

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	KETUVIM
Pinchas	11 July 2020	19 Tammuz 5780	Num. 25:10-29:40	Jer. 1:1-2:3	John 2:13-22

The sages teach that Phinehas consulted with Moshe before he slew Zimri and Cozbi. The Talmud¹ discusses the circumstances of action taken by Phinehas, as will be explained below, however, our discussion will be on Phinehas, his self-sacrifice, and its effect. The preceding *parashat* Balak, the Torah describes the story of Balak in detail because there are lessons essential for the Yisraelites to learn before they enter the Promised Land. This week's *parashat* Phinehas also teaches us lessons to learn in order to enter our personal "promised land" as well as to hasten the final entry into the Promised Land with the advent of Messiah.

First, our devotion to Hashem must not be limited by the Torah. Phinehas asked Moshe his intention of slaying the offenders. Moshe responded that while the Torah allows someone overcome by jealousy to slay someone in the act of relations with non-Yisraelite, no one can be taught to do this as this is "a law that is not taught."² Once the offender, in this case Zimri, has stopped the sexual act with the woman, Cozbi, he cannot be tried by the earthly court, and his punishment is left to the heavenly court. Therefore, anyone who kills him at that point is himself (Phinehas) liable to the death penalty. In other words, by slaying Zimri, Phinehas was doing something not required of him by the Torah, disapproved of by the sages, and he therefore was risking his own life.

Yet, by acting out of zeal and ignoring the sages and Moshe, Phinehas put an end to the sinful behavior of the Yisraelites, halted the plague, and earned himself the priesthood and his descendants which showed that he was fully vindicated of his zeal.

The Torah, as we know, is Hashem's instruction book for the world at large and the Yisraelites. It teaches us how to relate the world and accomplish our purpose here. It conveys these lessons to us via our intellect. We read the Torah, understand what it says, and follow it. If we do not understand parts of it, we continue to study and seek instructions from its teachers until we do understand it.

There is a spiritual dimension to the relationship between Hashem and the Yisraelites that transmits through the Torah which transcends beyond the realm of intellect. For we are bound supra-rationally to Hashem, and if the implication of this bond does not always seem rational, we shouldn't be surprised by it. The Torah speaks to our intellect, but at the same time, it opens windows to the supra-intellectual dimension of our relationship with Hashem.

The Torah demands that we sacrifice ourselves only in certain cases: adultery, idolatry, or murder, we are required to give up our lives rather than transgress these sins. Also, if the ruling regime, as Romans did, has declared an all-out war on the Torah and has forbidden its practices, then we are required to risk our lives for any aspect of its observances. We are not required to risk our lives and must in fact transgress the Torah's laws in order to stay alive in all other cases. When the Torah demands that we sacrifice our lives, is because in these cases it makes sense: self-sacrifice, is, in these cases, rational.

However, when we feel so strongly connected to Hashem that reason and rationales no longer impress him, when our consciousness has been overtaken by his essential, intrinsic, supra-rational identification with

¹ BT, Sanhedrin 81b; 82a

² Ibid, 82a

Hashem, he will not care whether the Torah requires him to sacrifice his life in any particular instance. His only concern will be for Hashem, as Phinehas did, his own life is of no concern.

The goal of life is to make this world and ourselves into a home for Hashem. The self-sacrifice is what will bring about the messianic future, for in order to achieve the heightened Divine consciousness that is the goal of creation, we must break out of restrictive rationality and open ourselves up to the world of Divine union that exists beyond the realm of reason.

This is the lesson of Phinehas as this is the very first time that the Torah has indicated that it is necessary to go beyond its dictates. The Yisraelites heard about the messianic prophecies of Balaam and they realized that, the goal of imminent conquest of Canaanites, can be attained only if they unsheathe their true inner identification with Hashem and His objectives and not limit themselves to the letter of the law.

