

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES
Parshas Pinchas
July 5, 2007

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Yad Avraham Institute
New York
July 5, 2007

B"H

Parshas Pinchas

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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1. Self-Negation, Unrelated to Humility

The Torah states when Bilaam went to curse the Jewish people, **"Bilaam arose in the morning and saddled his donkey..."** Rashi cites Chazal who state, "From here we learn *'sinah mekalkeles es hashura* – hate supersedes protocol." Although Bilaam was a self-centered and egotistical person with an insatiable desire for material and honor, he nevertheless saddled his own donkey. One would think that a person of Bilaam's stature – who believed that he was minimally worthy of a king's honor - would have had one of his servants prepare his donkey for riding. However, because he was driven by intense hate to curse the Jewish people, he chose to do this demeaning chore without hesitation.

The Torah states regarding Avraham, our Patriarch, **"Avraham arose in the morning and saddled his donkey..."** Despite the fact that Avraham was a person of world renown (father of all nations) and great wealth, he personally saddled his own donkey. Although Avraham was 137 years old and would have had one of his servants hitch his donkey, at this particular moment he attended to this chore himself because "Love supersedes protocol." Why is it when one hates intensely, or conversely, loves intensely is all protocol overridden?

When Avraham was told by G'd to bring his son Yitzchak as a sacrifice, despite his unlimited love for his special son who was born to him at 100 years old, he acted with zeal to selflessly carryout the Will of G'd. Because of Avraham's overwhelming love for G'd, all that existed for Avraham was the execution of G'd's Will. Consequently, Avraham's own sense of self was totally negated to the point that his age and stature had no relevance to the moment. Identically, Bilaam, because of his intense hate for the Jewish people, was singularly focused to bring about their destruction. At that moment, the objective of annihilating the Jewish people was so paramount that nothing existed other than the task at hand. Therefore, despite his exaggerated level of self-centeredness and

egotistic behavior he was able to hitch his own donkey without any hesitation. At that moment there was no Bilaam.

The Torah tells us that the Moabite women seduced the Jewish men in order to worship the Baal Peor. As a result of their idol worship and succumbing to temptation, the Torah states **"The wrath of Hashem flared up against Israel."** Consequently, a devastating plague came upon the Jewish people resulting in the death of 24,000 people. In addition, Zimri, the Prince of the Tribe of Shimon, publicly cohabited with Cozbi, a Midianite princess, causing a public Desecration of G'd's Name. Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the grandson of Aaron, acted zealously by taking a spear and piercing Zimri and Cozbi during their act of cohabitation, thus killing both of them. Pinchas' act of zealotry caused the plague to cease.

The Torah states, **"G'd said to Moshe, 'Pinchas... turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume the Children of Israel in My Vengeance."** Rashi explains that Pinchas expressed the anger and rage that G'd Himself would have expressed. Because Pinchas had internalized G'd's pain and acted upon it, the Jewish people were spared. Pinchas' zealotry emanated from his intense love for G'd. His love for G'd was so profound that he could not tolerate the desecration of His Name.

A Jew must feel the plight/pain of one's fellow. This is an expression of the mitzvah that a Jew must love his fellow as himself. Similarly, because of Pinchas' intense love for G'd, he acted with an intensity to purge the evil that was being perpetrated. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that a number of times every day a heavenly voice emanates saying, "Woe to the father who has exiled His children from His Table and Whose Sanctuary was burnt and lays in ruin." One who understands G'd's pain as a result of the Jewish people

being exiled and the Temple being destroyed will internalize that pain as a result of his love for G'd.

The Midrash tells us that under normal circumstances, it would have been impossible for Pinchas to kill Zimri. However, many miracles transpired to allow him to sanctify G'd's Name and to survive. He merited this level of protection because he acted only as a result of his overwhelming love for G'd.

The Torah tells us that although Pinchas, the grandson of Aaron, was born as a Levite, because of his act of zealotry he assumed the status of a Kohen (Priest). Because of his uncontained level of love for G'd he was willing to sacrifice all that he had for Him. An outgrowth of this level of attachment and dedication was that Pinchas should be considered one of those who is closest to G'd – such as the Kohen.

2. Putting Status Into Perspective

The Torah tells us that Zimri, the Prince of the Tribe of Shimon, desecrated G'd's Name publicly by cohabiting with Cozbi, a Midianite Princess. Pinchas, as a zealot, killed Zimri and Cozbi by piercing them both with a spear while they were engaged in the sexual act. Why does the Torah need to identify the individuals who engaged in this act and their status? Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “It is to inform us the praiseworthiness of Pinchas. Although Zimri was a Prince (with significant status) it did not deter Pinchas from avenging the desecration of G'd's Name.” One would think that Zimri's status as a Prince would have caused Pinchas to hesitate or consider another course of action. Nevertheless, the Torah tells us that Pinchas did not hesitate to avenge G'd's Honor by killing Zimri and the Midianite princess.

