

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
The Portion of
Pinchas

July 9, 2009

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 9, 2009

B"H

Pinchas

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

Dean

1. Silence, a Basis for Prosecution

The Torah tells us that Zimri, the Prince of the Tribe of Shimon, publicly desecrated G'd's Name by cohabiting with Cozbi, a Midianite Princess. Pinchas acted zealously to avenge G'd's Honor by killing Zimri and Cozbi. He pierced them both with a spear while they were engaged in their disgraceful sexual act. The Torah states, **"Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the Kohen, turned back My (G'd) wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume the Children of Israel with My vengeance."** Rashi explains that since Pinchas had expended his wrath upon the desecrators of G'd through his zealotry, G'd did not need to expend His Wrath to destroy the Jewish people. It was only because Pinchas had been consumed with the uncontrollable pain of seeing G'd's Name being desecrated that G'd spared the Jewish people.

The Midrash tells us that Pinchas was only able to succeed in his zealotry because of the many miracles that G'd had performed on his behalf. Pinchas put his life in jeopardy by acting upon his outrage and pain. A public desecration of G'd's Name is considered to be the most serious of transgressions. Rambam states in the Laws of Repentance that it is only through one's death that one's atonement is completed. As Rambam writes, "Although one had repented and experienced the atonement of the day of Yom Kippur and had undergone suffering, it is only with death that the atonement is completed because he desecrated the Name of G'd." When Zimri cohabited with the Midianite princess Cozbi in a public setting, Zimri (especially because of his princely status) brought about a profound level of desecration.

The Midrash tells us that initially Zimri had gone with Cozbi to ask Moshe if a Midianite woman was permitted to him. Moshe responded that she was forbidden. Upon hearing Moshe's ruling, Zimri said, "How can you say that she is not permitted when you yourself are married to a Midianite woman?" With his statement of defiance, Zimri intended to discredit Moshe as a legal authority by publicly showing that Moshe had a double standard. If it was permitted to Moshe to be with a Midianite woman, why should it be forbidden for him to do the same?

When the Jewish people witnessed the public desecration of G'd's Name that was perpetrated by Zimri, they did not react to his unconscionable behavior. They remained silent. As a result of their silence, a plague ensued. It was only Pinchas' act of zealotry, of avenging G'd's Vengeance, did the plague cease. Why did the Jewish people not react as Pinchas had? Pinchas' zealotry had emanated from the intolerable pain that he had experienced from witnessing the exaggerated level of desecration of G'd's Name. It was evident that the Jewish people were not pained to such a degree; otherwise, they would have reacted similarly.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that Bilaam, Yisro, and Iyov (Job) were advisors to Pharaoh. Bilaam had recommended the enslavement of the Jewish people to guarantee their subjugation under Pharaoh. Pharaoh embraced Bilaam's suggestion and implemented it immediately. When Yisro became aware of this injustice of enslaving an innocent people, he fled to Midian as a sign of protest. On the other hand, Iyov, the third advisor, remained silent. We read about the overwhelming suffering of Iyov. It was because of his silence when the bondage was implemented that he suffered to the degree that he did. Iyov's justification to remain silent was that

even if he had protested, Bilaam's recommendation would have been implemented. Pharaoh would not have acknowledged him.

Iyov suffered greatly. He lost his children, his wife, his wealth and suffered physically. The Brisker Rav explains the correlation between the silence of Iyov at the time of the enslavement of the Jewish people to the travails and suffering that he experienced. G'd initially had asked Iyov, "After seeing such evil being perpetrated, how could you have remained silent?" Iyov's response to G'd was, "Even if I would have protested it would have fallen on deaf ears. Therefore I remained silent." G'd responded, "I understand your rationale for being silent."

Subsequently, Iyov experienced great suffering and personal tragedies. He was at a point when he was writhing in pain and crying out when G'd said to him, "Why are you crying and screaming?" Iyov said, "I cry and scream because I am in pain." G'd then asked him, "When you cry does it alleviate your pain?" Iyov responded, "No, however when one is in pain one screams." G'd then responded, "Thus when one is in pain one cries. If this is so, why, when the evil of the enslavement of the Jewish people was being perpetrated did you not scream from pain? It is evident that it was only because you were not pained by the misfortune of the Jewish people that you did not scream in protest of the miscarriage of justice."

The silence of the Jewish people while they witnessed the desecration of G'd's Name perpetrated by Zimri was itself a desecration of G'd's Name. It had activated the most serious level of prosecution against the Jewish people. Thus, they were subject to death. This precipitated the plague that brought about the death of 24,000 Jews. However, through Pinchas' act of zealotry, the Jewish people were spared. His expression of avenging G'd's Vengeance, by killing Zimri was the ultimate sanctification of G'd's Name.

The Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) rules that every Jew has an obligation to mourn the destruction of the Temple on a daily basis. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that a number of times a day a Heavenly Voice calls out, "Woe to the Father who exiled His children from His table. Woe to the children who have been exiled from their Father's table." If one relates to G'd's pain, as it pertains to the Jewish people being in exile, that individual's pain is an expression of his love for G'd. He is internalizing G'd's Pain, which is considered a sanctification of G'd's Name. Ultimately, this will bring about a restoration of the initial relationship with G'd and

the rebuilding of the Temple. When one recites the blessings in the Amidah of the rebuilding of the Temple and the bringing of Moshiach, if one recites them with fervor and great feeling, it will be an indication of one's sense of pain and yearning. However, if one does not pray with intensity for the imminent rebuilding of the Temple, then one must reevaluate his relationship with G'd.

2. Seeing Pinchas in His True Light

The Torah states, "**Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the Priest, turned back My wrath from the Children of Israel...**" Rashi cites Chazal who ask, "Why does the Torah need to trace Pinchas' lineage back to Aaron the High Priest, his grandfather? It is because after Pinchas had killed Zimri, he was ridiculed by the tribes of Israel for killing a Prince. They had said, 'How can a person who descends from a grandfather (his maternal grandfather was Yisro) who had fattened calves for idolatry, have the audacity to kill a Prince of Israel?'" Therefore, the Torah needed to trace his lineage to Aaron the High Priest in order to reveal his prestigious pedigree.

The Torah tells us that had it not been for Pinchas' act of zealotry, G'd would have destroyed the entire Jewish people. After Pinchas killed Zimiri, the plague that had taken 24,000 people came to an end. Even if Pinchas did not descend from a prestigious line, how could the Jewish people have ridiculed him for his action, when it in fact it had spared them from total destruction? One would have thought that he would have deserved to be praised for his courageous act, regardless of his lack of pedigree. Despite all that they had witnessed, they had put Pinchas in a negative light, seeing him as an uncouth person.

The Jewish people had acknowledged that Pinchas' act of zealotry had saved them from destruction; however, their criticism of Pinchas was directed at him as a person. They claimed that if Pinchas, who descended from common stock, was able to kill a prince of Israel, it was an indication that he is a person who does not esteem or revere anyone of status. If Pinchas had in fact revered a person of status, he could not have been able to kill Zimri, despite his disgraceful behavior. He was thus perceived as a person who possesses an uncouth character. Therefore, the Torah needed to trace his pedigree to Aaron, the High Priest in order to establish him as someone of notable pedigree for the Jewish people to appreciate who he was.

In fact, the impetus for Pinchas to act as the zealot was unrelated to his pedigree, seeing Zimri as his equal. Rather, it was because of his degree of reverence for G'd that he was not able to tolerate the desecration that was taking place. The issue of status has no relevance in the presence of G'd's glory being disgraced, as the verse from Proverbs states, "There is no wisdom, there is no understanding, nor counsel in the face of G'd." The Gemara in Tractate Shevuos explains this verse to mean that if there is a desecration of G'd's Name, one's status has no value and is irrelevant. Pinchas, being the one who was imbued with reverence for G'd, responded despite the prestigious status of Zimri and the woman with whom he had cohabited.

One must be willing to negate himself as well as others in order to do the Will of G'd, regardless of one's personal disgrace. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that if one realizes that he is wearing *shatnez* (a combination of wool and linen that is forbidden by the Torah) one must immediately remove his garments, even in a public setting. How could one endure such disgrace? Every moment that one wears the garment that contains *shatnez*, one is in violation of a negative commandment. Therefore, one's personal dignity has no standing in a context where the Word of G'd is being violated. The act of undressing in a public setting is considered to be an act of negation of one's self for the sake of Him.

Rashi cites the Midrash that explains that the reason the Torah identifies those who were killed by Pinchas as Zimri, the prince of the Tribe of Shimon and Cozbi, the Midianite princess, is to convey that one's status and honor has no relevance when the Glory of G'd is at stake. Regardless of their prestigious status, Zimri and Cozbi had no value in the eyes of Pinchas because of the nature of their behavior.

