

The Path To Follow

A Hevrat Pinto Publication

Pinchas

400



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Pinchas And The Merit Of The Fathers

Concerning the words found in this week's *parsha*: "Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the *kohen*, turned away My wrath from the Children of Israel" (*Bamidbar* 25:11), Rashi cites the words of the Sages: "Since the tribes were disparaging him, saying, 'Have you seen this son of Puti [*i.e.*, Putiel, one of Jethro's names], whose mother's father *pitem* [fattened] calves for idols, and who killed a leader of an Israelite tribe,' Scripture traces his lineage to Aaron" (*Sanhedrin* 82b). Hence the verse describes the lineage of Pinchas and connects him to Aaron. We know that the Sages have said that everything Pinchas did was solely for Hashem's sake (*Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin* 10:2). In fact Pinchas devoted himself to the glory of Hashem and the sanctity of the camp of Israel. Furthermore, we find a *halachic* discussion in the *Shulchan Aruch* on whether to write the name "Pinchas" with or without a *yud* (see *Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer* 129). The letter *yud* in Pinchas' name testifies to the fact that everything he did was for the sake of Heaven.

He Saw and Remembered the Halachah

An explanation is still required because Moshe, Aaron, and the 70 elders were also present at the time. Furthermore, the Sages have said, "One does not teach the Halachah before his teacher" (*Yerushalmi, Gittin* 1:2). Therefore how could Pinchas have gone out and killed a leader of Israel on his own initiative?

Something even more surprising is the fact that the Sages say of Pinchas: "He saw what was happening and remembered the Halachah" (*Sanhedrin* 82a). That being the case, why did he not remind Moshe himself of this Halachah? He would have then received Moshe's full permission to kill the transgressor, and he would not have needed to fall under the category of *moreh Halachah* ("one who teaches Halachah"), whose punishment is death!

Furthermore, it seems that Pinchas could have used the same expression as his father Elazar the *kohen* did when Moshe was angry with the soldiers who returned from battle and had forgotten the Halachah. At that point Elazar said to them: "This is the decree of the Torah, which Hashem commanded Moshe" (*Bamidbar* 31:21), meaning that he was speaking in Moshe's name. Hence Pinchas, the son of Elazar, could have done the same: He could have said this in Moshe's name.

To explain what the Sages said about Pinchas the son of Elazar ("he saw what was happening and remembered the Halachah"), we may say that Pinchas saw the deed of the first man and remembered the Halachah. That is, he remembered that G-d had told Adam not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge (*Bereshith* 2:17). Now Adam thought that it was better to eat from it, for he was intelligent and knew that if he ate from it, it would enable him to, as it were, serve Hashem with even greater strength and vigor.

This means that pride from an alien fire – which Hashem had not commanded him – entered Adam and led him to sin. Instead of thinking of G-d and His commandments, Adam thought only of himself. He thought

only about increasing his own glory, which is what led him to transgress Hashem's command. All this occurred because the first man did not benefit from the merit of his fathers. He had been fashioned by the Holy One, blessed be He, and he believed that he was allowed to do anything. That is how he came to sin. From here we see the importance of the merit of the fathers. The first man did not have this merit to protect him, whereas Pinchas did. That is why the verse traces his lineage to Aaron, for it was precisely this merit that helped him the most during his trial.

To Increase the Glory of Heaven

In order to understand the difference between Pinchas and Adam, let us first cite the words of the Mishnah: "Reflect upon three things and you will not come to sin: Know from where you came, where you are going, and before Whom you are destined to give an account" (*Pirkei Avoth* 3:1). The commentators say that the first part ("from where you came") did not apply to Adam, since he had been fashioned by Hashem.

What of Pinchas? Of him it is said, "the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the *kohen*," proving that he was born from a woman and that he came from a putrid drop. This led him to humility, to not growing proud of himself, for all three things mentioned in the Mishnah applied to him, including "from where you came." This is why Adam, to whom G-d said, "on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die," thought the very opposite, namely that it was good to eat in order to overcome the trials of this world and receive a great reward. As for Pinchas, he risked his own life with the knowledge that he was in gave danger, all in order to increase the glory of Heaven.

A Personal Decision

Therefore when Pinchas felt the great danger that threatened the Children of Israel because the leader of the tribe of Shimon was sinning, he did not have time to seek Moshe's advice and receive the Halachah from him. If he had addressed Moshe to know what the Halachah was, thousands among the Children of Israel would have died. Pinchas therefore took a decision on his own – despite a grave danger to his own life, and even at the risk of losing his portion in the World to Come – solely to save the Children of Israel and avenge G-d's Name, which had been profaned.

