

Parshas Pinchas in a Nutshell

(Numbers 25:10–30:1)

Aaron's grandson Pinchas is rewarded for his act of zealotry in killing the Simeonite prince Zimri and the Midianite princess who was his paramour: G-d grants him a covenant of peace and the priesthood.

A census of the people counts 601,730 men between the ages of twenty and sixty. Moses is instructed on how the Land is to be divided by lottery among the tribes and families of Israel. The five daughters of Tzelaftchad petition Moses that they be granted the portion of the land belonging to their father, who died without sons; G-d accepts their claim and incorporates it into the Torah's laws of inheritance.

Moses empowers Joshua to succeed him and lead the people into the Land of Israel.

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If one sees a Jew zealous in his service of G-d, even a Jew with no claims to leadership or distinction, one must not dissuade or discourage him. For he, like Pinchas, is the bringer of true peace between G-d and His people, the peace which is the opposite of separation and exile. He is the harbinger of the Messianic Age, who "shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers" in the ultimate and everlasting peace.

-- The Rebbe

Anshei Lubavitch Congregation

Rabbi Levi and Leah Neubort

Adult education:

Rabbi Avrohom and Rivky Bergstein

Youth Outreach:

Rabbi Eli and Ruty Steinhauser

Shabbos Schedule

Erev Shabbos – July 7 / Tammuz 18

Candle Lighting 8:13 pm

Mincha 7:30 pm

Shabbos Day – July 8 / Tammuz 19

Shacharis 10:00 am*

Torah Reading 11:00 am

Kiddush 12:10 pm

Mincha 8:15 pm

Pirkei Avos/Rabbi's Drasha ... 8:40 pm

Shabbos Ends 9:20 pm

*Latest morning Shema is now **9:14 AM**. Be sure to recite the Shema at or before that time (even if at home).

Weekday Schedule (not on a holiday):

Minyan

Shacharis (Mon-Fri) 6:15 am

Shacharis (Sunday) 9:00 am

Mincha (Sun-Thurs) 1:45 pm

Maariv (Sun-Thurs) 9:15 pm

Bulletin

*This week's Bulletin
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The Parshah concludes with a detailed list of the daily offerings, and the additional offerings brought on Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh (first of the month), and the festivals of Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret. ❖

We are in the Three weeks.



**Join us each weekday morning Mon-Fri as we delve into the mysteries of Chassidic concepts.
5:55 am,
followed immediately by Shacharis.**

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Halachic Zmanim

Shabbos, July 8, 2023

Eastern Daylight Savings

Earliest Tallis 4:21 AM

Latest Morning Shema 9:14 AM

Earliest Mincha (Gedola) . 1:40 PM

Plag Hamincha 7:01 PM

Earliest Evening Shema 9:04 PM

Chassidic Masters

The Zealot

*Based on the teachings of
the Lubavitcher Rebbe
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*G-d spoke to Moses, saying:
"Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son
of Aaron the kohen, turned away
My wrath from the children of
Israel with his zealotry for My sake
. . . Therefore . . . I shall grant him
My covenant of peace . . ."
Numbers 25:11–12*

Pinchas's deed evokes many associations — courage, decisiveness and religious passion are several that come to mind—but peace hardly seems one of them. Pinchas, after all, killed two people. True, what he did was condoned by Torah law, and his doing so saved many lives; still, one does not usually think of homicide as a peaceful act.

As the Torah tells it (see Numbers 25; Rashi *ibid.*; Talmud, Sanhedrin 81b–82b and 106a), the wicked prophet Balaam, having failed to undermine the people of Israel's special relationship with G-d by harping on their past sins, had an idea. "Their G-d abhors promiscuity," he said to Balak, the Moabite king who had hired him to place a curse on Israel. Corrupt them with the daughters of your realm, and you will provoke His wrath upon them.

This time Balaam succeeded. Many Jews, particularly from the tribe of Simeon, were enticed by the Midianite harlots who descended upon the Israelite camp in the Shittim valley, and were even

induced to serve Baal Peor, the pagan god of their consorts. When tribunals were set up by Moses to try and punish the idolaters, Zimri, the leader of Simeon, sought to legitimize his tribe's sins by publicly taking a Midianite woman into his tent, before the eyes of Moses and the eyes of the entire community of Israel.

