

# PINCHAS & THE THREE WEEKS

*by Shlomo Katz*

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**Volume XVIII, No. 37**

**21 Tamuz 5764**

**July 10, 2004**

**Today's Learning:**

**Niddah 9:4-5**

**O.C. 241:1-243:1**

**Begin Hilchot Shabbat today (Shabbat)**

**Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bechorot 28**

**Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Nedarim 37**

The period between the Fast of the 17th of Tamuz and Tishah B'Av is known in halachah as "Bein Ha'meitzarim" / "Between the Troubles." During this period, we mourn the destruction of both the First and Second Temples.

However, writes R' Eliezer Ze'ev Rosenbaum z"l hy"d (the Nadvorner- Kretchnif Rebbe in Sighet; killed in the Holocaust), chassidic works teach that there is also a reason for optimism during this period. We read in Eichah (1:3), "All rodfehah / her pursuers hi'seeguhah / overtook her bein ha'meitzarim." The word "rodfehah" / "her pursuers" can be read "rodfei-Kah" / "Those who pursue G-d." (The "K" in "Kah" is inserted to avoid pronouncing G-d's Name, but it is not part of the word.) Those who pursue G-d during the period can "overtake" him. Also, "hi'seeguhah" can mean "grasped it," in the sense of grasping a deep concept. Those who pursue G-d during this period can grasp deep spiritual levels.

How can this be? How can a period of such sorrow be an opportunity for such joyful attainments? R' Rosenbaum explains with two parables.

First, when is it easier for the common man to approach a king - when he is in his palace or when he

is traveling? Presumably, when he is traveling. Similarly, it is easier for us to approach G-d when He is in exile from His home, the Temple, so-to-speak.

Also, imagine a father who, G-d forbid, lost many of his children. Whenever the father recalls that tragedy, he will feel closer to his surviving offspring. Similarly, when G-d mourns, so-to-speak, over the Destruction, He brings Himself closer to us. (Raza De'Uvda p.144)

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*"Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen, turned back My wrath from upon Bnei Yisrael when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume Bnei Yisrael in My vengeance." (25:11)*

Chazal comment: "Justice requires that Pinchas receive his reward."

What does this mean? asks R' Yitzchak Yaakov Reines z"l (rosh yeshiva in Lida, Poland and founder of Mizrachi). Might we think that Pinchas should not be rewarded? Reward and punishment is one of the fundamental beliefs of our faith!

He explains: We read in Yirmiyah (50:17), "Yisrael is like scattered lamb." The Midrash Rabbah asks, "In what way is Yisrael like a lamb?" The sage Chizkiyah answers in the Midrash, "Just as a lamb that is hit on one limb hurts all over, so when one limb of Yisrael (i.e., one person) is hurting, all of Yisrael is in pain."

The Midrash continues that the sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai illustrated the importance of Jewish unity in another way. Imagine several people sitting on a rowboat. Suddenly, one pulls a drill out of his pocket and begins boring a hole under his seat. The other passengers will surely yell at him, "What are you doing?" Can he rightfully answer, "It's none of your business; I'm only drilling under my seat"? Of course he cannot.

R' Reines writes: Both sages, Chizkiyah and Rabbi Shimon, acknowledge the importance of unity. What then is the difference between their two analogies? Chizkiyah's illustration refers to unity based on emotional attachment. If one Jew is hurting, all should be in pain. In contrast, Rabbi Shimon's analogy is based on reason, on the recognition that one Jew's improper act can harm all Jews. (For example, writes R' Reines, world opinion often condemns all Jews for one Jew's act.) We are all "sailing in the same boat." If the boat sinks, G-d forbid, we will all drown.

Pinchas' killing of Zimri was an emotional act. We know this because it is the source of the halachah that, for certain sins, a zealot may take the law into his own hands and execute the offender. The law is that if the "zealot" comes to bet din / court and asks whether he should take the law into his own hands, he is told, No! There is no doubt that one who commits a Zimri-like act harms the Jewish

people whether his act is judged rationally or emotionally. Nevertheless, the law that "A zealot may strike him down" applies only when the zealot feels the collective pain of the Jewish People, not when he has concluded rationally that the Jewish People may be harmed by the sinner's act. On the other hand, when a court-appointed agent administers lashes or executes a murderer, he may not act emotionally; he must act rationally.

Since Pinchas acted emotionally, emotion clearly requires that he be rewarded. However, the Midrash says, justice, i.e., reason, also requires that he be rewarded [for in the final analysis, he saved Bnei Yisrael].

