

PINCHAS' INNER CONSCIOUSNESS

by Rabbi Yisroel Roll

And when Pinchas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from the midst of the congregation, and took a spear in his hand. Bamidbar 25:7

The medrash explains that the illicit actions of Zimri and Cozbi took place in front of the entire community of Israel. Pinchas saw this affront, remembered the *halachah* that a zealot is permitted to stop such a travesty, took the spear and killed them.^[1]

What did Pinchas see that no one else saw? If the entire community witnessed these events did they not all see this challenge to God's Morality? If so, why did no one else act to stop it? The medrash answers that Pinchas did more than merely "see". He saw, and analyzed the situation, and "remembered" the *halachah*. Pinchas' *seeing* was not a physical seeing, rather it was an intellectual seeing.^[2]

The Medrash continues that the elders were debating whether or not Zimri and Cozbi were liable to the death penalty, and while they were debating, Pinchas arose from the midst of the debate, and killed them.^[3]

The Maharzu^[4] explains that Pinchas acted with *mesiras nefesh* is to sanctify the name of God.

The Talmud explains why Pinchas was driven to selfless action in the face of the brazen affront to Hashem perpetrated by Zimri, the Prince of Shimon:

And Moshe said unto the judges of Israel, "Slay every one of his men that were joined unto Baal Peor." Thereupon the tribe of Shimon went to Zimri ben Salu, and said to him, 'Behold, capital punishment is being meted out, yet you sit silent [i.e., inactive].' What did he do? Zimri arose and assembled twenty four thousand Israelites and went to Cozbi, and said unto her, 'Surrender yourself to me.' She replied, 'I am a king's daughter, and thus has my father instructed me, "You shall yield only to their greatest man". 'I too,' he replied, 'am the prince of a tribe; moreover, my tribe is greater than his [Moshel, for mine is second in birth, whilst his is third.] He then seized her by her hair and brought her before Moshe. 'Son of Amram,' exclaimed Zimri, 'is this woman forbidden or permitted? And should you say, "She is forbidden", who permitted to you Yisro's daughter'? At that moment Moshe forgot the halachah [concerning intimacy with a heathen woman], and all the people burst into tears; hence it is written, and they were weeping before the door of the Mishkan of the congregation. And it is also written, And Pinchas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it. Now, what did he see? — Rav said: He saw what was happening and remembered the halachah, and said to him, 'O great—uncle! Did You not teach us this

on your descent from Mount Sinai: He who cohabits with a heathen woman is punished by zealots?' He replied. 'He who reads the letter, let him be the agent [to carry out its instructions]' Sanhedrin 81b

When Pinchas saw that Zimri was challenging the authority of Moshe, and when he became conscious of the pain of the Jewish People at the affront to God's law of moral decency and modesty, *he rose up from the midst of the congregation*, and killed Zimri and Cozbi the Midianite princess.

In Slichos we say: *May He who answered Pinchas when he arose from the midst of the congregation, answer us.*

What was the merit through which Pinchas was answered? The Tzror Hamor^[5] teaches that Pinchas felt the pain of the Nation, and the pain of the affront to God, and he rose up from the people; he girded and strengthened himself from within his own self—his own values—and took hold of his inner conviction, by taking a spear in his hand to avenge the affront to God.

Pinchas' main occupation was that of a scholar and priest, and yet he went inside himself, and empowered himself to go beyond his own comfort zone, and *took a spear in his hand*—and this was his moment of splendor and glory. The word *romach* (spear) in gematria refers to the 248 bones of a man's body—and he took his entire being—body and soul—all of his 248 bones—for the love of God, and strengthened the covenant of God, and His 248 positive commandments.

It was this moment of deep inner conviction that prompted Pinchas to act. This moment occurred as Pinchas stood with the entire community and yet, at the moment, Pinchas was alone—with an awareness of the depth of his inner conviction. He delved into his inner being and psyche and discovered that his inner sense of truth would not allow him to remain silent. That which he was witnessing was an affront to his inner sense of self.

The *medrash* states that Pinchas approached Moshe Rabeinu, not to ask whether it was permissible for a zealot to kill a person who violated the law in public, for Pinchas knew that it was permitted. What he did not know was whether he, himself, was worthy to be the one to do it, or whether he should leave it to others, more worthy than he. Moshe answered that this was not a legal question that need be brought to the *Sanhedrin*, rather this was an issue of zealotry, and "there is no one more zealous than you."