Moses and the nation's elders were at a loss as of what to do. Torah law does not provide for any conventional, court-induced punishment for such an offender. There is a law that gives license for "zealots to smite him," but this provision eluded Moses and the entire Jewish leadership. Only Pinchas remembered it, and had the fortitude to carry it through. He killed Zimri and the Midianite woman, stopping a plague that had begun to rage as the result of G-d's wrath against His people.

The Grandfather Issue

The Talmud, referring to G-d's opening words to Moses quoted above, asks: The Torah has already told us who Pinchas is, back in the sixth chapter of Exodus and again, but a few short verses before, in Numbers 25:7. Why does the Torah again refer to him as "Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron?"

Rashi, quoting the Talmud and Midrash, explains:

*Because the tribes of Israel were
mocking him, saying: Have you seen
this son of the fatterer, whose
mother's father fattened calves for
idolatrous sacrifices, and now he
goes and kills a prince in Israel?!
Therefore, G-d traced his lineage to
Aaron.*

(Pinchas's maternal grandfather was Jethro, who prior to his conversion to Judaism was a pagan priest.)

This explanation, however, seems to raise more questions than it answers:

a) What set "the tribes of Israel" against Pinchas? The animosity of one tribe, the tribe of Simeon, would be understandable: he killed their leader and put an end to their pagan orgy. But why was he condemned by the entire community of Israel, most of whom were outraged by Zimri's act and were doubtless grateful for Pinchas's stopping the plague?

b) Of what possible relevance is Jethro's past? If Pinchas acted wrongly, then he is guilty of much worse than having a grandfather who fattened calves for slaughter. "Murderer" would be a more apt epithet than "fattener's grandson." And if it was acknowledged that killing Zimri was the right thing to do, why was the young hero and savior of his people being mocked?

c) If, for whatever reason, Pinchas is to be faulted because of Jethro's idolatrous past, why dwell on the fact that he "fattened calves for slaughter"? What about the fact that he was a pagan priest who (as the Midrash tells us) had served every idol in the world?

d) Whatever the complaint against Pinchas was, how is it refuted by the fact that he was Aaron's grandson?

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Who Is a Zealot?

The nature of Zimri's crime made his killing an extremely sensitive moral issue. On the one hand, the Torah deems what he did deserving of death. On the other hand, it does not entrust the carrying out of the sentence to the normal judiciary process, ruling instead that "zealots should smite him." Who, then, qualifies as a zealot?

When a sentence is carried out after the due process of a trial and conviction, there is less of a need to dwell on the motives of the judges and executioner: they're going by the book, and we can check their behavior against the book. But the motives of the zealot who takes unilateral action are extremely important, for his very qualifications as a zealot hinge upon the question of what exactly prompted him to do what he did. Is he truly motivated to "still G-d's wrath," or has he found a holy outlet for his individual aggression? Is his act truly an act of peace, driven by the desire to reconcile an errant people with their G-d, or is it an act of violence, made kosher by the assumption of the label "zealot"?

The true zealot is an utterly selfless individual—one who is concerned only about the relationship between G-d and His people, with no thought for his own feelings on the matter. The moment his personal prejudices and inclinations are involved, he ceases to be a zealot.

(This may be why the law that "zealots smite him" falls under the unique legal category of halachah v'ein morin kein, "a law that is not instructed": if a would-be zealot comes to the court and inquires if he is permitted to kill the transgressor, he is not given license to do so (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Forbidden Relations, 12:5). Indeed, the very fact that he has come to ask disqualifies him—someone who needs to ensure, in advance, that he is backed by the court is no zealot. The true zealot has no thought for himself: not of his feelings on the matter, not of his personal safety, not even of the moral and spiritual implications of his act on his own self—he doesn't even care if what he is doing is legal or not. He is simply determined to put an end to a situation that incurs the divine wrath against Israel.)

Aaron's Grandson

According to this, the questions posed above answer each other.

