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ALL THE TZADDIKIM COME TO THE AID OF THE GENERATION

One of the worst sins that the Children of Israel committed in the desert was the "sin of Baal Peor." While staying in Shittim, the Children of Israel began to sin with the daughters of the land. As we know, this was the result of the advice that the wicked Bilam gave to Balak before leaving: "The G-d of these [people] hates lewdness...come and I will advise you" (Sanhedrin 106a). What Bilam advised him to do was to make them sin by Baal Peor, thinking that in this way the Jewish people would never recover.

In fact at the end of the previous parsha (Parsha Balak) we read, "Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw and stood up from among the assembly and took a spear in his hand" (Numbers 25:7). Here the Sages ask, "What did he see?" They answer, "He saw what was happening and remembered the Halachah...He who cohabits with a heathen woman is punished by zealots" (Sanhedrin 82a). Hence a zeal for Hashem arose in Pinchas.

This is clear for everyone to see. Hashem wanted to save the Children of Israel from destruction, but how? It was for this reason that He brought forth a leader from among them, a man of great stature – Pinchas the son of Elazar the priest – who was filled with a zeal for Hashem and killed the sinners among them. The result was that the Children of Israel survived, for all evil had been removed from their midst. If we were to reflect a little more deeply on what happened, we would see just to what extent the things that a person sees can lead him to sin. Not only that, but what a person sees can incite him to scorn the leaders of the generation and to mock them. Pinchas arose from among the assembly, meaning that he did not feel superior to any of them; he did not think of himself as being important. When he told Moses that the Halachah "He who cohabits with a heathen woman is punished by zealots" is known, Moses replied, "He who reads the letter, let him be the agent" (Sanhedrin 82a).

This is why Pinchas, the son of Elazar the priest, drew courage from his holiness, took a spear in his hand, and killed the sinners. It was not only them, but 24,000 other people who died in the plague resulting from the sin of Baal Peor. Why so many people? It was because the sin of indecency is extremely serious. What happened then? The Sages said that eight miracles were performed for Pinchas, eight supernatural events by which Pinchas succeeded in removing evil from among the Jewish people and bringing them holiness. When Pinchas did act, all the Jewish people were of course standing on the side, and they saw with their own eyes the great miracles that occurred for him. The people saw that Hashem was standing by his side to help him increase their degree of purity. Yet it is precisely here that the Sages ask why the verse connects Pinchas to Aaron. Why does the verse state, "Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest" (Numbers 25:11)? They answer that it is because the tribes began scorning him: "See this son of Puti, whose maternal grandfather fattened cattle for idols, and who has now slain the chief of a tribe of Israel" (Sanhedrin 82b). That is why the verse connects Pinchas to Aaron.

This is astounding: A tribal leader of Israel brought such a serious sin upon the Children of Israel that 24,000 of them died, yet the tribes complained about Pinchas after he purified the people? How could that be?

We can learn an important lesson from all this, for now and all the generations. At that time the Children of Israel had a burning desire to sin, and they did so with the women of Moab, who by their enticing words led them to committing the worst of sins. As a result, although they clearly saw the miracles that were being done for Pinchas, and even though they realized that things could not continue like this, they still scorned Pinchas for what he did. Why did act like this? When the Children of Israel saw the sin of Baal Peor with their own eyes, they simply descended a few levels lower on the spiritual scale. This descent

is what led them to mock even the tzaddikim of the generation. Their eyes led them to laugh at Hashem's holy one, Pinchas, mocking him to the point that they said his grandfather fattened calves for idolatry.

From this we see just how sins can drive a person mad and turn him away from G-d. When a person sins, he is liable to mock the tzaddikim of the generation, who fight to repair breaches in the walls of piety and holiness. In reality, "A person does not commit a transgression unless a spirit of folly enters into him" (Sotah 3a), and if that does happen, it will even lead him to speak against the tzaddikim of the generation. We must be very careful not to offend the honor of the tzaddikim or the leaders of Judaism, wherever they may be, for they are the only ones who can plead our cause, and only they can stand between us and our Father in Heaven. The verse says as much by stating, "Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest," connecting Pinchas to Aaron the priest. Why does the verse not continue to cite the ancestors of Aaron as well? Here too the Torah shows us just how great Pinchas truly great. He followed the paths of his grandfather Aaron the priest, whom the Sages describe as loving peace and pursuing peace. He loved others and brought them closer to the Torah (Perkei Avoth 1:12). What is the meaning of "pursuing" peace? Even when the Children of Israel wanted to disrupt his peace, Aaron did not allow that to happen. He always pursued peace, for he knew that it was essential. Peace (shalom) is one of Hashem's Names, and it is only through Him that can peace can reign between a person and his fellow. This is why we must strengthen ourselves by the power of the tzaddikim of the generation, for among the servants of G-d they are the only ones who can lead people to protect themselves and be saved from all sin. By their great power, it is only the tzaddikim who can shine their influence upon us to perform mitzvot and good deeds.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

What is Worse Than Murder?

