

# הַיָּהוּדִים THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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## COMPARING THE DEVOTION OF PINCHAS TO THAT OF ADAM (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

It is written, "Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the priest saw, and he stood up from amid the assembly and he took a spear in his hand" (Numbers 25:7). The Gemara explains: "He saw what was occurring and remembered the Halachah" (Sanhedrin 82a). There are several points that must be understood about this Parsha, in which it is said, "Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the priest turned back My wrath ... I give him My covenant of peace" (Numbers 25:11-12).

1. The statement "He saw what was occurring and remembered the Halachah" must be properly understood. What did he see? What case in history was similar, so much so that from it he could conclude what was appropriate to do concerning Zimri ben Salu? What exactly was the Halachah that he remembered?

2. On the verse that states, "he took a spear," the Sages have explained: "By the merit of the spear that he took in his 'hand', the priests merited the 'shoulder' from the portion of the sacrifices that are given to the priest" (Rashi, Deuteronomy 18:3). What is the connection here? Not only that, but was there really a need to state "in his hand," for is there another way to take a spear?

3. On the verse that states, "and he took a spear in his hand," the Zohar says that Pinchas saw the letter **מ** (*mem*) flying up to the sky. He then seized it and joined it to his name (Zohar III:237a), which had the numerical value of 208 (also equal to the numerical value of the letters **ר** and **ח**). Together these three letters yield the word **רַמְרוּר** ("spear", having a numerical value of 248 in Hebrew), which means that he invested all his 248 members in the performance of this mitzvah. Now to accomplish it, 365 tendons are also required. Where, therefore, were Pinchas' tendons to be found during the performance of this mitzvah?

In addition, concerning the verse that states, "Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the priest," the Gemara asks why the Torah highlights the fact that he was descendant of Aaron (Sanhedrin 82a). The Gemara answers: Because the tribes disparaged him by saying, "Have you seen that son of Puti, whose mother's father fattened calves for idol worship?" The verse therefore found it necessary to call to mind that he was a descendant of Aaron. Yet why did this criticism of Pinchas express itself at that time? It could have manifested itself well before! Furthermore, did he not at that time have the status of being Aaron's grandson? It must also be understood why, in the name Pinchas, the letter *yud* is smaller than the others, and why the *vav* in the word *shalom* ("peace") is broken (Kiddushin 66b).

We shall attempt to explain all of the above as best we can, doing so by initially discussing the sin of the first man when he ate of the Tree of Knowledge.

When one performs a mitzvah, it must be done with complete devotion, entirely for the love of Heaven. One must also invest one's

248 members and 365 tendons in humbling oneself completely and by putting all one's being into a state of humility. This is why we are greatly surprised in examining the story of the first man who ate of the Tree of Knowledge. The Holy One, blessed be He, had told him, "Of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil you shall not eat of it, for on the day of your eating of it, you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Furthermore, this mitzvah is called an easy mitzvah (Shabbat 55a), at least with respect to the greatness of Adam. And yet Adam did not know how to hold himself back, finally eating of it. How could he, who had been fashioned by the hands of the Holy One, blessed be He (Kohelet Rabba 3:14), not manage to accomplish a mitzvah as simple as this? And even if it was difficult, he should have carried out G-d's will and refrain from eating! Moreover, G-d had told him, "on the day of your eating of it, you shall surely die." Why then, instead of making him die immediately, was G-d content by cursing him in saying, "By the sweat of your brow will you eat bread," death coming only afterwards?

When the man ate from the Tree of Knowledge, he was encouraged by his wife (Genesis 3:6). Now the Sages have taught us that women are more intelligent than men (Bereshith Rabba 18:1), therefore it seemed evident to him that her wisdom was encouraging him to undertake this action in order to better serve G-d. It was with this goal in mind – to better serve G-d – that he assumed that he should act with complete devotion, namely with all his 248 members and 365 tendons. Yet to him, this could only have been possible if he ate of the Tree of Knowledge. Certainly he knew that he thereby put himself in mortal danger, yet nevertheless he was ready to render his life unto G-d in order to serve Him in the highest way possible, in the spirit of what Sages spoke of: "One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the life of the World to Come" (Perkei Avoth 4:17).