The tribes of Israel knew that the case of Zimri warranted the law that "zealots smite him." But they were skeptical of Pinchas's motivations. Why is it, they asked, that no one—not Moses, not the elders, nor anyone in the entire leadership of Israel—was moved to assume the role of zealot, save for Pinchas, "the youngest of the band"? Was Pinchas the most caring and selfless one of them all? Far more likely, said they, that what we have here is an angry young man who thinks he found a Torah-sanctioned outlet for his aggression.

A bit of digging around in the skeletons of Pinchas's family closet only reinforced their initial doubts. Of course, they said. Look at his grandfather! Few professions are as inhumane as the fattening of calves for slaughter. The fact of Jethro's idolatry is not what is relevant here, but his nature and personality. Pinchas, the "tribes of Israel" reasoned, must have inherited his grandfather's natural cruelty, and proceeded to clothe it in the holy vestments of zealotry.

So G-d explicitly attached Pinchas's name to Aaron, the gentlest and most peace-loving man that Israel knew. Aaron, the "lover of peace and pursuer of peace, one who loves humanity and brings them close to Torah." In character and temperament, G-d was attesting, Pinchas takes after his other grandfather, Aaron. Not only is he not inclined to violence—it is the very antithesis of his natural temperament. Pinchas is a man of peace, who did what he did with the sole aim of "turning away My wrath from the children of Israel."

Two Hypocrites

This also explains the significance of another statement by Rashi. After emphasizing that Pinchas was Aaron's grandson, the Torah writes:

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“The name of the smitten Israelite, who was smitten with the Midianite, was Zimri the son of Salu, a tribal prince of the Simeonites.” On which Rashi comments, “On the same occasion that the righteous one’s lineage was cited in praise, the wicked ones lineage was cited in detriment.” But what detriment is there in Zimri’s being a Simeonite prince?

Those who looked with a negative eye on Pinchas’s motives saw his cruelty even more strongly underscored when contrasted with the motives of the man he killed. Pinchas slew a man while that man was engaged in an act of love; Pinchas was giving vent to his own violent passions, while Zimri acted out of a selfless concern for his constituents, putting his own life on the line (for surely he knew that some zealot might take it upon himself to kill him) to save his tribe through his bold attempt to legitimize their sins. If Pinchas did the right thing—these critics were saying—he did it for all the wrong reasons, while Zimri might have done a wrong thing, but was motivated by an altruistic love for his people.

G-d, who knows the heart of every man, spoke to dispel this distorted picture. Pinchas, He attested, inherited the peace-loving nature of his grandfather, while Zimri was every inch a descendant of Simeon, whom Jacob rebuked for his heated and violent nature. (“Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce,” said Jacob of Shimon and Levi, rebuking them for the massacre of Shechem and their plot against Joseph, “and their wrath, for it was cruel”—Genesis 49:5.)

Indeed, the Talmud describes a hypocrite as one who “does the deeds of Zimri, and asks to be rewarded like Pinchas.” Zimri’s kindness was the ultimate hypocrisy: instead of fulfilling his role as the leader of his people by prevailing upon them to cease the behavior that was destroying them, he pursued the fulfillment of his own passions without regard to the terrible consequences to their spiritual and physical wellbeing—all the while disguising his act as selfless and self-sacrificial. In contrast, Pinchas’s deed was “hypocritical” in the positive sense: ostensibly violent and cruel, but in truth a selfless act of peace. ❖

From Our Sages – Pinchas

Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aaron (Numbers 25:10)

Why does G-d refer to Pinchas as “the son of Elazar the son of Aaron”? Because the tribes of Israel were mocking him, saying, “Have you seen this son of the fattener, whose mother’s father (Jethro) fattened calves for idolatrous sacrifices, and now he goes and kills a prince in Israel?” Therefore, G-d traces his lineage to Aaron.

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 82b)

Few professions are as cruel and inhumane as the fattening of calves for slaughter. So when Pinchas slew Zimri, many said: “Look at this holy zealot! He acts as if motivated by the desire to avenge the honor of G-d and save the people, but in truth he has merely found a holy outlet for his cruel and violent nature. After all, it’s in his blood—just look at his maternal grandfather . . .” So G-d described him as “Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aaron” in order to attest that in character and temperament he actually took after his paternal grandfather—the compassionate and peace-loving Aaron.