“Oppress the Midianites and smite them, for they oppressed you” (Numbers 25:17-18).

We are all aware of the Holocaust that occurred in Europe, when Germany committed murder on a massive scale and extinguished the lives of millions of innocent of Jews – men, women, and children – people who were used as fuel for the fire. It was, without a doubt, the worst event in the history of humanity, one that left a profound scar upon the hearts of the Jewish people, a scar that will never heal. We go about thinking that nothing worse could happen. However before anything else, let us examine the opinion of our holy Torah in this matter.

In our parsha the Holy One, blessed be He, commands Moses to attack the Midianites and exterminate them. The reason is clearly given in the text: “Oppress the Midianites and smite them” (Numbers 25:17) Why? It is because “they oppressed you through their conspiracy that they conspired against you in the matter of Peor” (v.18). The wicked Midianites used their daughters to make the Children of Israel fall into debauchery and idolatry, bringing a plague upon themselves that killed 24,000 men. From this verse the Sages learned that the punishment of a person who causes others to sin is worse than one who kills, for two nations attacked Israel by the sword and two nations attacked Israel by sin. The Egyptians and the Edomites attacked them by the sword, as it is written: “The enemy [Egypt] declared, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide plunder...I will unsheathe my sword’” (Exodus 15:9), whereas the king of Edom said to Israel: “You shall not pass through me, lest I come against you with the sword” (Numbers 20:18). The two nations that attacked Israel through the agent of sin were the Moabites and the Ammonites.

Concerning the two nations that attacked Israel by the sword, it is written: “You shall not detest an Edomite...you shall not detest an Egyptian” (Deuteronomy 23:8). Yet for the Moabites and Ammonites it is stated: “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the L-RD. To their tenth generation they shall not enter into the congregation of the L-RD, to eternity” (v.4). This is astounding to learn, given that the Egyptians persecuted the Children of Israel for 400 years, enslaved them with backbreaking work, and threw their children into the river. Not only that, but Pharaoh slaughtered 400 Jewish babies each day in order to bathe in their blood!

Despite all this, the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded us not to detest the Egyptians. The reason is that the Egyptians afflicted only the bodies of the Children of Israel in this world. Because the Egyptians did not cause them to sin or defile their souls with sin, their souls will live in the World to Come. However such was not the case with the Midianites, who defiled and debased the souls of the Children of Israel with sin, causing them to lose their portion in the World to Come. As the Midrash says in the name of Rabbi Shimon, “How do we know that one who causes a man to sin is even worse than one who kills him? It is because one who kills him does so only as regards this world, but leaves him a share in the World to Come. One who causes him to sin, however, kills him in this world and in the next” (Bamidbar Rabba 21:4).

From everything that has been said, we learn that a person who causes another to sin is worse than a murderer. The usual way of looking at the world is diametrically opposed to the Torah’s view, for if someone harms a person’s body or possessions, he is not quickly forgiven and his offense not easily forgotten. As for someone who incites us to speak Lashon Harah or similar things, we have a tendency to forgive him. We will tend to forget this offense and show him kindness and mercy. Yet here the Torah comes to tell us that the spiritual anguish of a person who is provoked to sin should be much greater than the physical pain of one who is killed, for the one who causes another person to sin has killed him both in this world and in the World to Come.

From this we clearly see the terrible destruction that various forms of media inflict upon us. They are a source of debauchery, of contemptible and vile words that attack the holy souls of the Jewish people by means of incitement and provocation against Hashem and His Mashiach. The worst possible holocaust is a spiritual one, which we see each day in Israel as thousands of Jews are immersed in ungodly conversations and lose their souls for eternity. A person who makes others sin is worse than one who murders!

Don’t Lose Interest!

“Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest” (Numbers 25:11).

Oftentimes we may find ourselves witnessing an affront to the Torah’s honor, or to those who study it, being present when holy Jewish figures are being scorned. We would like to protest in the strongest terms against such incidents, and also against incitements such as the profanation of Shabbat and the like. However for some reason or another, we will often listen to the voice of the evil inclination as it whispers in our ears that protesting would be below our dignity. It tells us that this is not our job, and that there are organizations to take care of such things. Furthermore, why should we go out and deliberately look for trouble? In any case, it tells us, Shabbat will continue to be desecrated, indecency will go on celebrating, and provocation will remain in full swing.

