockery" of Egypt? Why is it not sufficient to relate the revealed miracles that G'd had brought upon Egypt through which they were destroyed? Pharaoh was the monarch of the most advanced civilization in existence. He and his society was revered and awed by the world. Thus, by relating how G'd made a "mockery" of Pharaoh and his people, it communicates the fact that he and his people were in a position of power because G'd bestowed upon them this status. Therefore, there is no reason to be impressed or intimidated by a person or people regardless of their position of power. One must always be cognizant that everything is determined by G'd's Will. If one is able to internalize this reality, then status will not interfere with one's fear of heaven and adherence to G'd's Will. Thus, one will act accordingly despite the way he is perceived by others.

There is a mitzvah to revere a Torah sage. The Gemara tells us that a Torah sage who chooses to waive his honor – his honor is waived. However, a king is not able to waive his honor. A Torah sage, who only came upon that status through his own initiative – which was diligent Torah study and meticulous adherence to the Will of G'd – has the right to waive his honor. "All is predestined/determined by heaven except the fear of heaven," which means that his accomplishment is attributed to himself. Contrastingly, the one who achieves a prestigious position of power does so only because G'd allowed him to do so. Therefore, there is nothing that is attributable to oneself (in the ultimate sense) and thus, there is nothing to revere.

When King David had wandered into the Philistine territory, the Philistine king was informed that the one who had killed Goliath (the giant) had entered into his land. Upon hearing this, he ordered that King David be arrested and brought before him. When King David was presented before the king, he behaved in a demented and

unstable manner. It was believed that he was insane. The Philistine king saw King David foaming at the mouth and mucous flowing from his nose. He sent King David away believing that he was harmless and had no value. King David, although he understood and internalized his innate value, had no difficulty in behaving as he did – regardless of how it reflected upon him. This is something that the average person could not do. Everything in King David's life was purely done for the sake of G'd. He had no ego and was totally negated before G'd. As he states, "I am a worm, and not a man." Thus, when he had to act in a demented manner to save his life, which was purely for the sake of G'd, there was no interference.

Pinchas was able to kill Zimri the prince, despite his prestigious status, not because he was a person of equal status and greater pedigree but because he was a true zealot who internalized to his core the desecration of G'd's Name. Nothing existed at that moment other than ending that desecration. The only one who could attain such a level of zealotry is one who is truly humble.

3. Reward and Punishment

The Torah tells us that the Midonites needed to be destroyed because they had plotted to eliminate the Jewish people. However, the Moabites were to be left unharmed. Rashi cites the Gemara, which explains that although the Moabites were no less involved in the plot than Midonites, they were not to be destroyed. In fact it was the Moabite women who enticed and seduced the Jewish men to be involved in promiscuity and idolatry (Baal Peor). This led to the death of 24,000 Jews. Nevertheless G'd did not want the Moabites to be destroyed because Ruth (the grandmother of King David), the Moabite, was meant to be born from this nation. Without Ruth, there would be no house of David from which Moshiach will come. Therefore, although the Moabites deserved to be destroyed, they were spared for the sake of Ruth.

It is interesting to note that Balak had built six altars on which he brought 42 offerings to G'd hoping to find favor in His eyes – thus allowing Bilaam to curse the Jewish people. The Gemara in Tractate Nazir states, "It is worthwhile to engage in Torah and mitzvos even if it is not with a pure intent (*shelo l'shma*). This is because if one engages in a mitzvah *shelo l'shma* it will lead him to perform it with a pure intent (*l'shma*). In the merit of the 42 offerings that were brought by Balak, the evil one, he merited that Ruth the Moabite should be his descendant..."

G'd created the world so that it should be a setting for man to exercise his power of choice. If one chooses correctly, he will be the beneficiary of making the right choice and if he chooses wrongly, he will be punished. The purpose of existence is to be the setting for reward and punishment. Ramchal in his work *Derech Hashem* (The Way of G'd) explains that the only reason that there is evil in the world is for man to choose to do good. If there is no possibility for one to choose evil, then good in its own right has no value. G'd is willing to allow evil to exist, and for man to perpetrate that evil (which is contrary to His Will), so that one should have the choice to do good and be deserving of reward.

Ruth, descending from among the Moabite people, was a consequence of merit/reward. It is only because Balak brought 42 offerings that he deserved to merit such as special descent. Since reward and punishment is the primary purpose of existence, the Moabites could not be destroyed, despite their culpability, because Balak needed to be rewarded. Ruth was only a consequence of the principle of merit/reward. The Moabites were not spared simply because Ruth would descend from them, rather her coming about was a necessary consequence of Balak's actions. She was to be the setting through which G'd rewarded Balak.