This is why Pinchas immediately arose among the community, took a spear in his hand, and killed the transgressors to stop the plague. This earned him the great reward of long life, and at that point he earned the crown of the priesthood as well as the great blessing: "I give him My covenant of peace, and it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood" (*Bamidbar* 25:12-13). All this because his deeds were solely for the sake of Heaven. As for Adam, because he did not do everything to fulfill Hashem's orders, but was concerned with his own interests, he received death rather than life, as it is written: "For on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die." Why did this happen to him? It was because he grew proud and did not benefit from the merit of the fathers.

Valid For All Time

It is written, "Therefore say: Behold, I give him My covenant of peace" (*Bamidbar* 25:12).

The term "say" signifies: Go to Pinchas yourself and tell him about his reward.

The book *Meshech Chochma* cites the Rambam in his introduction to the Mishnah, where we see that all the promises Hashem has made to man can change on account of sin (which is why Jacob was afraid that sin could change things). However when Hashem makes a promise through a prophet, it cannot be changed by sin if it was explicitly stated that it is unconditional.

This is why Hashem told Moshe, who was a prophet, to tell Pinchas that his reward would be the priesthood: "It shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood." In other words, there was no chance that sin or anything else could change it. In fact even during the time of the Second Temple, there were High Priests who descended from Pinchas. This is because the promise of the priesthood was made through Moshe, who was a prophet, and was therefore valid for all time.

Two Halves Makes a Whole

It is written, "Nadav and Avihu died when they brought an alien fire before Hashem" (*Bamidbar* 26:61).

In his book *Bnei Shlomo*, Rabbi Shlomo Amsalem *Zatzal* asks why the singular form of the word "died" is used here. The plural form should have been used, since both Nadav and Avihu died.

He answers this question by what the Midrash says concerning why Nadav and Avihu died, namely that neither one of them was married. Hence they were punished by death. Now we know that a man who is not married is like "half a body." It follows that Aaron's two sons, who were not married, were each considered "half a body." When both of them together were considered, they were like a single body. Hence the verse speaks of them in the singular: "Nadav and Avihu died when they brought an alien fire."

Like Sons

It is written, "He had no sons" (*Bamidbar* 27:3).

The verse should have more accurately stated, "He had not had sons." In fact Zelophehad the son of Hopher never had sons. Therefore what is the meaning of, "He had no sons"?

The saintly Rabbi Chaim ben Attar *Zatzal* answers this according to a statement in the Gemara: "Sons of sons are like sons" (*Yebamos* 62b). The same applies to sons of daughters, who are also "like sons." Hence the verse states, "He had no sons," meaning that he had no sons during his lifetime, but still hoped to have sons through the sons of his daughters. In that case, they would be like sons to Zelophehad.

Through Prayer

It is written, "He laid his hands upon him and commanded him, as Hashem had spoken through Moshe" (*Bamidbar* 27:23).

The hands of Moshe, wrote Rabbi Shalom Abuhatzera *Zatzal* in his book *Klei Kesef*, succeeded in prayer, prayer that was accepted and pleasing to Hashem. This is why Moshe placed his hands on Joshua, in order for his prayer to be accepted and pleasing to Hashem.

This is how we may explain the verse, "Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom" (*Devarim* 34:9). How so? "Because Moshe had laid his hands upon him" (ibid.) in order for his prayer to be acceptable and pleasing, just as "Hashem had spoken through Moshe." In other words, this occurred by the merit of Moshe's hands, which succeeded in prayer, as it is written: "When Moshe raised his hand, Israel prevailed" (*Shemot* 17:11). Here the Targum states that Moshe raised his hands in prayer.

Sharing with a Talmid Chacham

It is written, "My offering, My bread for My fires [*le'ishay*], My satisfying aroma, you shall be careful to offer Me at its proper time" (*Bamidbar* 28:2).

In his book *Torat HaParasha*, Rabbi Aharon Zakai *Shlita*, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ohr

Yom Tov, gives an allegorical explanation for this verse by directing us to a statement from the Sages: "If a man welcomes a *talmid chacham* into his home and lets him benefit from his possessions, Scripture regards it as if he has offered the daily burnt-offering" (*Berachot* 10b). The Sages also say, "If a man wishes to offer a libation upon the altar, let him fill the throat of the *talmidei chachamim* with wine" (*Yoma* 71a).