This is why the verse before us states that when Pinchas encountered a similar circumstance, he did not try to weigh the pros and cons of the situation. He gave no thought to his own honor, even though he had good reason to do so because his father was Elazar, who had married a daughter of Jethro, formerly a heathen priest. Pinchas could have abstained from taking action out of fear that people would tell him, “Before being filled with zeal on account of the Midianite, who gave your father permission to marry a daughter of Jethro?” Furthermore, Pinchas was a descendant of Aaron, and therefore people could have said to him: “How can you allow yourself to criticize idolatry, since your grandfather made the golden calf?” Pinchas could have stood by and done nothing, and the Name of Heaven would have continued to be desecrated. Yet in his wisdom Pinchas did not refrain from taking action. Instead he proudly arose, spear in hand, and appeased Hashem’s anger. Pinchas turned His anger away from the Children of Israel, and by his merit the plague was stopped. This teaches us that when the honor of Heaven is being desecrated, there is no place for weighing the pros and cons (Keli Yakar).

How Many High Priests Served in the Temple?

“I give him My covenant of shalom [peace]” (Numbers 25:12).

In the Torah text, the word shalom is written with a broken vav, as if it were written shalim (numerical value: 380). This alludes to the 380 High Priests that served from the time of Pinchas until the destruction of the Second Temple. During the time of the First Temple there were 80 High Priests (80 being the numerical value of lim), while during the time of the Second Temple there were 300 High Priests (300 being the numerical value of sha).

A Good Name is Better Than Fine Oil

“The name of the slain Israelite man...was Zimri, the son of Salu” (Numbers 25:14).

When describing the sin of Zimri as it occurred, the Torah does not mention his name. Instead it simply states, “A man of the Children of Israel came” (Numbers 25:6). After the account of the sin, however, the Torah mentions his name and publicly denounces him. Why the difference? At first the verse avoided mentioning the name of the sinner because he was an important figure, and his deeds were liable to have a detrimental affect on the people. That, however, was not the case afterwards, for citing his name after he was killed served a great purpose: Everyone would know that, despite his important

position, his status was not taken into account and he was killed all the same. This teaches us that a person's actions are what determines his fate, not his status or importance.

What Family Do You Belong To?

"Of Yetzer, the family of the Yetzerites. Of Shilem, the family of the Shilemites" (Numbers 26:49).

This verse teaches us that a person is led on the path that he wishes to pursue. If a person seeks perfection (shilemut), he belongs to the "Shilem" family, as it is written: "Of Shilem, the family of the Shilemites." Conversely, if a person wants to serve his evil inclination (yetzer), he belongs to the "Yetzer" family, as it is written: "Of Yetzer, the family of the Yetzerites."

Whoever Properly Observes Shabbat Merits an Inheritance Without Limit

"Moses brought their claim before the L-RD" (Numbers 27:5).

The book Oholei Torah gives a marvelous explanation for why Moses brought the claim of the daughters of Zelophehad before Hashem. As we know, whoever properly observes Shabbat is given an inheritance without limit. Hence measure for measure, one who desecrates Shabbat will lose his inheritance. Therefore according to the opinion that Zelophehad was the individual who desecrated Shabbat by gathering wood on that day (Numbers 15:32), he lost his inheritance as a result. His daughters could therefore not inherit from him. However according to the opinion that Zelophehad acted for the sake of Heaven, he did not lose his entire inheritance. Since such things depend on the intentions of the heart, only the Holy One, blessed be He, could judge him, for only He knows what is hidden in the heart. This is why Moses brought the claim of the daughters of Zelophehad before Hashem, the only One Who truly knew if Zelophehad had acted for the sake of Heaven.

Who is a True Leader?

"Who shall go out before them and come in before them" (Numbers 27:17).

One of the characteristics of a true leader is that he walks before the people and does not allow himself to get carried away by them. His duty is to raise them up to his level, not to lower himself to theirs. At the same time, he must take their requests into account. The verse states, "Who shall go out before them," meaning that he must always be at the front and lead those behind him.

It is in this way that the gaon Rabbi Israel Salanter explained the words of the Sages in the Mishnah: "In the footsteps of Mashiach...the face of the generation will be like the face of a dog" (Sotah 49b). Why did the Sages compare the face of the generation to that of a dog? What lies behind this comparison? Rabbi Israel Salanter explained it as follows: By nature a dog always runs ahead of its master, yet every now and then it turns around to see where its master wants to go and changes direction accordingly.