King David writes in Tehillim, "Ki l'olam chasdo – for His kindness endures forever" 26 times because there were 26 generations until Avraham, our Patriarch, who were undeserving. It was only G'd's Kindness (Attribute of Chesed) that maintained existence. G'd maintained existence for all of those generations so that there should be an individual as unique as Avraham. Avraham set the stage to choose between good and evil because he made G'd's existence known to the world.

There is a concept of "Rasha v'tov lo – an evil person who experiences goodness/blessing." How is it possible for a person who is truly evil to be endowed with goodness/blessing? One would think that only the righteous, who through their proper choices, should be deserving of reward. Ramchal explains that there are instances where the evil person is maintained and endowed with blessing because he will bring forth a special descendent who will be a tzaddik (righteous). That child would not be able to come about and develop unless a setting of bounty and blessing was provided previously by G'd. Thus, He provides the good to the evil person to enable the tzaddik to come about.

4. *Yehoshua Ben Nun's Special Dimension of Spirituality*

The Torah states, **“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Take to yourself Yehoshua Ben Nun, a man in whom there is spirit, and lean your hand upon him.’** Moshe had appointed Yehoshua to be his successor to lead the Jewish people. The Torah continues, **“You (Moshe) shall place some of your majesty/splendor upon him (Yehoshua) so that the congregation of Israel should heed his words...”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that “of your splendor/majesty” refers to the radiance, which Moshe possessed. Moshe was told by G'd to transfer part of that radiance to his disciple Yehoshua. Thus the Sifri states, “The face of Moshe was like the face of the sun, and the face of Yehoshua was like the face of the moon.” Yehoshua, the disciple of Moshe, only reflected semblance of his rebbe – Moshe.

Why was it necessary for Moshe to transfer some of his radiance to Yehoshua? Why was it not sufficient to appoint him as his successor? The verse states explicitly that the value of the transfer of the “splendor” was, **“...so that the congregation of Israel should heed his words.”** Because Moshe radiated holiness, it had an impact on the words that were communicated by him to the Jewish people. It was his dimension of spirituality that made the difference. It was not sufficient for Yehoshua to be qualified as Moshe's successor to assume his role of leadership. He needed minimally a semblance of that radiance in order to be the effective person that he needed to be. It is not only the articulation or oratory skills that had an impact upon the masses, but rather it is the dimension and presence of the person that causes another to be receptive and heed his words.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that Moshe's radiance resulted from the special level of spirituality that was given to him at Sinai. This occurred after the Jewish people forfeited their spiritual crowns/dimension because of the sin of the Golden Calf. When the Jewish people accepted the Torah unequivocally by declaring, “Naaseh V'Nishmah – we will do and we will listen” G'd endowed each Jew with two levels of spirituality (referred to as crowns – one for Naaseh and one for Nishmah). When the Jewish people forfeited their crowns of spirituality, they were transferred to Moshe. He assumed spirituality of the entire Jewish people because he was the equivalent of the entire congregation. Because Moshe radiated and was imbued with this exceptional level of holiness, his words penetrated the

Jewish people. By bestowing upon Yehoshua a semblance of that radiance, he too would have the capability of leading the Jewish people on a proper path.

The Gemara in Tractate *Berachos* tells us that Rebbe Yochanon went to visit Rebbe Elazar who was ill. When Rebbe Yochanon entered into the room where Rebbe Elazar was lying, he noticed that it was completely dark. Rebbe Yochanon lifted up his shirtsleeve to reveal his arm, which caused the room to become illuminated. He radiated holiness and beauty that was one of a kind. Rebbe Yochanon noticed that Rebbe Elazar was crying. He asked him, “Why are you crying? Is it because you feel that you did not study a sufficient amount of Torah?” Rebbe Elazar answered, “I am crying because of this beauty which will decompose in the earth.” Upon hearing this Reb Yochanon also began to cry. What is the tragedy of Reb Yochanon's beauty decomposing in the earth? Every human being is meant eventually to d

The Gemara in Tractate *Bava Metzia* tells us that the beauty (radiance) of Yaakov our Patriarch was a semblance of Adam – who was the handiwork/creation of G'd. Reb Yochanon's beauty/radiance was a semblance of Yaakov our Patriarch. When Rebbe Yochanon would eventually pass away, that special representation of holiness would no longer be in existence. If anyone would want to have an inkling of who Yaakov our Patriarch was and would want to aspire to something of that dimension, he would look at the radiance of Reb Yochanon. However, when Reb Yochanon would pass away that would come to an end. Reb Yochanon and Rebbe Elazar both cried because they understood the loss of no longer having a representation of that special dimension of holiness. They will no longer have the opportunity to be impacted on that special level.

We find that the Jewish people did not sin with idolatry until the passing of Yehoshua. The Torah tells us that G'd said to Moshe, **“Until you pass away the Jewish people will not become idolaters.”** Rashi cites Chazal who ask, “The Jews did not become idolaters until the passing of Yehoshua.” They answer, “As long as the student (Yehoshua) was alive it is as if his rebbe (Moshe) was alive.” It was only after Yehoshua's passing, who had a semblance of the holiness of his rebbe Moshe, that the Jewish people fail with idolatry.

