It is written, “Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest, turned back My wrath…. Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give him My covenant of peace, and it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood’” (Numbers 25:11-13).

The Torah tells us that when Pinchas saw Zimri’s vile deed, he realized that the honor of Heaven was being desecrated, and that thousands of Jews would die. Motivated by feelings of jealousy for Hashem’s honor, Pinchas therefore arose and took his spear to kill Zimri without hesitating or wavering, thereby saving Israel from death.

Pinchas’ bravery was impressive in Hashem’s eyes, which is why He told Moses to inform Pinchas that he would be rewarded on account of his great deed. What was his reward? It was a covenant of peace for himself and his descendants after him, a covenant of eternal priesthood, meaning that his descendants would always possess the holiness of the priesthood.

We need to understand this incident, for when Zimri sinned and disaster was about to strike, many of the Children of Israel saw and were fully aware of what he was doing. That being the case, why was it only Pinchas who decided to arise and carry out Hashem’s wrath?

We also need to understand the meaning of the statement, “Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give him My covenant of peace, and it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood.’” Although Pinchas was rewarded in this way, elsewhere we have learned that there is no reward for a mitzvah in this world (Kiddushin 39b).

The explanation is the following: When Pinchas saw what Zimri was doing, he not only perceived the physical reality around him, but also looked into himself and perceived his own strength, sensing an incredible awakening inside. He felt that the hidden forces within him were suddenly telling him to get up and carry out Hashem’s vengeance. At that point not using these forces would have been regrettable. Although Pinchas was not one of the most important figures among the tribes, he was a descendant of Aaron, one of the greatest figures in Israel, and he sensed that the merit of his fathers would help him carry out Hashem’s vengeance. Hence the verse states, “Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest.” Pinchas’ name alone would have sufficed here, so why mention his lineage as well? It is in order to tell us by allusion that Pinchas relied on the merit of his fathers to help him fulfill Hashem’s will, thereby preventing a plague.

Pinchas also understood that he was precisely the person who had to take action, for at that point the Halachah had been forgotten, and even Moses did not know it. Pinchas therefore saw Zimri’s deed and recalled the Halachah, leading him to the realization that Heaven had chosen him to kill Zimri. Pinchas understood what was happening, and he sensed that things now depended on him. If he hesitated or wavered at that point, a plague would break out and kill thousands of people. This completely explains our first question, which is why it was Pinchas who took action. He did so because he felt that Heaven gave him the strength needed for this task, and he realized that he was precisely the person chosen to carry it out.

The great proof that what Pinchas did was for the sake of Heaven – that his intentions were pure, not tainted in any way by self-interest – lies in the fact that twelve miracles were performed for him, as the Targum explains at the end of Parsha Balak. This is the greatest proof that all he did was solely for the sake of Heaven, completely devoid of self-interest.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, gave Pinchas His covenant of peace, for his only intention was to bring peace between the Children of Israel and their Father in Heaven. As the Sages have said, “Resh Lakish stated: Pinchas is Eliyahu. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: ‘You have made peace between Me and the Children of Israel in this world, and in the future you will also make peace between Me and My children.’” Pinchas merited the priesthood for himself and all his descendants, and death had no power over him (Zohar III:214a).

According to this, we can understand the question that we raised earlier, namely how Hashem could have rewarded Pinchas for his deed, since there is no reward for a mitzvah in this world. The question can be answered in several ways:

1. A person does not merit a reward in this world for a mitzvah that he performs, since his reward is reserved for him in the World to Come. However what he adds to a mitzvah, meaning the devotion and effort that he puts into completing it to perfection, is rewarded in this world. Here Pinchas risked his very life by acting as he did for Hashem’s honor.

2. When we say that there is no reward for a mitzvah in this world, we are speaking of a material reward. A person nevertheless merits a spiritual reward in this world, such as the priesthood and long life, since Pinchas was rewarded with these.

3. There is no reward for a mitzvah in this world when it is performed with the sentiment that personal merit is the cause. Pinchas did not act as he did by relying upon his own merit, but upon the merit of his fathers. Although he had a number of personal merits in his favor, Pinchas still humbled himself, and therefore it is fitting that he was rewarded. It was not a personal reward that he received, but the reward of his fathers, accompanied by its fruits.