In our generation, those who want to be leaders and spokesmen for the generation "are like the face of a dog," for they act like dogs. True, they are the ones who walk before the people and stand at their head, yet they do not have firm and established principles. On the contrary, they turn back from time to time to see what the people in the street are thinking – what is being said on TV and in the newspapers – and they make decisions accordingly, so as to appease the masses. This is a very serious issue, for a real leader must be someone who maintains his own personal opinion, walking before the people and showing them Hashem's way, even if it means being subjected to the attack of public opinion.

This is why Moses asked Hashem to place at the head of the community a man who walks before them and returns before them, meaning a true leader who does not turn back to look at the people and decide matters according to their whims.

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

Zeal – But for the Sake of Heaven

In his zeal Pinchas turned the anger of Hashem away from the Children of Israel, and he was rewarded with a covenant of peace. Because Pinchas redeemed the Children of Israel, he and his descendants became priests for evermore. In the name of Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld Zatzal, it is said that Zimri as well, by approaching the Midianite woman, wanted to demonstrate his zeal and save the Children of Israel from the plague that resulted from the incident of Baal Peor. Since the Children of Israel had resorted to idolatry in order to liberate themselves from all obstacles to forbidden relations, Zimri wanted to prove to them that they could engage in forbidden relations even without resorting to idolatry. Thus his goal was to stop the plague. However there are different kinds of zeal. In the town of Shechem, Simeon and Levi demonstrated themselves to be fanatics, and of them Jacob said: "You have disturbed me" (Genesis 34:30) and, "Accursed is their rage...I will separate them within Jacob and I will disperse them in Israel" (ibid. 49:5). However the dispersion of Levi among the Jewish people occurred amidst greatness and honor, for they were set apart as the chosen tribe to serve Hashem and act as intermediaries between Him and the people. Similarly, Pinchas and Zimri (the descendents, respectively, of Levi and Simeon) manifested their fervor in two different ways, one positive and the other negative.

When the Sages wanted to add a blessing dealing with heretics to the Amidah, only Shemuel Hakatan was found worthy of composing it (Berachot 28b). Due to the fact that he stated, "When your enemy falls, do not rejoice" (Perkei Avoth 4:19), he was capable of composing this blessing for the sake of Heaven, without any personal animosity on his part. When we educate harshly and uncompromisingly (which may be needed in some cases and in certain situations), we must be careful not to involve our own personal animosities. Our fervor must be justified and applied only for the educational goal at hand. Otherwise, not only will this constitute an unjustified offence to those being educated, there is also the likelihood that this will be harmful to them. When a child senses that his teacher does not care for him, the educational message that he is trying to get across will not sink in. He also risks having the student revolt against his instruction and learn to resist him. This is due to the fact that children mimic the behavior of their parents and teachers.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

The Danger of Growing Accustomed to Speaking Lashon Harah

If, unfortunately, someone becomes accustomed to continually speaking Lashon Harah (much like those who sit to gossip about others and regularly spread rumors), that individual is called a Baal Lashon Harah. Such a person's punishment will be absolutely horrendous, since he deliberately and boldly transgresses Hashem's Torah. To him, the prohibition against speaking Lashon Harah carries absolutely no importance. Kabbalah says of such a person, "May the L-RD excise all lips of smooth talk, the tongue that speaks boastfully" (Psalms 12:4).

In fact the worst kind of Baal Lashon Harah is modern media. From morning till night, the media broadcasts barbed remarks and incites people against Jews. Anyone who values his soul will keep far from it.

We are familiar with the words of Chovot HaLevavot: Whoever continually speaks Lashon Harah, all his merits are transferred to those against whom he speaks, and all their sins are transferred back to him, the speaker of Lashon Harah. As a result, his service of Hashem is rendered worthless.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Mitzvot Rewards

It is written, "Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace'" (Numbers 25:12). Sforno states that the reward Pinchas received for the action he took was a "covenant of peace," meaning that the covenant which Hashem entered into with Pinchas consisted of protecting and saving him from the Angel of Death. This is why Pinchas is Eliyahu, who did not die because the Angel of Death never had any power over him, just as the Holy One, blessed be He, promised. Pinchas received this reward measure for measure, for just as he elevated his soul to demonstrate his zeal for Hashem, so too did Hashem elevate his life without end. There are two well-known questions regarding the reward granted for observing mitzvot: (1) Why do we find the punishment for each sin mentioned in the Torah, but not the reward for each mitzvah? (2) Why does the Holy One, blessed be He, not grant a reward, here in this world, for the mitzvot that we perform?