Although the entire Jewish people witnessed the same desecration of G'd, as Pinchas had, they did not respond or react. Seeing, Pinchas' act of zealotry, the Jewish people needed to justify their own silence. They thus concluded that the only reason that Pinchas was able to rise and kill Zimri was because he had an uncouth nature and had no respect for status. The Torah reveals Pinchas' pedigree only as a response to the Jewish people's perception of him in a negative light. In truth, Pinchas acted as he had only because he saw Zimri as a desecrator of G'd.

3. Identifying the True Culprit

The Torah tells us that after 24,000 Jews had perished in a plague because of the incident of Baal Peor, a new census had to be taken of the Jewish people. The Torah states, "**These are the families of the tribe of Reuvain...Nemuel and Dasan and Aviram, the same Dasan and Aviram who were summoned by the assembly, who contended against Moshe and Aaron among the assembly of Korach, when they contended against Hashem. Then the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and Korach...**"

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks, "Why are Dasan and Aviram mentioned by name? It is to tell us that they were the same Dasan and Aviram who were part of the conspiracy of Korach against Moshe. Why would one think otherwise? Is it a possibility that there were another two individuals who were also named Dasan and Aviram? Even if there were, why should they be mentioned at all? Why should they be any different from the other families who were swallowed up by the earth and were not identified? ... It seems that the Torah is clarifying something relating to the insurgency of Korach against Moshe. Although Korach had persuaded 250 members of the tribe of Reuvain, who were qualified to be the head of the High Court of Israel (Sanhedrin) to go against Moshe in order to usurp his authority, it was actually Dasan and Aviram who had planted the seeds of mutiny by inciting Korach. Therefore, the Torah identifies them by name because G'd wants to reveal the true perpetrators of evil ...The Mishna in Tractate Sanhedrin has a question regarding the future of the assembly of Korach. Although they were swallowed up by the earth, will they be resurrected at the end of time or will they be condemned to go into oblivion? According to the opinion that they will come back, Dasan and Aviram, because of the evil that they had perpetrated will not merit to return."

The Midrash cites a verse from Proverbs that states, " 'The wisdom of women have built the household.' To whom is this referring? It is the wife of Ohn ben Pelles. Although Ohn ben Pelles was initially part of the mutiny, his wife convinced him not participate in the rebellion. She had said to him, 'If Korach will succeed in his uprising, he will become the leader; however, your status will not change. What benefit will you have? Therefore you should not be involved.' He responded, 'What you say is correct; however, I cannot extricate myself from the group.' She told him to drink some wine and go to sleep while she dealt with the issue at hand. She subsequently uncovered her hair and sat by the doorway of their tent. When the members of Korach's group came to summon him, they had seen a woman in an immodest state (with her hair uncovered) thus causing them to retreat. She thus spared

her husband. We also find the contrary, that the evil/skepticism of women can destroy the household. Who is an example of this? It is the wife of Korach. She had instigated him to rise against Moshe.” Although Korach’s wife was evil because she had convinced him to go against Moshe, he was only susceptible to her influence because Dasan and Aviram had already negatively influenced him regarding Moshe’s status.

One may be inclined to behave in a certain manner because of his preexisting mindset. Although he may be drawn to engage in activities that are contrary to the Will of G’d, one is still able to maintain himself and resist. However, if one had been exposed to positions that are contrary to the fundamentals of authentic Judaism, it will create a negative subliminal effect although it will remain unnoticed by the individual. Consequently, if the individual should be confronted with an issue, which under normal circumstances he would be able to resist, because of the previous negative exposure, he will succumb. Because Korach was continuously exposed to the criticism of Moshe by Dasan and Aviram he was susceptible to the criticism of Moshe by his wife.

This is the reason the Mishna in Ethics of Our Fathers states, “Distance yourself from a bad neighbor...” If one is exposed to the subtleties of negative influence, it is only a matter of time before he will fail.

4. Yosef’s Unique Love for the Land

The Torah states, **“The daughters of Tzelofchad, son of Chefer, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh 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 Tzelofchad’s daughters were his only progeny they came to claim his portion in the Land as his heirs. The daughters of Tzelofchad merited that the laws of inheritance should be communicated to Moshe as a result of their request for a portion in the Land.

The Midrash asks, “Why does the Torah trace the pedigree of the daughters of Tzelofchad back to Yosef, the Patriarch of the Tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh? Since the verse identifies them as the descendants of Manasseh, why is it necessary to mention that Manasseh was the son of Yosef? The Torah needed to trace the genealogy of the daughters of Tzelofchad back to Yosef because he had a

special love for the Land (of Israel) ‘*chibas haaretz*’. Where do we find that he had a special love for the Land? The verse states, **‘When G’d will surely remember you and bring you up out of this land (Egypt)...then you must bring my bones up out of here with you (to the Land of Israel).’** Just as Yosef had a special love for the Land, so too did the daughters of Tzelofchad love the Land as it states, **‘Give us a portion...’** This is to teach us that all the daughters of Tzelofchad were righteous.” The daughters of Tzelofchad desired a portion in the Land, not for its monetary value, but only because of their special love for the Land Israel.