When one views himself as one of a lesser status than another, very often this will cause one to feel intimidated in the presence of that person. A consequence of this perception is that it causes one to remain silent when the individual of status behaves inappropriately. One would not consider to intercede and show any disapproval regarding this individual's behavior. Although Pinchas is identified as a person of special pedigree as the Torah traces his lineage to Elazar and Aaron the Kohen; nevertheless, it was considered praiseworthy that he was not deterred or intimidated by Zimri's status.

The Torah states regarding the last three plagues that came upon Egypt, “**G'd said to Moshe...you should relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I**

have made a mockery of Egypt...” At this point, Egypt had already experienced seven of the ten plagues and was devastated by them. The Torah is revealing to us one aspect of the value of the final three plagues. It was to demonstrate to us that although Pharaoh was the monarch of the most advanced civilization in existence, G'd devastated him and his nation in a short period of time. The Jewish people, who were enslaved by the Egyptians threw off their yoke of bondage and left Egypt with the wealth of their masters. The value of making a mockery of Pharaoh was to communicate to us that although he seemed to be invincible this was proven to be a fallacy. He was only able to assume the position of monarch of the most advanced civilization only because G'd Willed it to be so. Witnessing Pharaoh's downfall by G'd and seeing how He played with him put this truth into perspective. Consequently, regardless of one's status or position of power, one should not be intimidated. This is the importance of conveying the plagues of Egypt to our children and our grandchildren- for them to fully appreciate that it is only G'd that causes one to rise and fall. Status is G'd's endowment upon mankind.

Pinchas was able to act without any hesitation and with an intensity to stop the public desecration of G'd's Name because he internalized to the core of his being that it is only G'd who Wills one's predicament. However, despite this, it was nevertheless considered praiseworthy for Pinchas to act as he had.

3. Grasping the Awesomeness of Pinchas' Zealotry

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh points out in his commentary that the Torah initially does not reveal the names of the individuals that were killed by Pinchas. It simply states, “**He (Pinchas)...pierced...the Israelite man and the woman...**” It is not until the Portion of Pinchas that the Torah chooses to identify the individuals who were killed by Pinchas as Zimri, the Prince of the Tribe of Shimon and Cozbi the Midianite princess.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains, “The reason the Torah does not initially reveal the identity of the individuals killed by Pinchas is because G'd does not wish to disgrace and denigrate even the evil who were responsible for bringing about these abominable acts (of idolatry). As the Torah does not identify the Mekoshesh Eitzim (the one who had violated Shabbos and was put to death). It was only when G'd wished to communicate the praiseworthiness of Pinchas and his accomplishment does

the Torah reveal their names and status. This was to tell us that despite the status of Zimri, as the Prince of the Tribe of Shimon, and Cozbi as the princess of all that is unholy (Midian), Pinchas was not deterred from avenging G'd's vengeance by killing them...The only reason the Jewish people merited that G'd's Wrath be withdrawn was because of the dimension of sanctification of G'd's Name that was brought about by Pinchas. By killing Zimri and Cosbi without hesitation, despite their aura of status, Pinchas' sanctification of G'd was extraordinary. In addition, by publicly revealing to all the detestableness of their sin, Pinchas subdued and removed the influences of satan. If the individuals that were killed by Pinchas would have been of lesser status, his act of zealotry would have not withdrawn the Wrath of G'd."

Baal HaTurim cites Siphri, "Pinchas's act of zealotry not only brought atonement for the Jewish people who were engaged with Baal Peor, but also for all the Jewish people until the end of time." The only other act mentioned in the Torah that has a similar affect regarding the atonement of the Jewish people is the Akeidah (binding of Yitzchak). The merit of the Akeidah stands in the good stead of the Jewish people until the end of time. On Rosh Hashanah when the ram's horn (Shofar) is blown, the most severe level of prosecution of satan is silenced. The willingness of Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak, his most beloved son, generated sufficient merit for the Jewish people until the end of time. Pinchas' act of zealotry similarly had the effect of retracting the Attribute of Justice. Had it not been for Pinchas' act of zealotry the entire Jewish people would have been annihilated by G'd. He not only killed those who desecrated G'd with zeal, he also gave the Jewish people an understanding and appreciation for the detestability of their sin.

There is a principle that is stated by Chofetz Chaim in his writings. If one provides what is needed to give a child a proper Torah education and consequently that child develops to be a Torah observant Jew who establishes a family within that context, the one who was responsible for his education will receive the merit of all the good deeds of all the generations that will descend from that one person, until the end of time. It is through the one act of providing initially for the child's Torah education that the benefactor becomes the beneficiary of unlimited merit. Identically, it is only because of Pinchas' act of zealotry that the Jewish people were spared. Therefore he will be deserving, as a result of his single act, all the good that will be generated by the Jewish people until the end of time.