Therefore one who offers a *talmid chacham* to eat and lets him benefit from his possessions, it is as if he has offered sacrifices: "My bread for My fires [*le'ishay*], My satisfying aroma" – give My bread to My men (*le'ishim shel*), meaning the *talmidei chachamim*. The verse continues by saying, "My satisfying aroma" (*re'ach nichochi*), meaning that in this way, you are bringing satisfaction to Hashem (*nachat ruach*).

In the Light of the Parsha

Solely for Hashem

It is written, "Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the *kohen*" (*Bamidbar* 25:11).

Here Rashi explains that the tribes disparaged Pinchas by saying, "Have you seen this son of Puti, whose mother's father fattened calves for idols, and who killed a leader of an Israelite tribe?" Hence the verse traces his lineage back to Aaron the *kohen*.

We need to realize that the tribes knew that Pinchas was the grandson of Aaron the *kohen*. Hence what is the meaning of the expression "this son of Puti"? Furthermore, Jethro had already converted and was now a *tzaddik*. Therefore even if Pinchas was the grandson of Jethro, there was no reason to scorn him for that.

We may explain this by recalling what the Mishnah in *Sanhedrin* states: "If one... cohabits with an Aramean woman, he is punished by zealots" (*Sanhedrin* 81b). Rav Hisda says, "If the zealot comes seeking advice, we do not instruct him" (ibid. 82a). Rashi explains that a zealot who comes to the Beit Din for advice at the time of the deed, in order to know if he must strike, is not taught this Halachah, for it was only given to the zealot himself, without him asking for advice. The common explanation for why he is not given this Halachah is that if he has some personal interest at stake and would not act solely for Hashem, he would become a murderer. The Beit Din therefore cannot tell the zealot to strike him, for nobody knows what lies in the heart of man.

According to this explanation, we may say that when the tribes said, "Have you seen this son of Puti, whose mother's father fattened calves for idols," they meant that Pinchas had not killed Zimri for the sake of Heaven or because of his zeal for Hashem's honor, but instead sought personal fame and honor. Now the Gemara cites Rabbi Yochanan as stating in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, "Every man in whom pride dwells, it is as if he worships idols. It is written, 'Every haughty heart is an abomination to Hashem' [*Mishlei* 16:5], and it is written elsewhere, 'You shall not bring an abomination into your home' [*Devarim* 7:26]" (*Sotah* 4b). This enables us to understand that it was for this reason that the tribes believed – despite Pinchas having been the grandson of Aaron, and despite Jethro having already converted by then – that killing a leader in Israel demonstrated pride and a desire for fame, an attitude at whose root was the feeding of calves for idolatry. Now pride is similar to idolatry, and even if Jethro had converted by then, the root of Pinchas' deed originated from the time when he fattened calves for idolatry.

This is why the verse mentions Aaron, telling us that on the contrary, Pinchas was the grandson of Aaron. Now Aaron was a very humble man, having described himself and Moshe by saying "and what are we?" (*Shemot* 16:7). Pinchas was also very humble, having committed an act of zealotness without any trace of pride or desire for glory, but solely for Hashem.

You're Still Alive!

The Sages explain that the letters in the word *Tammuz* constitute the initials of *Zmanei Teshuvah Memashmeshim U'Bayim* ("Days of *Teshuvah* are Approaching"). In numerous Jewish communities around the world, rabbis encourage the faithful to prepare for the days of *teshuvah*, for it is best to prepare ourselves as soon as possible.

In this regard, it is said in the name of the Maggid of Kelm (an account also cited in the book *Zekenicha Veyuru Lach*), that a great proclamation once emerged from Heaven: A certain village had found merit in the eyes of Heaven, and it was being given a special reward. Exactly which reward?

The proclamation stated, "All the inhabitants of the community in question – from the day of its founding until now, all the souls in the World of Truth who have ever lived in this community – are being given 'an hour of life.' Let them arise for an hour, and then let them return to the dust!"

The anticipated hour arrived, ten o'clock in the morning, and a great upheaval took place in the Heavens. All the souls from this village came from every place, one from Gan Eden, another from Gehinnom – and there too, everyone from his particular place, each sinner from his furnace – and assembled at the Celestial Court to prepare for the stated reward. Naturally, the inhabitants of the village who were alive at the time knew nothing of this.

Ten o'clock in the morning! The ears of the (living) residents of the village were deafened by the noise. They were struck with fear by this strange sound, which was growing louder and louder. What was going on?

A rumor quickly spread and grew ever larger: The cemetery at the end of the village was filled with a loud crowd! With a mixture of fear and excitement, the inhabitants of the village gathered their strength, and without saying anything they hurried to see this incredible sight.