The true greatness of Pinchas lay in that he acted in complete opposition to his nature, transcending his inborn instincts to bring peace between G-d and Israel.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe) ❖

The Three Weeks

“The Three Weeks” is an annual mourning period that falls out in the summer. This is when we mourn the destruction of the Holy Temple and our launch into a still-ongoing exile.

The period begins on the 17th of the Hebrew month of Tammuz, a fast day that marks the day when the walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Romans in 69 CE.

It reaches its climax and concludes with the fast of the 9th of Av, the date when both Holy Temples were set aflame. This is the saddest day of the Jewish calendar, and it is also the date that many other tragedies befell our people.

Observances:

There are various mourning-related customs and observances that are followed for the entire three-week period (until midday of the 10th of the Hebrew month of Av, or—if that date falls on Friday—the morning of that day). We do not cut our hair, purchase new clothes, or listen to music. No weddings are held.

The 17th of Tammuz

17 Tammuz is a fast day, on which we refrain from eating and drinking from dawn to nightfall. The fast commemorates five tragic events that occurred on this date, including Moses breaking the Tablets and breaching of the walls of Jerusalem.

The Nine Days

The final Nine Days of the Three Weeks are a time of intensified mourning. Starting on the first of Av, we refrain from eating meat or drinking wine, and from wearing freshly laundered clothes.

The 9th of Av

Nine Av is a more stringent fast than 17 Tammuz. It begins at sunset of the previous evening, when we gather in the synagogue to read the Book of Lamentations. Besides fasting, we abstain from additional pleasures: washing, applying lotions or creams, wearing leather shoes, and marital relations. Until midday, we sit on the floor or on low stools.

The Inner Message

There is more to the Three Weeks than fasting and lamentation. Our sages tell us that those who mourn the destruction of Jerusalem will merit seeing it rebuilt with the coming of Moshiach. May that day come soon, and then all the mournful dates on the calendar will be transformed into days of tremendous joy and happiness. ❖

Haftorah for Pinchas in a nutshell

I Kings 18:46-19:21

The prophet Elijah is the main protagonist of this week's haftorah. According to tradition, Elijah shared the same soul as Pinchas, the hero of this week's Torah portion. They also both zealously fought on G-d's behalf, while disregarding the dangers involved.

Following the showdown with the Baal prophets at Mount Carmel, which led to the execution of the Baal priests, the evil Queen Jezebel issued a death sentence for Elijah. Elijah fled to the Judean desert and asked G-d to take his life. While he slept, an angel awoke him and provided him with food and drink. Reenergized, Elijah went for forty days until he arrived at Mount Horeb (Sinai), and he slept in a cave on the mountain. And the word of G-d came to him and asked him for the purpose of his visit. "And [Elijah] said: 'I have been zealous for G-d, the Lord of Hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant. They have torn down Your altars and they have killed Your prophets by the sword, and I have remained alone, and they seek my life to take it.'"

Elijah was instructed to leave the cave and stand on the mountain: "Behold! G-d's Presence will pass." There was a great and strong wind splitting mountains and shattering boulders, but Elijah realized that G-d was not in the wind. Then came an earthquake followed by fire, but again Elijah understood that not in the earthquake nor the fire was G-d. After the fire there was a subtle silent voice, and Elijah realized that the Divine Presence had appeared.

G-d asked Elijah again for the purpose of his visit, and Elijah repeated his earlier response. G-d instructed Elijah to go to Damascus and anoint Hazael as king of Aram and Jehu as king of Israel and to anoint Elisha as a prophet in his stead. These three would continue Elijah's battle against the Baal.

Elijah followed the instructions and he immediately found Elisha and recruited him as his aide and eventual successor. ❖



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Marc S. Berman, Esq.
Attorney-at-Law
140 E. Ridgewood Ave.
Suite 415
Paramus, NJ 07652

Telephone: **(201) 797-4411**
msb@bermanlawoffice.com
www.bermanlawoffice.com
17-10 River Road, Suite 2C
Fair Lawn, NJ 07410

שבת שלום גוט שבת!



Good Shabbos to all!