However, beginning from the moment that he ate from the Tree of Knowledge and his understanding was increased, he very well understood and felt the insignificance of his state, as it is written, "And they knew that they were naked" (Genesis 3:7). On this, the Midrash explains as follows: "They had a single mitzvah and they had been stripped of it" (Bereshith Rabba 19:6), meaning that he understood that from that moment on, he was truly stripped of mitzvot. Despite this feeling, far from reversing, he thought that since he had fallen and was no longer elevating himself, he should from then on continue without stop to perform the will of the Creator, which is why he wanted to taste of the Tree of Life. Now such a gesture would have been very arrogant. Not content with having transgressed G-d's commandment, he also didn't want to be punished for it. This is why the Eternal chased him out of the Garden of Eden in saying, "And now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the

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Tree of Life ...” (Genesis 3:22). Yet He did not immediately punish him with death, for Adam had acted with a positive goal in mind, in order to further elevate himself.

We see from this that if a man acts contrary to the will of G-d, even with all his heart, it is a mitzvah that is founded on a sin (Sukkah 30a). In addition, this sin engenders others (Perkei Avoth 4:2). At that moment, even if he wants to increase his fear of G-d, he will not be able to do so, and this will be counted unto him as a serious transgression.

Having said all this, let us at now explain what Pinchas the son of Elazar did. To answer our first question, Pinchas saw something being done, meaning the act of Adam who had wanted, by going against G-d's will, to increase his fear of Heaven, something that he was not able to do. Pinchas recalled the Halachah according to which one must not go against G-d's commandment, even when done with devotion to G-d, and that if one wants to absolutely prove one's devotion, one must accompany it with total humility, without the slightest trace of arrogance or vanity. One's devotion should be used solely to perform G-d's will.

Having seen all this, Pinchas fervently prayed in order to prepare himself for the momentous act that he planned to undertake, for he needed much mercy from Heaven to obtain the miracle that they (Zimri and the Midianite woman) not die by his hand, since that would have rendered him impure because he was a priest. Then, he went to act with total devotion, with all this 248 members and 365 tendons, without the least bit of pride. This is the sense of the words, “He took a spear [רַמְתָּ] in his hand”: He took with him his 248 members (the numerical value of רַמְתָּ). And to answer our third question (that is, where were his 365 tendons?), we note that the text employs the word בִּידוֹ (“in his hand”). Now it is obvious that he took the spear in his hand and not in his mouth or in any other way. Yet the word בִּידוֹ, in adding the values of its letters (22) to the word itself (1), has the same numerical value of the word גִּידוֹ (“his tendon”, whose value is 23). This indicates that he used all his 365 tendons equally, with all his heart. This is why the priests truly merited the shoulder from sacrificed animals, for it represents the arm of the animal (the extension of the hand), which symbolizes strength and devotion.

At that very moment, the Holy One, blessed be He – Who probes hearts and minds (Psalms 7:10) – acknowledged the excellence of Pinchas' action. Having seen Moses and the Sages abstaining from all action, Pinchas decided to intervene, as the saying advises: “In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man” (Perkei Avoth 2:5). It is true that by this act Pinchas put himself in danger, for whoever instructs Halachah before his teacher, which is what Pinchas did before Moses, is liable to death (Berachot 31b). Yet despite everything, in view of the sin committed by Zimri, which put the all of the Children of Israel in danger, he decided that it was worth the risk of incurring death in order to save the people from destruction.

This was how Pinchas conducted himself, contrary to Adam who incited a curse and committed a serious transgression. Adam, moreover, hoped for a reward, whereas Pinchas acted solely for the love of Heaven, without awaiting any recompense and by fervently praying so as not to cause harm. Then the Holy One, blessed be He, truly rewarded him by adding the letter *yud* to his name, which evokes the Name Y-H, whose numerical value is 15, like the word *ga'avah* (“pride”). This signifies that G-d would protect him from that time on from pride, for all his actions demonstrated humility, love of Heaven, and the desire to increase G-d glory. This behavior is the mark of true devotion, and in fact G-d witnessed concerning him by stating: “He was jealous with My jealousy” (Numbers 25:11), meaning that all his actions were truly for G-d's Honor.