The Gemara in Tractate *Berachos* states, “After the destruction of the Temple, the only location in existence that G'd has a relevance to interest is the four cubits of halacha (law).” After the destruction of the

Temple, the location of the Divine Presence is where definitive law is elucidated. Yehoshua was the location of the Divine Presence because he was the conduit through which the tradition that he had received from Moshe was transmitted to the Jewish people. He is referred to as “the youth who did not remove himself from the tent (of Torah).” When the Jewish people saw Yehoshua, it was as if they were exposed to the Divine Presence – similar to Moshe his rebbe. When one is exposed to this dimension of holiness, there is no room for question or doubt regarding G’d’s Omnipotence. It was only after this level of representation no longer existed that confusion and doubt came upon the Jewish people.

5. *The Jewish Women’s Love for the Land*

The Torah states, **“The daughters of Tzelofchad... of the families of Manasheh son of Yosef drew near...and they stood before Moshe, before Elazar the Kohen...saying, “Our father died in the desert, but he was not among the assembly that was gathering against Hashem in the assembly of Korach, but he died of his own sin; and he has no son...Give us possession among our father’s brothers.”** Since their father Tzelofchad had died in the desert without male heirs, his daughters approached Moshe concerning their right to their father’s inheritance. They wished to receive his portion in the Land of Israel. Moshe presented their claim to G’d and was told that that the daughters of Tzelofchad were qualified heirs and thus had the right to inherit their father’s portion.

Rashi cites Chazal who say that the generation that passed away in the desert (the generation of the meraglim - spies) did not include the women. The reason the women were not subject to the decree was because they rejected the report of the spies who had slandered the Land. Chazal tell us that the women did not believe the spies because they had “*chibas ha’aretz* (special love for the Land).”

Without this explanation of Chazal, one could have said that the basis for the women’s rejection of the report of the spies was because they had an innate intuition that the spies’ reports were baseless. As we find, through the statement of Chazal that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt “in the merit of the righteous women.” The Jewish women in Egypt believed intuitively that the Jewish people would eventually be redeemed as G’d had promised. Thus, they did not despair. In fact, they encouraged their husbands to procreate to guarantee the future of the Jewish people.

However, regarding the generation of the desert, it was not the women’s intuition that caused them to reject the false reports of the spies. But rather, their it was their “*chibas ha’aretz* (special love for the Land).” From this, we can learn a profound lesson that when one truly loves something, he cannot be discouraged or distracted. Despite the negative reports, the women remained steadfast in their belief that they were going to enter the Land and succeed.

It is interesting to note that when the Torah mentions the daughters of Tzelofchad, it traces their pedigree back to Yosef - **“The daughters of Tzelofchad, son of Chefer...of the families of Manasheh son of Yosef...”** Rashi cites Chazal who say, “It is understood that if the Torah states that the daughters descend from the family of Manasheh that they descend from Yosef, who was the son of Yosef. Why is it necessary for the Torah to trace their pedigree back to Yosef himself? It is to tell us that Yosef also had a special love for the Land of Israel. As we find, he had asked that his remains be taken out of Egypt and buried in the Land of Israel.

One might have understood that Yosef would have wanted to be buried in Israel because he did not want to be buried in Egypt, which was a spiritually contaminated location, and not among his family. However by tracing the pedigree of the daughters of Tzelofchad to Yosef, the Torah is revealing that the basis for Yosef’s request was because of his special “love of the Land”- as the daughters of Tzelofchad had demonstrated. Since the Torah is telling us that the interest to be buried in the Land of Israel was because of his love, it is indicated that had it not been for that reason, he would have wanted/agreed to remain in Egypt.

The Torah tells us that after the splitting of the Sea and the war against the Amalekites, Yisro was willing to abandon all of his glory as the Sheik of Midian to go into the desert and become part of the Jewish people. Although all humanity was aware of these two events, he was the only one who was impressed sufficiently to join the Jewish people. How do we understand this?

The Midrash tells us that one of the names of Yisro was “*Chovav* (one who loves).” Chazal explain that the reason Yisro was called “*Chovav*” was because of his special love for Torah. Yisro was able to appreciate the magnitude of the miracles that occurred – thus acknowledging how special the Jewish people were to G’d. The normal disdain, which the world had for the Jewish people did not interfere with his perception because of his special love for the Torah. However, the nations of

the world who did not have love for the Torah or the Jewish people, were not able to appreciate the special relationship between G'd and the Jews.

The Torah is teaching us a profound lesson. If one has a special level of love -whether it is for G'd/Torah, his fellow Jew, or the Land of Israel, he will not be discouraged or distracted from his objective.

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6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna
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