Pinchas’ brave deed teaches us that when we see the honor of Heaven being desecrated or Judaism’s sacred values being trampled upon, we are not allowed to ignore it and weigh our options in order to save face. Although we are not called upon to emulate Pinchas’ deed, there are still many ways that we can ensure that Hashem’s honor is being respected. As the Sages have said, “There is neither wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the L-RD’” (Proverbs 21:30). Whenever the Divine Name is being profaned, honor must not be paid to one’s teacher [i.e., Pinchas did not wait for Moses’ ruling upon seeing Hashem’s Name being profaned]” (Sanhedrin 82a). Every Jew must therefore ensure that the honor of Hashem and His mitzvot are respected, in which case the glory of the Torah will be exalted and Hashem’s Name will be sanctified in the world.
A Questionable Job Offer

It is written, “The L-RD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Harass the Midianites and smite them, for they harassed you’” (Numbers 25:16-18).

The Midrash states: “Harass the Midianites. Why? For they harassed you. From here the Sages derived the adage: If a man comes to kill you, kill him first. Rabbi Shimon says: How do we know that one who causes a man to sin is worse than one who kills him? 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. Two nations advanced against Israel with the sword and two with sin. The Egyptians and the Edomites advanced against them with the sword, as proved by the texts: ‘The enemy said: I will pursue, I will overtake…I will draw my sword’ [Exodus 15:9] and ‘Edom said to him: You shall not pass through me, lest I come against you with the sword’ [Numbers 20:18]. Two advanced against them with sin, namely the Moabites and the Ammonites. Of those who advanced against them with the sword, it is written: ‘You shall not detest an Edomite…you shall not detest an Egyptian’ [Deuteronomy 23:8]. … However of those who advanced against them with sin, endeavoring to make Israel transgress, it says: ‘An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the L-RD, even to their tenth generation…forever’ [v.4]” (Bamidbar Rabba 21:4).

One day a merchant carrying a package on his back arrived at the Beit Midrash of the gaon Rabbi Chaim Leib Mishkovsky. He was carrying all kinds of sanctified objects to sell: Mezuzot, tzitzit, tefillin, siddurim, and so on. Such merchants would usually put their merchandise on display by the door of the synagogue during prayer, and people passing by would purchase what they wanted.

The Rav approached the table and fixed his gaze upon a pile of profane books that were known to contain indecent material. Not hesitating for a moment to fulfill the mitzvah of, “You shall remove the evil from your midst” (Deuteronomy 22:24), the Rav himself took this pile of books and threw them into the furnace. The merchant started to blame him: “Rabbi, you’ve cost me a great deal of money – three rubles! And that goes without counting the fact that you harmed my livelihood, for how am I going to feed my family with the few cents that I made by selling some mezuzot and tzitzit? I make money from the books you burned!” The Rav murmured that he would repay him in cash for the books, but with joy. This is found in the name “Haggi,” which alludes to the joy of the festival. The third thing to keep in mind is that we must not say “I already gave,” for we must give tzeddakah time and again, as the Sages have said: “Give generously – even one hundred times.” This is alluded to in the name “Shuni,” which comes from a root meaning “to repeat.” Hence we must give tzeddakah, and then repeat this mitzvah.

Looking Without Shame

It is written, “For the L-RD is righteous. He loves righteousness; his face beholds the upright” (Psalms 11:7).

Rabbi Yechezkel of Kuzmir explained this verse in the following way: Hashem loves deeds of tzeddakah, and the greatest one of all, the most precious in His eyes, is when “his face beholds the upright” – when the receiver can look straight into the eyes of the giver without shame. This can consist of an anonymous gift (such as by putting money in a person’s bank account, or by giving it to him through a third party), or a loan that is offered with kind words and an assurance that the recipient is actually doing the lender a favor.