In addition, Pinchas merited long life, and the Angel of Death never took hold of him (Zohar III:214a), for we know that Pinchas is Eliyahu (ibid., Perkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 47). This is opposed to Adam, whose days were shortened and who died, and concerning whom it is said, “And now, lest [פָּנָ] he put forth his hand.” For Pinchas, his days were lengthened, and it is פִּינָ of Pinchas (פִּינָחָס) that repaired the פָּנָ of

Adam. Furthermore, חַיִּים has the same numerical value as חַיִּים (“life”), meaning that Pinchas had merited, through his own zealous act for the sake of Heaven, life for innumerable years.

If we are correct with regards to this, we will understand what the Tanna says when he states, “Reflect upon three things and you will not come to sin: Know from where you came, to where you are going, and before whom you are destined to give an accounting” (Perkei Avoth 3:1). We understand that a man's knowing where he is going (and before Whom he will be called to give an accounting) can prevent him from sinning, for otherwise he would incur punishment. But how can “from where you came” have the same effect? According to what we have said above, we understand perfectly well that the fear of punishment is not enough to avoid sin. One must also behave with complete humility (as Pinchas) and not with pride (as Adam). This attitude has an effect on the perfection of mitzvot performance, and consequently when a man considers that he originated from a putrid drop, he will inevitably humble himself and act in a spirit of humility and self-abasement solely in order to perform G-d's will.

According to this, we also understand why the letter *yud* is written smaller than the rest of the letters in Pinchas' name. It is because it alludes to the humility that is in him. And why is the letter *vav* in the word *shalom* broken? It is because of the greatness of Pinchas, for, as we know, a broken *vav* takes on the aspect of a *yud*, consequently it is considered as both a *vav* and a *yud*, which together have the numerical value of 16. This value is equal to the sum of the initials in the verse חֵיל בָלַע וִיקָאֵנוּ (“He devoured wealth, but will disgorge it” – Job 20:15), and these initials form an acronym that is particularly tied to the reparation of sins dealing with the covenant of circumcision. Now we know that the essential thing concerning Adam's sin (according to the Arizal) was that he didn't wait until the evening of Shabbat to perform the mitzvah to “be fruitful and multiply,” without which a light would have surrounded him. He did it before Shabbat began, which gave the serpent the possibility of desiring Eve (Bereshith Rabba 18:6), and in this Adam violated that covenant, which is the foundation of, and comprises the 613 mitzvot. Instead of arriving at *sheleimut* (“perfection”), which is similar to *shalom* (“peace”) – as it is written, “He makes peace in His heights” (Job 25:2) – he arrived at calamity and death. This is why Pinchas did not violate the covenant of circumcision (Zohar III:220a), why he showed himself to be jealous for G-d's cause with humility, and why he received G-d's “covenant of peace” (Numbers 25:12). The Hebrew word *brit* (“covenant”) has the numerical value of 613 (including the word itself in the count), and so Pinchas received peace (*shalom*) and perfection (*sheleimut*) as well as חֵ-בָ-וּ (by the broken *vav*). He thereby merited repairing that which Adam had ruined.

Yet the Children of Israel, drawn by deception and deceit, gathered together around Zimri, who had asked Moses, “Who allowed you the daughter of Jethro?” (Sanhedrin 82a). Because the Children of Israel were arrogant, they did not view the action of Pinchas in a positive light, nor did they tell Zimri that Moses had married before the giving of the Torah, and that moreover he had done so in holiness. They preferred to scorn Pinchas by recalling the other side of his ancestry, for they wanted to remind him “where he came from.” They wanted to remind him that he came from a totally different side, not from Elazar and Aaron, but from the side of Jethro, who was the priest of an idolatrous cult. On his part, Pinchas continued to act with humility, self-abasement, and total devotion. He thus demonstrated to all men the path to follow for all generations, namely to know when one must truly rise up, and when one should be on guard that this elevation not undermine holiness. He showed us how not to act like Adam, who harmed this holiness and made himself liable for death, but rather how to act as he (Pinchas) did, who demonstrated his jealousy for G-d and merited all the good reserved for the righteous.

## IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM RABBI ISRAEL ZEITOUN

## THE MORAL OF THE STORY *A teaching of the Maguid of Dubno*

**D**uring his youth, Rabbi Israel was a delicate boy who sought the companionship of Torah scholars because he thirsted for knowledge. The vanities of this world did not interest him at all, and he desired nothing other than to grow in Torah.