The Torah states that after the daughters of Tzelofchad brought their claim to Moshe, he presented it before G’d. Why was Moshe not able to respond to their request? Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “Although Moshe had known the laws pertaining to inheritance, it was concealed from him. Why did this happen? The Torah wanted the order of inheritance to be communicated as a result of the daughters of Tzelofchad’s claim to reveal the special love that they had for the Land. It was their love that motivated them to make the request.” What was the cause of their special interest in the Land?

The Gemara in Tractate Kesubos states, “One who lives outside of the Land (of Israel), it is as if he has no G’d.” Maharsha cites Ramban who explains that the Land of Israel is the only location on earth that is not under the dominion of one of the archangels of the nations of the world. The world was divided among the seventy root nations, each one of them having its own archangel. The blessing and sustenance that G’d provides for each nation is passed through that archangel for the people living in that particular location. However, the Land of Israel, which is the Land that was given to the Jewish people is overseen by G’d Himself. There is no archangel. The blessing and sustenance that is provided by G’d comes directly to those who live in the Land. Therefore, when one lives outside of the Land, it is as if he has no G’d. Meaning, his relationship with G’d comes about through an intermediary, which is not the case in Israel.

Yosef had a special love for the Land because he understood and appreciated its unique spiritual value. If one performs a mitzvah in the Land it’s innate spiritual value is greater than if one performs the same mitzvah outside of the Land. There are also mitzvos that are uniquely tied to the Land itself. Therefore, Yosef had asked of the Jewish people, that before they leave Egypt they must take his remains to the Land of Israel. Similarly, it was because the daughters of Tzelofchad, the descendants of Yosef, had appreciated and understood the

spiritual value of the Land of Israel that they wanted a portion in it.

It is interesting to note that a convert does not have a share in the Land. One needs to be a descendant of one of the original Twelve Tribes of Israel in order to merit a portion. Although the Tribe of Levy did not have a portion in the Land, it was because as the Torah states **“G’d is their portion.”** They did not need a medium through which to have a relationship with G’d. However, the other tribes, being of a lesser dimension of spirituality, needed the Land as the medium for their special and unique relationship with G’d. The convert, not being a descendant of Yaakov, the Patriarch, needs the Jewish people themselves to be his link to G’d. Becoming part of the totality of the Jewish people allows the convert to be valued as the original Jew.

The Midrash tells us that we see that Yosef had a special love for the Land because he had requested, **“When G’d will bring you up out of Egypt, you must bring my bones up out of here with you.”** How do we see from this request that Yosef had a special love for the Land? Rashi cites Chazal who explain the words **“with you”** to mean, “When your children will take out your remains from Egypt, you must ensure me that they will remove my remains with them.” Every one of the Tribes wanted their remains to be removed from Egypt when the redemption would come about. Since every one of the Tribes wanted their remains to be removed from Egypt, why was Yosef’s request an indication that his love for the Land was greater than theirs? In addition, why was it necessary that Yosef request from his brothers that they should guarantee that his remains should be removed when he could have asked his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh to remove his remains at the time of the exodus? Why was it necessary for him to make the removal of his remains a prerequisite for the redemption of the Jewish people? If one desires something that he esteems, reveres, and loves at an unusual level, he will do everything that is possible to ensure that his request will be fulfilled and guaranteed. Because Yosef did not want to rely solely upon his children, as his brothers had done, it is an indication of his exceptional love for the Land. This is the reason he made the request, **“...you must bring my bones up out of here with you.”** Why was Yosef the only one of Yaakov’s sons who needed such a guarantee that his remains would be taken out of Egypt?

Chazal tell us that Yosef was a reflection of every aspect of his father Yaakov, our Patriarch. Therefore his grasp and understanding of spirituality was unique. His brothers did not have the same depth of understanding as

Yosef had. This is the reason that he was the most loved by his father Yaakov. This was also the basis for his appreciation of the spiritual value of the Land.