Just as Hashem assisted Phinehas, He will assist those who exhibit self-sacrifice in the face of adversity. Hashem will bless their efforts with success, for those who do not bow to the enemies, ultimately prevail. This is why the story of Phinehas is split between *parashat* Balak and *parashat* Pinehas, by leaving his self-sacrifice in the previous *parashah*, and now focus on its reward, to teach us that self-sacrifice succeeds and will carry us through to the ultimate Redemption.

The Kabbalah expresses self-sacrifice as the *yeichidah*, the highest of the five levels of the soul. *Yechidah* is the interface between the soul and Hashem, in which the individual is aware of himself only as a “part of Hashem” – paradoxically both conscious of himself (as a part of Hashem) and not (totally dissolved in Hashem’s reality). There are four lower levels of the soul, *chayah* (will – essentially one with Hashem), *neshamah* (intellect and awareness of Hashem), *ruach* (emotion and morality), and *nefesh* (action or natural instinct). *Yechidah*, in contrast, is too sublime to be expressed in any one soul-power, but instead encompasses them all. Generally, we are not conscious of this aspect of the soul, but in the future this level will become the dominant aspect of our consciousness. Also, the four levels of the soul will be infused with the consciousness of *yeichidah*. The four spiritual worlds of *Atzilut* (Emanation), *Beriah* (Creation), *Yetzirah* (Formation), and *Asiyah* (Action) will be infused with the transcendent Divine Light.

It is written (Num. 25:11), “Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aharon the *kohen*.” The Zohar³ questions why the Torah says, “the son of... the son of...” when it should have been enough to say, “the son of Eleazar,” then we can easily deduce that Phinehas is a grandson of Aharon, knowing that Eleazar is a son of Aharon. R’ Shim’on alludes to a deeper meaning involving Eleazar’s two brothers, Nadav and Abihu, who were consumed by a divine blaze because they “offered strange fire before YHWH.” (Lev. 10:1)

The sages explain in the midrash that when Nadav and Abihu died, they were unmarried. The Kabbalah explains: If a married man dies childless, his soul moves about aimlessly through the world, unless his brother redeems through performing levirate marriage. The marriage consists of marrying a widowed wife, impregnates her, and consciously draws that homeless soul into the embryo. This process of reincarnation provides the soul with another opportunity to fulfill itself on earth by engendering new life.

Since Nadav and Abihu were not married and they died childless, their souls could not be redeemed by levirate marriage. Instead, the Zohar teaches, their “lost” souls were redeemed and “restored” by being

³ Zohar, Vol. 3, 213a

reincarnated (or “impregnated”) in their nephew Phinehas. So Phinehas was not only the “son of Eleazar,” but also, in a sense, the “son of Aharon.”

R' Shim'on said, “If a person obtains a recycled soul and fails to have it rectified within, it is as though he falsifies the truth of the King.” Meaning, if a person’s soul is reincarnated because he failed to live virtuously enough, and the next recipient of this “recycled soul” fails to rectify the fault, this second person, as it were, “falsifies the King.” That is, he ruins and betrays the sacred opportunity bestowed upon the soul by the Divine King as it is written, when he “has found what was lost and has lied concerning it, or did swear falsely... he shall be guilty” (Lev. 6:2-4).

“Come and see: If one acts zealously for the name of Kadosh Barchu, even though he is not worthy of greatness or deserving of it, he will surely gain and obtain it. Phinehas did not deserve it at that time, but because he acted zealously for the name of his Master, he gained all and attained all. All was rectified within him, and he was privileged to serve in the supreme priesthood. From that moment on, Phinehas son of Eleazar son of Aharon the priest – for he consummated two, since he acted zealously for the Holy Name of his Master, rectifying what had been contorted.”⁴

“If one acts zealously,” like Phinehas did by killing the fornicating couple Zimri and Cozbi, he assuaged Hashem’s wrath. As a reward for his zealous act, he was granted a covenant of eternal priesthood (Num. 25:13), which until then he did not deserve. The Talmud⁵ says that Phinehas was not elevated to the priesthood until he killed Zimri.