(Sefer Ha'arachim: Gmul Va'onesh)

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*"May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly." (27:16)*

In this verse, Moshe asks Hashem to appoint a successor to himself (Moshe) who would lead Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael. Why did Moshe refer to Hashem in this context specifically as the "G-d of the spirits of all flesh"?

R' Amram Zvi Gruenwald z"l (dayan and rosh yeshiva in Visheve, Romania and rabbi of the Fernwald D.P. camp; died in Brooklyn in 1951) explains: Moshe not only brought the Torah down to Bnei Yisrael, but he also fed them. In particular, our Sages teach that the mahn fell in Moshe's merit. Moshe knew that the soul cannot remain within a person if the flesh is not fed. Therefore Moshe prayed that G-d should appoint a spiritual leader who would care for his charges material needs, their flesh, also.

(Zichron Amram Zvi)

From the same work:

*"Let the assembly of Hashem not be like sheep, which have no shepherd." (27:16)*

R' Amram Zvi Gruenwald quotes R' Yekutiel Yehuda Teitelbaum z"l (19th century rabbi of Sighet, Hungary) who writes: There seemingly is an extra word in this pasuk - the Hebrew word "asher." Without that word, we would have translated the verse, "Let the assembly of Hashem not be like sheep that have no shepherd." With that word, however, the verse may be rendered as above, implying that no sheep have a shepherd. What does this mean?

He answers: Why does a shepherd watch sheep? Is it for the sheep's sake? Usually not. Rather, the shepherd is trying to earn money. In reality, he is "watching" himself.

Moshe prayed that the leader of Bnei Yisrael should not be like this. Sheep do not have a truly

committed shepherd, but let Bnei Yisrael have one.

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*"And on the Shabbat day - two male lambs . . ." (28:9)*

We recite in the Shabbat Musaf prayer, "You have commanded us to offer a Musaf / extra Shabbat offering as is fitting." What is meant by the phrase, "as is fitting"?

R' Simcha of Vitry z"l (France; died 1105) writes that the phrase refers to our verse. Many aspects of Shabbat are doubled compared to during the week. For example, during the week a person recites Hamotzi over one loaf of bread, but on Shabbat he recites the blessing over two loaves. During the week, a person has one neshamah, but on Shabbat he has a neshamah yetairah / an extra neshamah.

So, too, every day, two lambs were offered in the Bet Hamikdash - one for the morning Tamid and one for the evening Tamid. On Shabbat, two more lambs were offered, as is fitting for the day when things are doubled.

(Machzor Vitry, quoted in Tefilah Le'Moshe p.637)

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*"Therefore, say - Behold! I give him My covenant of Shalom." (25:12)*

It is customary to write the letter "vav" of the word "shalom" shorter than the surrounding letters. The renowned halachic authority R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (1910-1995) once was shown a Sefer Torah in which the vav had been written the regular size. It should have been a simple matter to take a blade and scrape off the bottom of the vav, but no sofer / scribe could be found in Yerushalayim who was willing to undertake the job. The reason was that there are authorities who hold that the word "Shalom" is a Divine Name. Although the halachah does not follow that view, these scribes were not willing to do an act which, according to some, would constitute erasing G-d's Name. [For this reason, some authorities counsel not to say "Shabbat Shalom" in a bathroom and not to write the word "Shalom" in correspondence that will be thrown away.]

A difficult predicament? Not for R' Auerbach. He advised that they bring a quill and ink and thicken the bottoms of all of the other letters of the word Shalom. Once that was done, the vav would be a short letter.

Simple, but brilliant.

*"Let the assembly of Hashem not be like sheep-that they have no shepherd." (27:16)*

R' Yehuda Leib Alter z"l (the Gerrer Rebbe known as the Sefat Emet; 1847-1905) was extremely reserved and withdrawn. One of his elder chassidim once commented to him:

"The rebbe R' Bunim z"l (a leader from several generations prior) once asked why our verse says, 'that they have no shepherd.' Seemingly the word 'they' is unnecessary.

"The answer, R' Bunim said, is that sometimes a congregation has a shepherd but his leadership is so subtle and hidden that the congregation does not realize it is being led. Moshe prayed that his successor not be that type of leader, for such a leader leaves the congregation feeling abandoned.

"Presumably," concluded the elder chassid, addressing the withdrawn rebbe, "R' Bunim was alluding to you."

(Both stories are quoted in Oztrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

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