Chofetz Chaim writes in his work *Shem Olam* that when one passes away and comes before the Heavenly Court, he needs an unusual amount of spiritual merit. It is because of the necessity of this merit that one should not leave the responsibility of managing the distribution of one’s assets to charity solely to one’s children. Because one’s family does not fully appreciate and understand the dire need of merit that is required by the one who passed away, they will not sufficiently impart the funds to the proper causes. Therefore, one must set in motion the distribution before one passes away in order to guarantee that he will be the beneficiary of his own decisions. Similarly, Yosef, because of his dimension of spirituality, was able to internalize and grasp the value of his remains being taken to the Land of Israel. This was of such monumental importance that he would not allow the responsibility to rest solely upon his children, but rather he set it as a prerequisite for the redemption from Egypt.

5. The Jewish People, Reflecting the Profile of their Forbearers (from Balak)

The Torah states when Bilaam went to bless the Jewish people, **“He (G’d) perceived no iniquity in Yaakov, and saw no sin in Israel...”** How is it possible that G’d did not see the iniquities of the Jewish people, if in fact they had sinned multiple times. They had sinned with the Golden Calf and with the spies. Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “When they transgress His words, He does not scrutinize their actions and is not exacting in His gaze upon them. This is an indication of His special love for the Jewish people.” Baal HaTurim explains the meaning of the words **“He (G’d) perceived no iniquity”** by citing the Jerusalem Talmud, “The Hebrew letters *“ches”* and *“tes”* (which together spell *“chet (sin)”*) do not appear among the names of the twelve Tribes of Israel.” If in fact the Jewish people did sin, what relevance does the fact that the sons of Yaakov, who were their forbearers, do not have the letters *“ches”* and *“tes”* among their names?

The Portion of Vayechi, because of its paragraph structure is classified as a “sealed” Portion. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the reason the Portion is sealed is to allude to the fact that Yaakov, our Patriarch wanted reveal to his sons, the end of time (ketz) when Moshiach would come. However, G’d concealed it from him so that he should not reveal it. Rabbeinu Bachya cites another

Midrash that explains that Yaakov initially wanted to reveal the end of time to his sons. He initially hesitated to do so because he was concerned that they may be flawed because of sin and thus not worthy to receive this information. However, when he realized that that the letters “ches” and “tes” were not present in their names, he understood that they were in fact pure. Nevertheless, Yaakov chose to withhold this information from them because he realized that the letters “kuf” and “tzadie”, which spell “ketz”, also did not appear in the names of his children. This confirmed for him that the end of time should not be revealed.

The fact that the letters “ches” and “tes” do not appear in the names of the Tribes of Israel is an indication that the essence of the Jewish people is pure and has no relevance to sin (*chet*). Repentance for a Jew brings about two consequences. Firstly, he is forgiven and thus will not be subject to the Attribute of Justice. Secondly, it brings about a spiritual rehabilitation. Whatever level of spiritual diminishment that was caused by the sin will be rehabilitated as a result of the repentance. However, a non-Jew only has relevance to the first aspect of repentance – that he is forgiven not to be punished. As we see with the community of Ninve. Yonah the prophet was sent to forewarn them that they must repent. If they did not, they would be destroyed. As a result of Yonah’s rebuke, the community of Ninve repented and were thus not destroyed. They were forgiven.

Maharal of Prague explains that sin is attributed to the physicality of the human being. Sin does not emanate from one’s spiritual essence. The Jew, whose essence is spiritual, when he sins it is considered to be incidental emanating from his physicality. Because sin does not touch upon the essence of the Jew, he has relevance to spiritual rehabilitation. However, the non-Jew, whose essence is not spiritual, when he fails and sins it is not considered to be incidental because it emanates from his physical essence. Therefore, he has no relevance to spiritual rehabilitation. The sin for the non-Jew is thus considered to be terminal and something that is beyond recovery.

When Bilaam said, “**He (G’d) perceived no iniquity in Yaakov, and saw no sin in Israel....**” he was referring to the fact that the terminal consequence of sin (*chet*) has no relevance to the Tribes of Yaakov as is indicated by the fact that letters “ches” and “tes” do not appear in their names. Because the Jewish people descend from the holy Tribes, their make up and profile is spiritual. Therefore, their essence cannot be tarnished by sin. When G’d gazes upon the Jewish people, the Attribute of Mercy is upon

them because their sin is only considered to be something of a superficial nature for it does not emanate from their core being, which is spiritual and pure.

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 – Path of the Just
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Chulin –Gid Hanasheh
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi- Bava Kamah
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:30 – 12:30pm	Talmud: Megilah Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00-2:00 pm	Ramchal: Derech Hashem Location: Cedarview Capital 1Penn Plaza (45 th FL.)

Tuesday

12:10 - 1:10pm	Torah Insight Based on the Parsha Location: Yad Avraham
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Wednesday

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

Thursday

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