Whispering into the Rav’s Ear

On the night of Passover, after the evening prayer, the faithful gathered around Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski to wish him a happy Passover. One man lingered by the Rav’s side for a few minutes and whispered something into his ear, at which point the Rav exclaimed: “Treif! Treif!” Hearing this, the faithful gathered around the man and began inviting him to their home for the Seder meal: “Come to my home!” “You’re welcome to stay with me.” What had the man said to the Rav, and what did the Rav mean by saying “Treif”? Actually, he told the Rav that he was staying in town alone, and so he didn’t have anywhere to eat the Seder meal. In his wisdom, the Rav said “treif” as if the man had asked him a question regarding some meat he had prepared for the Seder. The Rav’s reply gave people the impression that everything the man had cooked for Passover was treif, meaning that he would have to eat the Seder meal elsewhere. His assistants understood what was happening, and so they extended every honor in inviting the man to spend the Seder with them.
The city of Sale, located on the Atlantic Ocean coast at the far end of Morocco, is not large in terms of cities. The Jewish community there, although small in number, has nevertheless left its imprint on Israel’s history because of our revered teacher, Rabbi Haim Ben Attar. Born and raised in Sale, he grew up in the city until he felt the need to leave for the Holy Land and Jerusalem, where he now lies buried.

He was born in 5456 (1696) into the Ben Attar family (originally from Muslim Spain, “Attar” means “perfume” or “perfume merchant”) and studied Torah with his grandfather, after whom he was named. As he relates in the introduction to his book Hefetz Hashem, “I studied Torah with my teacher and grandfather, Rav Haim Ben Attar of holy and blessed memory. He was a great Rav, well known, pious and humble, who in his time I drank living waters from. From my birth, I grew up on his knees and took in all his wondrous sayings. He was so pious that I would say that he almost never slept even half a night. He even spent the nights of Tammuz reciting lamentations over the destruction of the House of G-d, crying profusely, like a widow. He finished the night by studying with myself and others who, like myself, were his descendants.” In Sale, Rabbi Haim Ben Attar gained a living through his work, which tradition says was in making clothes, especially clothes made of luxury materials woven with gold or silver thread.

Once, the governor of Sale was about to marry his daughter, and when he heard that the work of our teacher was done to perfection and with great precision, he decided to entrust the creation of his daughter’s wedding dress to him. He governor had one condition, however, which was that the work had to be completed before the end of the week. As we have said, our teacher earned a living through his work. However he maintained one principle: From the moment that he had earned enough money to live on for the week, he returned to his studies. The servants who had brought him the bride-to-be’s clothes were shocked to hear him refuse the job. They returned a second time on orders from the governor, and threatened him with death should he refuse. However our teacher remained firm in his conviction. The governor could not tolerate the fact that a Jew refused to obey him, and he ordered him thrown into the lions’ den (after having starved the beasts) found in his court. The governor’s servants, who had chained our teacher to bring him to the lions, could hear the hungry roars of the big cats from afar. Yet our teacher, without being perturbed, moved firmly towards the den. The governor’s servants were even more surprised when the lions met him by lining up in front of him, wagging their tails and seemingly showing him respect. During this time, our teacher had taken out the book of Psalms and had begun to recite it. The governor, who hastened to come to the den to witness this marvel with his own eyes, greatly regretted having mistreated our teacher and ordered that he be freed. He also gave him expensive gifts and asked for forgiveness.

This is only one of the widespread stories circulating in the Jewish community concerning the greatness of our teacher, whom even wild beasts had a reverential fear of. Staying with his father-in-law from his youth, our teacher did not cease elevating himself in Torah. He finished by founding a yeshiva in his home, where he taught his students, whether it be in Jerusalem, or in Sefat and Tiberias in the Galilee.

In fact, this was really a favor that G-d had done for them, for there was an epidemic that had broken out in Jaffa and Jerusalem. This is why the Rav established a yeshiva in Akko and stayed there for nearly a year, until the middle of 5502 (1742). In Eretz Israel, he was accustomed to pray at the graves of the Tzaddikim. He would go with his students, whether it be in Jerusalem, or in Seft and Tiberius in the Galilee.

He was warmly greeted when he arrived in Sefat, and even the Beit Midrash of our revered teacher Rabbi Yossef Caro (the author of the Shulchan Aruch) was put at his disposal. There, according to tradition, the holy Arizal had prayed. From time to time, our teacher and his students left for ziarot (pilgrimages) to the graves of the Tzaddikim, Tannaim, and Amoraim buried in the villages of the Galilee. They approached the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Meron with particular emotion, and even though they traveled there by riding donkeys, when they saw from afar the tomb of Rabbi Shim'on Bar Yochai on the mountain summit of Meron, our teacher descended from his donkey and began to climb on all fours, uttering with a bitter voice, “How can I – who am nothing – how can I enter into that place of fire, wherein dwells the flame of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Shechinah, while all the heavenly guides and all the souls of the Tzaddikim are here!”