Rabbi Israel was a sage who literally absorbed Torah, and he quickly distinguished himself as a great Torah scholar. Every Shabbat evening, he hastened to the house of study where Rabbi Yeshua Bessis and Rabbi Avraham Cohen Itshaki taught Kabbalah and its mysteries. Rabbi Israel put his head in his hands and very attentively drank in the words of his teachers.

He studied the Torah that his teacher Avraham Hadjaj instructed him. A deep affection developed between them, and Rabbi Israel loved him as a father, without reservation. He even took it upon himself to publish his Rav's book, entitled Saro Shel Avraham.

During the day, Rabbi Israel earned his living as a wax merchant. During that time, he understood the workings of the business world very well, and learned how to avoid the scams of the business world. Years later, when he was presiding over the Rabbinic court of Tunis, that experience helped him in arriving at judicial decisions and to properly carry out his inquiries.

Rabbi Israel was a fair judge. He was upright and honest, with nothing to hide. The Rabbis of Tunis relied on him and named him as head of the Rabbanim. When controversy arose among the Rabbanim, he fled from all disputes as if from a fire. When he himself had opponents, he forgave them, and through the love that he showed them he managed to bring them close to him.

Rabbi Israel maintained a correspondence with Rabbi Shmuel Salant of Jerusalem, with whom he exchanged messages dealing with all aspects of Halachah. He also maintained a correspondence with the Rabbanim of Morocco and Livorno in Italy.

Famous for his merit, his modesty, and his uprightness, he continued to be loved and appreciated even after his death in 5861 (1921) at the age of 80.

His Hilloula is celebrated on Av 18.

May his merit protect us. Amen.

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

Why did Pinchas merit that which neither Moses nor Aaron did, as it is written, "He said He would destroy them – had not Moses, His chosen one, stood in the breach before Him to turn away His wrath from destroying" (Psalms 106:23)? More than once did he behave in the same manner as Pinchas, saving Israel on several occasions and turning away Hashem's anger (with the golden calf, the spies, and other circumstances), yet he was never offered a covenant of peace. The Midrash also has the Holy One, blessed be He, saying in our Parsha, "He is just in taking his wages," which is quite surprising.

The Maggid of Dubno explains this Midrash to us with the following parable.

A man once had many creditors, and each time they came to collect their due, the man's friends came to defend him by finding excuses and managing to appease his creditors. Finally, the day came when his friends were unsuccessful in acting as a bulwark against his creditors, and the creditors pressed to collect what they were owed. The man was very bitter. One of his friends nevertheless reached a compromise with the creditors, to the effect that he, the friend, would pay ten percent of all the man's debts to the creditors and the rest would be considered as null and void. This friend rendered a greater service to the man than did his other friends, for they managed to get the debts postponed to a latter date, yet they remained intact. On the contrary, the man's other friend paid his debts from out of his own pocket and eliminated them all, so well in fact that from that point on the man would never again hear the voice of his creditors.

When the children of Israel made the golden calf, the attribute of strict Justice came to claim its due, but Moses managed to put it off. Regarding this Moses said, "The L-RD reconsidered regarding the evil that He declared He would do to His people" (Exodus 32:14), meaning that he prevented this debt from being collected. However, G-d also said, "On the day that I make My account, I shall bring their sin to account against them" (v.34). The debt was therefore put off until later, as the verse says: "But as I live ... if they will see the land that I have sworn to give their forefathers!" (Numbers 14:21-23). As for Pinchas, he completely eliminated the debt.

## ADVICE FROM RABBI NACHMAN OF BRESLOV

**When a person begins to enter the paths of devotion, G-d tells him, "I know that your desire and your will are to serve Me, but what guarantee do I have that you will not abandon Me tomorrow? Therefore how can I bring you closer to Me simply because of your desire? How can I now reveal hidden things to you? What you should do, rather, is to begin by simply loving Me, by performing My mitzvot, even if you don't understand the wisdom found within. Serve Me in simplicity, without complexity. In doing this for a time, I will have faith in you and will reveal to you the reason and the wisdom that exist in everything. I will bring you closer to Me though all types of ways, for the time that you remain devoted to me will constitute a true guarantee that you will not leave Me."**