

Parshas Pinchas

This week's Parsha is Pinchas-named for the zealous actor who stopped the plague, started by the licentious acts of Zimri and Kosbi. The Chumash of Bamidbar has many stories, but they aren't presented for historical reference; they are recorded to teach us something specific.

In Parshas Shelach, the Meraglim, for better or worse, wanted to remain in the desert because they wouldn't have to leave the cocoon of safety that was Hashem's presence. They wouldn't have to enter the land of Israel, where there was an option to sin and or there was an option to spiritually disconnect from Hashem because of the requirement to toil the ground and work. The intentions may have been correct, but the method was wrong.

Next, Korach- his claims were "logical." They had a basis (albeit presented with audacity), and Korach's aspirations were for a pure and idealized world that was out of line with the Torah. (As the Torah recognizes, humans are all different; therefore, everyone's experience is different, and everyone's connection to Hashem may arrive from another avenue). The Torah is to be applied, poured over, and used as a tool to work on ourselves to remain close and steadfast to Hashem. Korach's claims are also an existential threat by outside forces trying to convince us away from our faith in Hashem. Because the rest of the world, so to speak, applies logic, reasoning, and a way the world "ought to be," which all make sense but, ultimately, if not in the service of Hashem, are problematic. So even though Korach's claims may have 'made sense,'

fundamentally, they didn't, which connects to the next Parsha- Chukas.

In Parshas Chukas, we are taught about one of the categories of Mitzvos, Chukim (the other two being Mishpatim and Eidos¹).

These are the Mitzvos that have no reason other than because Hashem told us to do it (using a Red Heifer to purify a person is a unique request that is done because Hashem told us to). The Alter Rebbe's additional explanation isn't to think about Chukim as the only category of Mitzvos that we do simply because we have faith. All Mitzvos-even ones that have a reason associated with it or are logical, we still do because Hashem told us to. Because doing Mitzvos and serving Hashem protects us from the outside world. Which connects us to Balak.

Balak hired Balaam to curse the Jews, which ultimately became a blessing. Because as we saw in the earlier Parshas and Rashi there, Mitzvos differentiate a Jew from the outside world. Especially a Jew who practices Mitzvos with Yiras Hashem. Balaam's observation was "Mah Tovv Oholecha Yaakov" (how great are your tents Yaakov-meaning the Jews were different in how they treated one another and were modest. Because following Mitzvos because Hashem commands us to will differentiate us. The events of Balak were such that the curses were turned to blessings; that is, we will be protected from outside forces of evil if we serve Hashem and do His Mitzvos, leading us to this week's Parsha-Pinchas.

Pinchas acted zealously, which could be viewed as problematic, which is why Rashi tells us that Pinchas' lineage was

¹ Mishpatim are the Mitzvos that make sense in society, such as do not kill or do not steal. Eidos is the Mitzvos relating to events that took place,

testifying to Hashem's miracles-such as the Mitzvah of Korban Pesach.

highlighted, to show that Hashem accepted his zealous act. Zeal has a time and place, but if done for the name of Hashem-it will manifest goodness. Zeal ultimately creates an impassable mote safeguarding us from outside forces of evil. Balaam tried to snag us (as explained in Rashi Bamidbar 25:1), but he didn't give up on trying to bring the Jews down because, ultimately, he knew that if the Jews sinned, they would be weakened. It was only on Balaam's advice that Moav had a chance to cause the Jews to fall, and that was through acts of promiscuity, which led the Jews quickly astray to serve Bal Peor. But the final sin was with a Midianite princess. One of the prices of Shimon brought to Moshe with a claim that if she was forbidden to him, Moshe should also be forbidden (as he had married the daughter of Yisro-a Midianite). Moshe (as explained in Rashi on 25:6) was at a loss for what to do (hence the weeping written in the Parsha). Pinchas then said due to what I saw, I know the law, based on what I was taught, and he took matters into his own hands and slew the sinners. Pinchas' response was entirely in line with the Torah-especially when Moshe was at a loss for what to do. Pinchas responded (according to Rashi) as he was taught. (Rashi derives much of his explanations from Sanhedrin). Therefore, at the beginning of our Parsha, Rashi's explanation answers whether Pinchas was allowed to do what he did. Pinchas was humiliated for responding as he did (by killing the sinners), much like Zimri 'mocked' Moshe by claiming his marriage to Zipporah (a Midianite convert) shouldn't

² Although Zipporah and Moshe got married before Matan Torah and she would have converted along with the rest of the nation at Matan Torah.

have been allowed². Yet the posuk delineates Pinchas' heritage and states that his act was lauded.

This is the subsequent chronological development as the nation continued to formalize before entering Eretz Yisrael. After the development of all the trials and methods by which the Jews were trying to connect to Hashem-there is the next step. That is, one must protect the Torah zealously for the sake of the Torah. Even though optically (and as evidenced by the fact that particular among the Jews humiliated Pinchas), Zimri's claim and act could have been construed as somehow correct, that was not true. Furthermore, there are forces from within that will try to make us sin³ (which is likened to the cunning nature of the Yetzer Hara- evil inclination-who will make something look like it is Torah or valid to Halacha, but truthfully it's a stumbling block to become distant from Hashem). The forces can be stimulated by 'outside nations' – like Moav (and Midian).

The rest of the Parsha has another counting of the Jews (census for love, and now to keep stock of who survived this plague, or as Rashi adds, now that Moshe was going to pass away, he needed to count how many Jews he will be returning to Hashem so to speak. He was entrusted with the nation from exodus, and now some people passed, so he must tell the "Owner"-Hashem- how many people are left. Rashi points out that the nickname given to each household is to give the name of Hashem to each family (Chanoch is called HaChanochi- the added Hey and Yud, and the beginning and end is

³ Great men, such as a prince from Shimon, will make it seem like the acts are ok. Similarly, the person being sinned with was from a house of royalty- seemingly giving credibility. But Rashi and the Torah

the name of Hashem). This addition to the name is a testament by Hashem that we are His people, even if the world's nations try to state otherwise. Hashem is with us, protects us, and is a witness to us.

Continuing, this Parsha adds a portion to every holiday Torah reading (the second Torah that is generally brought out) and every Rosh Chodesh (we read from this Parsha more than any other). Rabbi Yossi Holzberg from our Thursday night Shiur pointed out that there are 21 days of holidays (as enumerated in this Parsha) and 21 days from 17 Tamuz until 9 Av. The parallel is that just as 21 days in the calendar give us time to reconnect to Hashem outside of Shabbos. These calendar days serve as beacons to reconnect with Hashem, even when the mundane world has taken over. How appropriate that when we are shown the threat of outside forces, we read about the holidays, which are our beacons. Moreso- during the “three weeks” we are commemorating now, we mourn many tribulations that befell the Jews. The 21-day parallel is so that each day we are reminded that we are getting closer to Mashiach, just as we have 21 beacon days in our calendar.

May the final beacon shine, reuniting us with a rebuilt Beis Hamikdash Shlishi-Bimheira B’yameinu. Good Shabbos.