From afar, the spectacle was already terrifying them. The cemetery was completely white! They came even closer: Everything seemed to be filled with white columns. What was going on? The more they approached, the clearer things became. The dead had risen from their graves clothed in their white linen shrouds – neither more nor less!

At that point, the first shouts pierced the air:

"Grandpa! Grandpa!" cried a man who had gotten there first. "And there's my great-grandfather!" Other shouts were heard as well: "There's my father!" "There's my mother!" Little by little, everyone drew closer and found their deceased relatives and friends, their ancestors going back to several generations. Tremendous confusion gripped the crowd. At that point, something else amazing happened.

As the living were crying out with heartfelt emotion, running over to say "*Shalom Aleichem*" and spilling tears of joy for their parents or grandparents, the exact opposite happened among the dead. It was as if they didn't recognize anyone!

"What do you want?" the dead asked the living. "Let us go! Move away!"

At that point, things became even more frenzied. The dead screamed as they desperately tried to get to the village. Yet the living were shedding copious tears with great emotion, tears that did not stop, tears that were mixed with shock on account of their surprise and utter dismay.

The shouts from both sides – those from the dead and those from the living – mixed together and ascended to Heaven, causing a great uproar. One dead man stopped for an instant and explained to his relative who followed him: "We have to take advantage of every instant we have! We're running to the closest synagogue. Each moment is precious!"

At that point, the living understood.

This was not the resurrection of the dead, and *Mashiach* had not yet arrived. It was but a temporary resurrection. Did the dead have time to kiss their grandchildren? Not at all!

Everyone excitedly ran to the Beit HaMidrash in the village, which became completely filled. As the living members of the community tried to digest what was

happening, all the dead were already out of sight. They had all assembled within the walls of the synagogue and Beit HaMidrash in the village. All the living could do was to follow them and see what was happening with their own eyes.

It was already 10:10 am!

Ten minutes, more precious than gold, had already elapsed and not all the dead had yet found a book from which to learn. It was a terrible sight: Standing in the synagogue were men dressed in white linen shrouds, completely covered in white, and the sound they made – an intense sound of study and prayer – ascended to Heaven and descended to the abyss. Every bookcase was empty, for every book was being used. Those who arrived first had a Gemara, others had Mishnayot, still others had a Chumash, others more had a Tanach, and those who were late had a book of Mussar or Psalms. Those who were even later grabbed a prayer book. There was not a single book left on the shelves of the bookcases. Naturally, nobody was looking for a comfortable place to sit down, and nothing interested them except having a holy book in their hands and squeezing everything they could out of their learning.

It was already 10:15 am!

The latecomers among the dead found the bookcases empty, as well as everywhere else a book could be found. Even space for those standing inside the Beit HaMidrash was hard to find, so crowded together were the dead. For lack of anything better, they stood by the windows as they recited whatever they could remember.

The synagogue's clock was already showing that it was 10:35 am!

Everyone was stressed! How could they fully benefit from every second of every minute? What great concentration they displayed!

Already 10:45 am!

Someone realized that time was running out, and with a quick rap on the Bimah, he instantly silenced the crowd. He shouted, "It's already ten before eleven!"

The sounds started up again, inundating every ear outside the Beit HaMidrash with even greater intensity and strength.

Hearts were beating fiercely, and the anxiety was unbearable.

There were only six minutes left...and then only two and a half!

The thunderous sound of learning – of the dead trying to make the best use of their time – was reaching a climax.

Ten seconds left!

Nine, eight, seven....

The cries that were heard from the woman's side and the sounds of learning grew louder and louder.

Four, three, two....

The final second approached, at which point the sounds were silenced forever as everyone returned to their rest.

It was enough, there was silence. The hour had ended, and it had been used to its utmost. The dead had filled their souls with eternal treasures, namely thousands of seconds that were overflowing with *mitzvot* and Torah study, with prayer and *teshuvah*.

The dead therefore returned to the dust with great satisfaction, before the wide-eyed stares of their relatives. The latter had "seen the sounds" and understood what the dead wanted, those who did not even find time to say hello to them.

A father did not greet his son, nor a mother her daughter, and how much less did a grandparent say hello to a grandchild or a person to his friend. Everyone had been forgotten due to the greatness of that "hour."

The Maggid of Kelm stopped his account for a moment, but then he "launched" his last statement, summarizing and concluding as follows:

"Listen well! Is it so bad to live for more than a single hour? Why should anyone go and lose his time, solely because he has 24 hours every day, 30 days a month?