“All was rectified within him” – It alludes to the reincarnation of the souls of Nadav and Abihu within Phinehas. Therefore, the Torah by saying, “the son of Eleazar, the son of Aharon,” implies that Phinehas “consummated two” – that is, he fulfilled his own soul by becoming the complete “son of Eleazar”, and he restored the souls of Nadav and Abihu, “rectifying what had been contorted” by their fatal sin and thereby becoming, in a sense, the “son of Aharon.”

It is written (Num. 25:12-13), “Therefore say, ‘See, I am giving him My covenant of peace, and it shall be to him and to his seed after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was ardent for his Elohim, and made atonement for the children of Yisrael.’” In literal sense, the word “therefore” is because Phinehas had zealously avenged Hashem’s vengeance, he therefore merited His covenant of peace. The sages question the word “therefore,” since it is followed by “because” which connotative word for “therefore.” Thus, they conclude both verses 12 and 13 can’t mean to establish the reason for Hashem’s covenant with Phinehas is because he avenged His vengeance. So, the word לָכֵן (*la-chen*) can’t be used as an introduction, but is rather an expression used for an oath. The Midrash⁶ says the word *la-chen* is nothing but an oath as it is written, “Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli,” (1Sam 3:14).

Now, since the word *la-chen* is not superfluous, we need to understand why an oath was needed. The sages say that an oath was necessary to strengthen the covenant of peace with Phinehas and all of his future offspring even if his descendants would not be worthy of it. Hashem would nevertheless uphold the oath. However, this is not enough.

⁴ Ibid., 213b

⁵ BT, Zevachim 101b

⁶ Shemos Rabbah 6:4

The Talmud⁷ explains that Phinehas did not become a *kohen* (priest) until the incident of Zimri. Because the *kehunah* (priesthood) belonged to Aharon and his descendants (Lev. 8:12, 30). Phinehas, as Aharon's grandson, was already alive when Aharon and his sons were anointed as such he was not anointed along with them, so he remained a non-*kohen*. Thus, Phinehas acquired *kehunah* after he performed his act of vengeance.

Or HaChaim explains the legal process by which Phinehas became a *kohen*. The first is by way of a waiver which means that Hashem would waive the disadvantage, that is penalty. This should not be taken literally, as Phinehas was not left out of the anointment due to any fault of his own. In fact, the Zohar⁸ says that it was beneficial for Phinehas not to have been a *kohen* when he killed Zimri. Because if a *kohen* kills another person loses his sanctity as a *kohen*.

As a grandson of Aharon, Phinehas' basic status as a *kohen* would stem from being a descendant of Aharon, and he would now be formally sanctified to serve in that role. But Hashem decided, for reasons known only to Him, to withheld the *kehunah* from Phinehas at that time. Now, though, Hashem would waive that restriction, and Phinehas would take on the status of a *kohen* by virtue of being Aharon's grandson.

The second way is by way of a gift, meaning, Hashem would give Phinehas a new status as a *kohen*, which was unrelated to the fact that he was descended from Aharon, just as the *kehunah* has been given to Aharon even though his father and brother were not *kohanim*.

In a practical monetary transaction, if something is given by "way of a waiver", then it does not need a *kinyan* (act of acquisition) in order for it to be legally binding. For example, paying money is a valid *kinyan* for land. The sale or gift is not final until a *kinyan* is performed. While a *kinyan* is necessary to finalize a transfer of property, no *kinyan* is needed to finalize a waiving of a right. Thus, if a lender declares that he waives the right to collect his debt, the borrower is automatically released from his obligation to pay, with no need for any *kinyan*.

But when something is given by "way of a gift", it does need a *kinyan* in order for it to be binding, and as long as no *kinyan* was done for the recipient to acquire it from the giver, the recipient does not gain ownership of the gift, for he acquires only what has already reached his possession. Thus, if Phinehas acquired the *kehunah* by means of Hashem waiving the original disadvantage, then no *kinyan* was necessary, but if he acquired the *kehunah* as a newly given gift, then some form of *kinyan* was needed in order for him to acquire it.