When he visited the holy places of Tiberias, Rav Haim Abulafia would insistently beg him to settle in Tiberias and to take charge of the new Jewish community of that city. In the end, our teacher decided to establish his yeshiva in Jerusalem, and near the end of the year 5502 (1742) he settled in the holy city with his students. His emotions in arriving in the holy city were expressed in a letter in which he enthusiastically described his first Yom Kippur in Jerusalem: “I saw a great light at the time of Kol Nidre … and when I opened the heichal, it was truly for me like opening the doors to the Garden of Eden. There was such radiance in the synagogue that everyone was overflowing in supplications and cried abundantly in their desire to see the construction of the Temple. Even the Falachim did the same. [Editor’s Note: Apparently these were the Jewish peasants that lived in the villages neighboring Jerusalem (such as Nevi Shmuelt) and who came to the city on the night of Yom Kippur to pray with the community]. Believe me, in my entire life I have never seen such a thing.”

Among his students was the Chida, who was 18 years old when he joined himself to our teacher’s group as the latter ascended to Jerusalem. Even though our teacher
In the Light of the Haftorah

**RABBI HAIM BEN ATTAR**

*with words of affection for the devotion they displayed.*

**THE STORY OF THE WEEK**

**You Shall Not Take Interest**

One day a wealthy and generous Jew came before the Chatam Sofer and asked to speak with him in private, a request that was granted. Looking around, the man said, almost in a whisper: “Rabbi, I’ve already lost almost everything I own, and I’m almost bankrupt!” As the Chatam Sofer looked at him with compassion, the man recounted everything that had recently happened to him, and what had brought him to this point.

“A large trade fair is going to take place,” the man continued, “and all the important merchants will be there. If my spot is taken, everyone will immediately know about my situation and I’ll be ruined.”

The Chatam Sofer gave him an encouraging smile and asked, “How much does it cost to go to the fair?” “One hundred rubles, but I don’t even have that much.” The Chatam Sofer said, “My son, I’ll lend you 100 rubles, and although you have no money to do business there, the money that you have generously given to observant Jews will protect you. In the meantime, I’ll lend you whatever you need to cover your initial costs.”

Since he was in a very difficult situation, and although it wasn’t easy for him to accept this money, the man agreed to the offer and proceeded to the fair. The Holy One, blessed be He, demonstrated His kindness to him, and he was instantly allowed to purchase an item on credit. He completed the transaction and then resold the item at a much higher price, making a nice profit. Hashem was kind to him in this way all day long. He purchased and resold items like a skilled merchant, and he returned from the fair having made a considerable amount of money. He then went to the Chatam Sofer to repay his loan, and out of gratitude he also purchased a diamond ring for him as a gift.

When the Chatam Sofer put the ring on his finger, he didn’t stop saying: “What a beautiful ring. What taste! What craftsmanship!” After a few minutes, he gave the ring back to the man and thanked him profusely, but said: “This is interest, and the Torah forbids taking interest.”

Naturally, the man accepted this law, but he was curious about something. “Could you please tell me,” the man said, “if the Torah forbids you from taking the ring, why you did not return it to me right away? Why did you wear it for ten minutes?”

The Rav replied, “What was the point of your gift? It was to make me happy and to demonstrate your gratitude. I therefore wore it for a while to show you how happy it made me. But to actually accept it as a gift?”

A TRUE STORY

**Rabbi Haim Pinto and the Flask of Tears**

Rabbi Haim Pinto HaGadol and his friend Rabbi David ben Hazan traveled to Marrakech, where Rabbi David ben Hazan died. He could not be buried, however, because anyone who touched his sacred body to prepare it for burial immediately collapsed. At that point Rabbi Haim Pinto said, “We can only clean the body of the holy man with his own tears, tears that he kept in a flask in Mogador.” At that time, about 180 years ago, there were no trains or cars, and the residents of Marrakech were upset because they did not know how they were going to bury the deceased. Rabbi Haim Pinto went into a small room, and he came out a few minutes later and said: “Go to the Al Azama synagogue. There you will find the flask of tears.” Thus it was done.

In the holy places where many people come to pray during the entire year. In particular, there are many who journey there on the day of his Hilloula, Tammuz 15.