The answer to the first question is that, as we know, the Torah speaks to us in the language of men. Since the reward that we are to receive for each mitzvah is spiritual in nature, it is so great that we cannot describe it in words, for we cannot even imagine it. Man, made of flesh and blood, is limited in his comprehension of spiritual rewards. Hence the Torah avoided giving us details pertaining to the reward of each mitzvah (see Ramban on Exodus chapter 6). As for the second question, the Gemara states: "There is no reward for precepts in this world" (Kiddushin 39b). In other words, the Holy One, blessed be He, does not grant rewards in this world for the mitzvot we perform. Here the book Tevuat Shor asks the following question: The Sages have said that the Holy One, blessed be He, fulfills Torah mitzvot (Shemot Rabba 30:9). Therefore how can He withhold, as it were, the reward of those who perform His mitzvot, since in the Torah He Himself forbid us from withholding wages?

The author of Tevuat Shor answers with a reply from the Shach (Choshen Mishpat 239:7), who wrote that if someone hires a worker through the intermediary of an agent, he does not transgress this mitzvah if he fails to pay his wages right away. Now Moses was the agent of the Holy One, blessed be He, who commanded the community of Israel to observe mitzvot. That's why Hashem is not transgressing this prohibition by not rewarding us in this world for the mitzvot we perform. According to this explanation, we can fully understand why Pinchas merited receiving his reward in this world, for he carried out the Halachah without being instructed to do so by Moses. Although it is a Halachah, it is not taught. Hence the command for Pinchas to take action did not reach him through the intermediary of an agent. That being the case, if the Holy One, blessed be He, had not given him his reward in this world, He would have transgressed, as it were, the prohibition against withholding wages. It was therefore appropriate for Pinchas to receive his reward right away.

(For an in-depth treatment of this subject, please refer to Shaarei Emonah.)

EISHET CHAYIL

Vigilance in the Workplace

We must realize that in environments where men and women work together, there is a chance that this can lead to serious problems because of the constant proximity of male and female co-workers. This is why, in principle, even if a woman is obligated to work outside the home, she must choose a place where male and female employees do not work together. If a woman cannot find such a place, and she is obligated to work in an environment where males and females are co-workers, she must ask a competent Rav if she can indeed work there. In such a situation, she must refrain from making any decision on her own without having obtained the opinion of a competent Rav. In any case, wherever a woman finds herself, she must be vigilant to observe the laws of modesty and to distance herself from any unbecoming situation.

A TRUE STORY

Do I Not Hate Those, O Hashem, Who Hate You?

It is written, "Oppress the Midianites and smite them, for they oppressed you" (Numbers 25:17).

From this verse we learn that there are sometimes reasons to exhibit hatred toward those who attempt to turn Jews from the right path and make them sin. In fact this has always been the response of great Jewish figures in every generation, manifesting their zeal for Hashem against all those who try to make the Jewish people sin.

With regards to this subject, it is said that in the time of Rabbi Amram Blau Zatzal a clinic opened up in Jerusalem that did not respect the laws of modesty. When Rabbi Amram learned of it, he went to the clinic and started to scream against the practices being done there, to the point that a great commotion erupted on the premises. The directors of the clinic called the police, and an officer (an Arab who was nothing more than a thug) arrived and began to beat the rabbi mercilessly. Nevertheless, Rabbi Amram continued without hesitation to oppose anyone who tried to make the residents of Jerusalem sin.

This story teaches us that even when the body suffers painful beatings, we must not accept compromises when it comes to Hashem's mitzvot.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried – The Author of Kitzur Shulchan Aruch

The son of Rabbi Yossef Ganzfried, Rabbi Shlomo was born in Ungvar, Hungary in 5564. From early on in life, even as a boy, he was known for not letting a single day pass without coming up with a novel Torah thought. After his marriage he continued to study Torah, however he did not want to use his Torah knowledge for personal ends. He therefore tried to earn a living for himself and his family by engaging in business.

At the age of 30, Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried composed Kesset HaSofer, a Halachic primer for scribes. Yet afterwards he experienced tremendous financial setbacks that obligated him to work as a rabbi. At first he served as the rabbi of the small town of Brezevitz, but then in 5610 he became the Rav and Av Beit Din of his hometown of Ungvar. There he composed the book Perat VeHiddekel on the Halachot of mikvaot.

In 5613 Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried began writing his famous work, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, which today is accepted throughout the Diaspora. Rabbi Shlomo is often referred to as "the author of the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch," a book that he republished more than a dozen times, making corrections and adding new material with each edition. At the same time, Rabbi Shlomo was known as a great Kabbalist, and he left us with many of his writings in this field.

Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried's life came to an end on Tammuz 28, 5646, when his soul ascended to Heaven. May his merit protect us all