From where did Pinchas draw this inner awareness, consciousness and confidence to place himself in such mortal danger by acting on his zealous love of God? The answer lies in the Torah's commandment of honoring Shabbos, where man gains an inner sense of himself. The Torah teaches:

See that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.' Shemos 16:19

On Shabbos man is required to stay within himself—and is not permitted to venture outside the *techum*—the boundary of 2000 *amos* outside the city. The deeper meaning here is that on Shabbos man is required to travel within, into his subconscious self, to discover his innermost self—his true identity. This can only be achieved when man stops mastering and manipulating the outer world—and explores his inner character and spirit. He must ask himself, “Who am I, really? What is my true nature and how do I define myself. What do I believe and what do I stand for?”

For this holy task, man must stop traveling outside himself—by mastering the world with creative acts of *melachah*, and must endeavor to delve within; — *let no man go out of his place*.

This is what Pinchas achieved in that fateful moment of *aloneness* in the midst of the congregation. In the midst of turmoil and upheaval in the community, when God's Law and the Moshe's leadership were being challenged, Pinchas looked within himself. At that moment of existential awareness, Pinchas came to know himself and found peace with his inner convictions. That is why God responded by saying:

Wherefore say: Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace; Bamidbar 25:12

Pinchas looked within his own soul and found that true honor belonged to God. He did not fear the affront to Zimri, a prince of Israel, or the potential wrath of his tribe. Pinchas aligned himself with his conviction of standing for the honor of God. In this he found peace with himself. God gave him the reward of peace, to reflect Pinchas' inner peace.^[6]



The actions of Zimri were an affront to the *kavod* of Hashem and that is what roused Pinchas to rectify the *chilul* Hashem, and to be *Mekadesh Shem Shamayim* in public. The actions of immorality of Zimri were tantamount to an act of public *Avodah Zarah*, and that is why the Torah says,

Pinchas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned My wrath away from the children of Israel, in that he was very jealous for My sake among them, so that I consumed not the children of Israel in My jealousy. Bamidbar: 25:11

Zimri's actions were tantamount to *avodah zarah*, because a person who commits such an act, is acting 'as if' he connects with *avodah zarah* itself. The act was an act of service of foreign gods. Therefore it is permissible for a zealot, who experiences God so deeply and intimately such that he actually within himself feels the affront to God—is himself allowed to execute such a person.

This speaks to the nature of Pinchas' relationship with God. He experienced God Consciousness so deeply, and in such a tangible manner, that he personally felt the pain of the affront to God's Honor.

Therefore Pinchas acted not out of punishment of the perpetrators, but out of jealousy—or love—of Hashem. Such was his zealotry for the honor of God.

Zimri, as a sinner, was not *halachically* deserving of death—except at the hands of one who personally felt jealousy for *kevod shamayim*. Therefore, had he asked the question whether he could kill Zimri, or had he been instructed to do so, it would have been an act of obedience, and not an act of zealotry. It was Pinchas' jealousy for God's Honor that burned within his soul that prompted him to act.

Pinchas cleaved to the covenant, as an expression of the love between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*. Eliyahu—who was a *gilgul*—incarnation, of Pinchas, continued that *avodah*.^[7]

That is why Eliyahu comes to every bris—and we set aside a *Kiseh Shel Eliyahu*—because the eight day old boy is about to enter into the covenant with Hashem, and we want his mentor to be Eliyahu—and Pinchas—who lived the covenant with great passion.

And that is why Hashem rewarded Pinchas: *Wherefore say: Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace*; Bamidbar 25:12.

Since Pinchas was passionate about maintaining the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people, therefore, measure for measure, Hashem gave him —the covenant of *shleimus*.

Eliyahu too, was rewarded, measure for measure with the legacy of:

Behold, I will send You Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD — And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers
Malachi 3:24

Pinchas discovered his passion for his love of Hashem, when he was alone in the midst of the congregation. If he was in the midst of the congregation, as they deliberated the fate of Zimri, how could he be alone? The answer is that he delved within himself through a moment of soul searching and introspection as to what he, Pinchas, truly believed. Would he take a stand for God's honor, or not?

The answer to that question depended on how he perceived himself. At that fateful moment, Pinchas was existentially alone. In that moment of aloneness, he discovered himself. That self, that identity, was the core of who he was. It was the essence of self that was revealed only as a result of his aloneness. And is that core self, which visits every bris, in the person of Eliyahu *Hanavi*.

^[1] Bamidbar Rabbah 20:25

^[2] Aruch L'ner

^[3] He arose from within the congregation and took a spear in his hand

[4] Rabbi Zev Wolf Einhorn of Horodna, d. 1862

[5] *Abraham Saba*, 1440–1508, Spain and Italy

[6] Rabeinu Bachya Bamidbar 25:7

[7] Shalah Hakadosh; Pinchas, Torah Ohr 2

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