4. *The Far Reaching Consequences of Moshe's Statement*

The Torah tells us that the daughters of Tzelofchad approached Moshe with a claim to their father's inheritance- as he had died with no male heirs. They posed the question of inheritance to him since at this time it was thought that a daughter was not a qualified heir. Moshe was not able to respond. The Torah states, "**Moshe brought their claim before G'd.**" Rashi cites Chazal who say that the law pertaining to the order of inheritance was withheld from Moshe.

After the hierarchy of the judicial system (higher and lower courts) was established because of Yisro's suggestion, Moshe had said, "**The most difficult issues you will bring to me.**" Despite the fact that Moshe was the most humble person who ever lived, since he expressed himself in this manner, Chazal explain, "he had taken the crown (of glory), therefore G'd withheld the law of inheritance from him." Since Moshe's statement could be construed to mean that he had a unique ability, which was attributed to himself, G'd punished him by withholding from him the law of inheritance (when a daughter is a legitimate heir).

The incident regarding the daughters of Tzelofchad was not the only situation in which the law was concealed from Moshe. The Midrash tells us that at the time of the incident of Zimri (when he was cohabiting with the Midianite princess), Pinchas approached Moshe and asked, "What action should be taken regarding this situation?" Moshe did not know how to respond. He had forgotten the law. Pinchas continued to question his teacher Moshe by saying, "Did you not teach us that in the case where a Jew openly cohabits with a gentile woman, if one were a zealot, he has the right to kill the perpetrator?" Moshe said to Pinchas, "Since you recalled the law and I did not, you should carry out the mitzvah." Chazal do not attribute Moshe's forgetting of this particular law as punishment for "taking the crown of glory" - "**The most difficult issues you will bring to me...**"

The Torah tells that if one is contaminated with the dead, he is disqualified from bringing the Pascal offering. When the Pascal offering was brought in the desert, two individuals had been contaminated by the dead. They approached Moshe and asked, "Why should we be excluded from bringing the Pascal offering?" Moshe was unable to respond. He needed to present the question before G'd (regarding *Pesach Sheini*- the make up

Pesach). There is no mention of this as an example of Moshe being punished by G'd for expressing himself inappropriately - **The most difficult issues you will bring to me.**" It is because the law of Pesach Sheini was not communicated to Moshe prior to this moment.

There are two examples in which the law was hidden from Moshe – regarding the laws of inheritance and the issue of how to respond to chillul Hashem. Yet Chazal tell us that the punishment for “taking the crown of glory for himself” only manifested itself regarding the law of inheritance. Why was Moshe’s forgetting the law regarding the act of zealotry not considered another manifestation of punishment?

Moshe was the most humble person who ever lived. When he said regarding the judicial system, “**The most difficult issues you will bring to me** (and I will personally adjudicate them.),” he did not do so because of a lack of humility. Yet Moshe was faulted as it is stated, “he took the crown of glory for himself.” Why was he culpable?

Despite that fact that G'd had said to Moshe at Sinai, “**The Jewish people will believe in you forever,**” Korach attempted to usurp his authority and undermine his credibility as G'd's spokesman. Until Sinai, all of the miracles that had transpired through Moshe could have been attributed to sorcery or something other than Moshe acting as G'd's Agent. It was not until Sinai when the entire Jewish people witnessed G'd speaking to Moshe as His agent that it was confirmed that he was in fact G'd's spokesman. If this was so, then how could Korach and his community, who witnessed Sinai, have questioned the authenticity of Torah?

Korach and his community had questioned the source of Torah. It was understood that G'd had a special relationship with Moshe. Thus, the question was- Is the Torah that is being presented by Moshe his word and being endorsed by G'd? Or was the Torah that was transmitted by Moshe truly the Word of G'd (independent of Moshe)? Korach, because of his self-interest and lack of humility, believed that the only reason he was rejected as the High Priest was that Moshe had chosen his brother Aaron to assume that role. Moshe suggested his brother to be the High Priest and it was fully endorsed by G'd. Thus, Korach believed that the essence of the Torah was only G'd's endorsement of Moshe's own agenda.

When Moshe decided to strike the rock rather than speak to it as G'd had commanded him, he was punished

by not being allowed to enter into the Land. Because he chose not to publicly sanctify the Name of G'd by speaking to the rock, he was destined to pass away before the Jewish people would enter into the Land. What appears to have happened was that although G'd had commanded Moshe to speak to the rock, he chose to strike it because he believed that the Jews were only worthy of witnessing a miracle that did come about through human intervention (which is a lesser miracle). G'd thus punished Moshe in this manner, and was not willing to accept Moshe's supplications to annul the degree, so that Korach's claim should be refuted beyond any doubt forever. The integrity of Torah should never be questioned.