There are two disadvantages in acquiring the *kehunah* by way of a gift. First, there might be those who raise a challenge against him, just as there were those had initially raised a challenge against Aharon, and Phinehas would need Hashem's intervention to discredit them. Phinehas, by killing Zimri, bore hatred from the tribe of Shimon, and the people who had tried to kill him.

Second, if Phinehas were to become a *kohen* by way of a gift, there is a loophole to say that the matter of Phinehas' *kehunah* is something unique Hashem invented to designate a new *kohen*, and it would therefore include only the point that it innovates, meaning Phinehas himself would be a *kohen*, but not his descendants.

⁷ BT, Zevachim 101b

⁸ Zohar, Vol. 3, 214a and 221b

Therefore, Hashem, by saying, "I am giving him My covenant of peace, and it shall be to him and to his seed after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood," Hashem is giving Phinehas the *kehunah* as a way of a waiver. By way of a waiver, there was no need for a formal act of *kinyan*; there was no concern for challengers; and the *kehunah* would extend not only to Phinehas himself, but to his offspring as well.

It is written, "Command the children of Yisrael, and you shall say to them, 'Take heed to bring My offering, My food for My offerings made by fire as a sweet fragrance to Me, at their appointed time'" (Num. 28:2). Often, people say that "God in the 'Old Testament'" (Christian terminology used) is a mean, unmerciful, and uncaring God," Heaven forbid. If that is the case, Adahm and Chava should have died immediately after their sin (Gen. Ch. 3), instead Adahm died at the age of 930. If Hashem is unmerciful, we all should have died immediately after committing a sin. Questions we need to ask ourselves are "How many times did I sin in my actions today? Or How many times did I have sinful thoughts?" The above verse show how merciful Hashem is.

"Command the children of Yisrael" – In previous chapter 27, Moshe requested, beside asking for a physical, human leader, i.e., Yehoshua (Joshua), he also requested that Hashem ensure that the people always recognize that they are subject to Him as their Divine leader. That Hashem runs the world and that all aspects of life occur through Divine providence. Hashem granted this request by instituting the daily sacrifices, which correspond to the daily prayers. The daily/prayer rituals enhance our awareness and recognition that there is Elohim in the world.

"My food" – The sacrifices are termed Hashem's "bread," for just the food we eat strengthens the connection between the body and soul, drawing the life-force of the soul into the body. The sacrificial service, and the prayer that correspond to it, draws Divine life-force into the world. The daily sacrifices/prayers express the eternal and inviolate bond between Hashem and the Yisraelites. Its daily observance therefore gives Hashem great pleasure, and He even calls it His daily "food," the nourishment that "sustains" Him.

The sages in the Talmud explain that the daily prayers were instituted to parallel the daily sacrifices in the absence of the Temple.⁹ It follows that our daily prayers also "sustain" Hashem. If we ever doubt how important our prayers can be, even common middle of the week prayers, we should recall that Hashem considers them vital to the world's existence and maintenance. They are as important to Him as our daily bread is to us. Our Messiah, Yehushua said, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). The "bread," our Master is referring to is not just a physical sustenance. But we are asking Hashem to give us the strength to pray, as we often say, "I will pray later."

The blood of the sacrifice is termed "My offering," and its fat-parts as "My food for My fire-offerings," (Lev. 3:16). The "appointed time" (Num. 28:4) is once in the morning and once in the afternoon, as the "morning" symbolizes the bright, happy times in life, while the "evening" symbolizes the dark, difficult times. We are to serve Hashem when things are going well, as well as we keep serving Him during the difficult periods in life. This constancy cements our relationship with Him and enables us to develop a true feeling of closeness to Him.

"Made by fire as a sweet fragrance to Me" – The Maggid of Mezeritch says "a fire offering" (v. 8) is when we serve Hashem with warmth and enthusiasm, this is pleasing to Hashem. This is why our Master said,

⁹ BT, Berachot 26b

“But let your word ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No.’” (Matt. 5:37) Meaning, our hearts are to be warm and enthusiastic toward Hashem. If not, our hearts would stray, as our Master warns, “And what goes beyond these is from the wicked one” (ibid.).