"Why wait for the resurrection of the dead? Look and remember: You are still alive!"

A Leader in Israel

The Story of how the Chafetz Chaim Fasted for Forty Days for the Complete Healing of One of his Disciples

It is written, “May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly who shall go out and come in before them” (*Bamidbar* 27:16-17).

In the book *The Maggid Speaks*, we find an account given by the Maggid of Jerusalem, Rabbi Shalom Schwadron *Zatzal*. It provides a faithful depiction of the leader of the generation and his devotion to both the community and the individual. The account goes as follows:

A disciple of Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen of Radin *Zatzal* (the author of *Chafetz Chaim*), who studied at the Radin yeshiva, was diagnosed with a grave illness that threatened his life. The doctors lost hope of trying to save him.

In his distress, he approached the Rosh Yeshiva and told him about his condition: He had a terrible illness that the doctors could not treat, and with each passing day his family was losing hope. That is what he told his Rav.

The Rav listened to his story, and after reflecting a little, he said to his disciple: “Listen, I have some good advice for you. With Hashem’s help, you will completely recover from your illness and regain full health. However this depends on you promising to never tell this to anyone.”

The disciple immediately agreed to the condition. He then carefully listened to the words of the Rav, who told him to go to a certain *talmid chacham* in a small village near Radin. “Tell him about your situation, and ask him for a blessing for a complete recovery,” the Rav said to him. “He will give you a blessing, and with Hashem’s help you will recover.”

The student obeyed and immediately traveled to the village near Radin, where he asked to see the *talmid chacham* from whom the Chafetz Chaim had said to seek a blessing. After traveling to his home and receiving a blessing for a complete recovery, the disciple returned to the Radin yeshiva. Not long afterwards, something unbelievable happened: He began to recover from his terrible illness, and soon he was in complete health. In fact it was as if he had never been sick, to the utter dismay of his doctors and family. In agreement with the Rav’s demand, nobody knew anything that had been said in his meeting with the Chafetz Chaim, nor about his journey to the *talmid chacham* who had given him his blessing.

Begging Him Without End

About twenty years passed, and this disciple married and established a home. His sister-in-law, the sister of his wife, fell ill with a mysterious and grave disease, and the doctors lost hope of saving her.

The disciple’s wife, who remembered that he had been afflicted with a mysterious illness in his youth, realized that

her sister was now in the same situation. She immediately asked her husband how he had been healed from this strange illness. Yet to her great surprise, he refused to speak about it, and he evaded her numerous questions. This was because he has promised his Rav, when he was ill, to never tell anyone about what he had said and how he had been healed.

However the more he tried to remain vague, the more his wife insisted that he tell her about it, for she hoped that his secret could help her sister. His wife and her sister begged him to reveal what had happened and how he had been healed, but he explained to them that he had made a promise to never reveal it. Nevertheless, they continued to harass him without end.

Eventually, his resistance weakened and he gave in to their requests, for many years had passed since the Chafetz Chaim had warned him. He therefore believed that he could reveal what had happened. Once he reached this conclusion, he quickly acted on it, telling his wife about the Chafetz Chaim’s suggestion that he go see a certain *talmid chacham* to ask him for a blessing. As he was saying this to her, he began to feel ill. In fact he was very afraid, and asked his wife to bring him to the Chafetz Chaim right away.

I Was Young Then

The two of them traveled to the home of Rabbi Israel of Radin, who at the time was very old and weak. The Rav remembered their previous discussion, and he listened very attentively to his disciple’s story.

He then spoke to him in a weak voice and said, “I would very much like to help you, but what can I do? I was young when you were sick the first time, and I fasted for 40 days for your recovery. Today I am very old and weak, and I can no longer fast like that.”

When the disciple heard this, he got up and was deeply shaken. Not only had his Rav fasted 40 days for him, he also concealed it and claimed that his healing had come from the blessing of another *talmid chacham* who prayed for him, not from his own prolonged fast to save the life of his disciple!

Guard Your Tongue!

Even Under Duress

The Sages say, “He saw what was happening and remembered the Halachah” (*Sanhedrin* 82a).

Regarding the prohibition against *Rechilus* [talebearing], it makes no difference whether the speaker engages in *Rechilus* willingly or the listener suspects something and pressures the speaker into telling him what another person said about him.

Even if a person’s father or Rav pressures him into recounting what another person said against them, and even if it only constitutes *avak Rechilus* [the “dust” of *Rechilus*], it is still forbidden.

– Chafetz Chaim