For someone of Moshe's dimension of spirituality and intimate relationship with G'd to say, “**The most difficult issues you will bring to me**” could have been misconstrued to mean something similar to Korach's understanding – that Moshe would be the one to decide what Torah should be. G'd needed to demonstrate to the Jewish people that Moshe was not in fact acting independent of Him, rather he was only the conduit between G'd and the Jewish people. In order to correctly understand the statement of Moshe “**The most difficult issues you will bring to me**” G'd needed to deny him clarity regarding the laws of inheritance, which pertained to receiving a portion in the Land. It is interesting to note that the same individual who was denied entry into the Land for acting in a manner that could distort the reality of Torah is identified with the law that pertains to a woman being a legitimate heir to inherit- thus being deserving of a portion in the Land. It will be known forever that the statement of Moshe “**The most difficult issues you will bring to me**” does not mean that he will decide what Torah should be, but rather Moshe is only transmitting the Word of G'd.

5. The Value of Seeing Something for What it Truly Is

After the incident of Baal Peor, the Torah states, “G'd spoke to Moshe saying, ‘**Harass the Midianites and smite them; for they harassed you...they conspired against you in the matter of Peor...**’” Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the Midianites had intentionally brought disaster upon the Jewish people through the sexual enticement of their women and the idolatry of Baal Peor. Although those who were directly involved with the women perished in the plague; nevertheless, the remaining Jewish males were negatively impacted by what they had seen. Despite the fact that they would not consider

violating the areas of sexuality and idolatry, having a degree of interest/desire in these areas prevents the Jewish people from being fully atoned.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues that if one has any desire for something that is forbidden, the teshuvah process (repentance) does not bring about full atonement. One needs to purge himself of that interest/positive perspective of the wrong. Thus, G'd commanded the Jewish people, "**You should Harass the Midianites**" so that they should see them in the most negative/undesirable light. The Jewish people needed to internalize the fact that the Midianites and what they represented was a detriment to them. It was only after the Jewish people were able to perceive the Midianites as the true enemy in every regard that they had no interest and detested everything that was associated with them. Thus, this mindset in conjunction with teshuvah reinstated them to their pure status. This concept is expressed by King David in Psalms, "I shall hate those who hate You (G'd)." If one does not despise and hate that which is contrary to the Will of G'd he will be susceptible to its influences. One cannot take a neutral or "middle of the road" position regarding something that is contrary to the Will of G'd.

The only way we can safeguard our spirituality from negative influences is to have a conscious disdain for the positions that are not in conformance with the Torah. We say in the aleinu prayer before we acknowledge G'd as the King, "It is our duty to praise the Master...He has not assigned us our portion like theirs nor our lot like all the multitudes. For they bow to vanity and emptiness and pray to a god which helps not. But we bend our knees and bow...before the King Who reigns over kings, the Holy One..." We only acknowledge our belief and gratitude for being G'd's people, after we have expressed our recognition of the negativity and detestability of idolatry. Only after one has internalized that whatever is contrary to the Will of G'd is abhorrent and destructive will one not be distracted by those influences. It is then that he can fully appreciate the path of spirituality.

There is a positive commandment to "remember what Amalek had done to us." In addition, there is another mitzvah to "obliterate Amalek from existence." It is only after one reflects, understands, and appreciates the evil of Amalek will he obliterate them with the proper understanding that evil must be purged from existence.

Moshe at the end of the Book of Devarim refers to the idols as "**dung and their putrid rodents.**" If idolatry is perceived as something that is truly revolting and

disgusting as dung and putrid rodents, there is no concern that one may be influenced by its existence. Similarly, one must perceive the beliefs and lifestyles that are contrary to the Torah as something that is truly inappropriate and unacceptable. King David would attend summits that were frequented by the kings and dignitaries of the world. Rather than being impressed by their discussions or values to any degree and attempt to be sociable, he would only speak about Torah values without any compunction or embarrassment. As he states, "I spoke of Your Testaments in the presence of kings and I was not embarrassed." The only way one can truly shield himself from values and beliefs that are false is to see them in the most negative light. This mindset can only be developed through the study of Torah within the context of dialogue with true Torah luminaries.

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar – Derech Hashem
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Chulin
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:15 – 12:15pm	Talmud: Taanis Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
12:30 – 1:30pm	Talmud: Pesachim Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue Between E.51 st and E.52 st

Tuesday

12:15 - 1:15pm	Torah Insight Based on the Parsha Location: Yad Avraham
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Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm	Talmud: Taanis Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00—2:00 pm	Daas Tevunos Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

10:30 –11:30am	Duties of the Heart Location: Yad Avraham
12:00 – 1:00 pm	Talmud: Taanis Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL)