

PARSHA

## PINCHAS

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### A JEW'S NAME

*Rabbi David Pinto Chlita*

**T**he end of Parsha Balak describes the horrific sin that Zimri the son of Salu, a leader from the tribe of Shimon, committed with the Midianite Cozbi the daughter of Zur. The Torah describes the incident in the following way: “Behold, an Israelite man came and brought a Midianite woman to his brothers in the sight of Moshe” (Bamidbar 25:6). It does not mention their names, for they caused the concealment (if we may use the term) of the Divine Name in this world. Their names are mentioned afterwards, when Pinchas kills them with a spear at risk to his own life, thereby earning the Torah’s praise and being rewarded by G-d with an “eternal covenant of priesthood.” In fact after this incident, the verse explicitly mentions their names: “The name of the slain Israelite man... was Zimri the son of Salu... and the name of the slain Midianite woman was Cozbi the daughter of Zur.” My dear son Rabbi Mikhael asked me why the Torah waited for this moment to mention their names, rather than doing so earlier.

Now we know that Zimri the son of Salu was not an ordinary man; he was not among the lower classes. According to the Midrash, he was called Schlemiel ben Tzurishadai, and he was a giant in Torah. He was a leader from the tribe of Shimon, and was worthy of serving as a judge on Moshe’s court. However the evil inclination suddenly ignited in him, and he took a Midianite woman and sinned with her before the eyes of all Israel. Through this reprehensible act, and by the desecration of the Divine Name that ensued, he cut himself off from G-d and His Torah. Furthermore, his root connection to the world of life was severed and he lost his name at the time of his transgression.

A person’s given name reveals the nature of his unblemished soul, which emanates from the supernal worlds. Each name that Jewish parents give their child is inspired by divine providence in relation to the child’s connection to the supernal worlds. This is why our Sages said that Rabbi Meir verified the names of people he dealt with, for in this way he could determine their character traits and nature (Yoma 83b). Our given name connects us to the root of our soul. Through sins, however, especially through grave sins, we break our connection to the supernal worlds and the holy Shechinah, and we destroy (G-d forbid) our root connection to the world of life. The connection now broken, a person’s given name disappears because it connected him to his source, leaving him nameless.

Yet at soon as Pinchas arose to avenge G-d’s honor by killing Zimri, his soul (if we may say) was rectified. In fact his death served as his atonement. Not only that, but since Zimri’s act brought about a deadly plague among the Children of Israel, they experienced a fear of sin and understood just to what point G-d hates promiscuity. If a few members of the Children of Israel initially had a negative view of Pinchas’ excessive jealousy, they immediately changed their minds upon seeing that G-d approved of his deed and even fully rewarded him for it. Hence they understood that G-d abhors such actions and kept quiet. They also examined their own behavior more closely as they tried to draw closer to G-d.

Our Sages add that at that point, 12 miracles were performed for Pinchas (Bamidbar Rabba 20:25). These miracles obviously contributed to magnifying G-d’s Name and sanctifying Him in public, this in order to compensate for the desecration of the Divine Name that had just occurred.

Since G-d’s Name was eventually sanctified after Zimri’s reprehensible act, merit was also conferred to him and his soul was rectified and became reconnected to its source. As a result, Zimri regained his name and the Torah clearly mentions him by describing him as “Zimri the son of Salu.”

This is what happened with Hagar, Sarah’s maid-servant, and her son Ishmael. Sarah did not mention their names when speaking of them, but instead said: “Drive out this slavewoman and her son” (Bereshith 21:10), for Ishmael did not follow the path of Torah and mitzvot. As he grew older, Ishmael adopted the behavior of a wild man, taking to the wrong path and even turning to idolatry. Since he separated himself from G-d – from the root of his soul beneath the Throne of Glory – he lost his name, which is what connected him to his root. The same happened to his mother, who led him along this path and who also lost her name.

Despite having been aroused by evil intentions, Zimri served as an intermediary for the sanctification of the Divine Name, enabling the Children of Israel to draw closer to G-d and infuse themselves with a fear of sin. Hence this was counted to Zimri as a merit, and the connection that had previously been severed was now restored, allowing him to regain his name.

The Ohr HaChaim writes that although Zimri sinned, he still remained a member of the Jewish people. G-d punished him so that he would not be rejected or excluded from the assembly of Israel. This is why the text states in regard to Zimri, “The name of the slain Israelite man” (Bamidbar 25:6), meaning that he was a member of the people despite his sin. In light of these words, we can better understand why the Torah decided to mention his name only after he was punished.

We can now understand why the Torah does not explicitly mention the name of Zimri the son of Salu at first. As a result of his grave and premediated sin, he cut himself off from Hashem, which made him a stranger to the Torah. This in turn made him lose the name that connected him to the source of his soul, which was rooted beneath the Throne of Glory.

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**HEVRAT PINTO**

Under the Direction of  
**Rabbi David Hanania  
Pinto Shlita**

**CHEVRAT PINTO**  
207 West 78th Street  
New York - NY 10024  
Tel: 1 212 721 0230  
[www.hevratpinto.org](http://www.hevratpinto.org)  
[hevratpinto@aol.com](mailto:hevratpinto@aol.com)

Editor-in-Chief:  
**Hanania Soussan**

### *The Customs of Bein HaMetzarim*

Our Sages call the 21 days that separate Tammuz 17 from Av 9 Bein HaMetzarim, an expression drawn from the verse: “All her pursuers overtook her bein hametzarim [between the boundaries]” (Eicha 1:3). These are days filled with pain, a time when all kinds of destructive forces are at work, and during which the Jewish people have suffered grave tragedies in every generation. Hence these days have been established as a time to mourn the destruction of the Temple, may it be quickly rebuilt in our days, Amen.

Various mourning rituals have been established by Jewish communities for this time of year. The poskim have drawn clear distinctions between the different periods forming Bein HaMetzarim: (A) Tammuz 17 to Av 1; (B) Av 1 to the week of Av 9; and (C) the week of Av 9.

Different halachot apply to each of these periods, and with each successive period, our mourning rituals become more severe.

#### He Fasted for Three Weeks

During the time of the Rishonim, especially pious men would take it upon themselves to fast during the 21 days of Bein HaMetzarim. The book *Shibolei HaLeket* describes it as follows: “I found in the name of our master Saadia Gaon Zatzal that from Tammuz 17 to Av 9, which are the days mentioned in the book of Daniel, there is a three-week fast that certain people observe.” Rabbeinu Yaakov Baal HaTurim also cites the Ravia on the laws of this fast: “There are people of great piety who fast from Tammuz 17 to Av 9.” In the *Shulchan Aruch*, Rabbi Yosef Karo reveals that some poskim did not look favorably upon just anyone fasting at this time, and in the book *Birkei Yosef* the Chida cites Rabbi Shemuel Shaar Aryeh in protesting: “A talmid chacham must not engage in such ascetic practices, which result in diminishing his service of G-d. It is impossible not to diminish one’s [Torah] studies for a few hours as a result of such a fast, and these things must be carefully considered.”

#### A Very Good Custom

Another custom is mentioned by the commentators: The reading of Tikkun Chatzot in the middle of the day. The Magen Avraham cites the Arizal in stating, “It is good and desirable during this time for everyone to mourn for half an hour each day.” In *Shaar HaKavanot*, Rabbi Haim Vital also writes in regard to these three weeks: “It is a very good custom for every pious person to mourn after the middle of the day, and to actually weep over the destruction of the Temple.”

He also explains why the reciting of Tikkun Chatzot was established for the middle of the day, since “it is a time when the Attribute of Justice prevails, which is why the Temple was

burned in the middle of the day, and this tikkun is extremely useful for the human soul.” We find interesting testimonies in the book by Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian regarding the customs of his city, such as the fact that even the artisans’ Beit HaMidrash was completely filled with Jews reciting Tikkun Chatzot each day during Bein HaMetzarim.

In the introduction to his book *Tikkun Chatzot*, Rabbi Nissim Harari Zatzal extols a person who rises at midnight to study Torah and sing songs of praise. In the end, he recounts the story of Rabbi Avraham Halevy Zatzal, who lived in Sefat during the time of the Arizal, and who encouraged people to get up at midnight. Every night he would arise and walk through the streets, proclaiming with a strong and bitter voice: “My Jewish brothers, do you not know that because of our numerous sins, the Shechinah is in exile, the Temple was burned, and the Jewish people are in exile and suffer the greatest tragedies? Many pious men and women, boys and girls, have experienced violent deaths – and yet you remain quietly in bed! Get up and beg Hashem our G-d with tremendous cries, for He is a good and merciful King. Perhaps He will hear our voice and take pity on what remains of His people Israel!”

Rabbi Nissim Harari continues his account: “This pious man would cry without respite to the residents of his town, and everyone would get up at the same time and make their way to synagogues and houses of study, where they would recite Tikkun Chatzot. Each of them would then study according to his level, and they would awaken tremendous compassion. The Arizal greatly admired his piety, saying that he was a reincarnation of the prophet Jeremiah.”

#### No Sadness or Worries

The gaon Rabbi Avraham Antebi Zatzal, who served as the Av Beit Din of Aleppo some 200 years ago, recounts another story about something he witnessed in his youth. In his city was a shamash from the Ben David family who would get up before midnight and knock on the doors of Jews so they would get up and go to synagogue. The large majority of the community came to read *Sefer Tehillim* aloud, word by word, followed by the reading of *Shir HaShirim*.

“I am a witness,” writes Rabbi Antebi, “that as long as this custom was practiced, the Children of Israel lived in peace. During all those years they suffered no sadness or worries, and nothing bad happened to any Jew. During all that time, people experienced abundance, finding things almost for free. Everything was inexpensive, and nobody worried or died prematurely. Of that generation it was said: ‘He who observes a mitzvah will know no evil’ [Kohelet 8:5], and I say of them: ‘Your people will all be righteous’ [Isaiah 60:21].”

### You Inform Him

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

The Netziv of Volozhin used the following parable to explain why G-d chose Moshe to inform Pinchas of his reward:

The commander of an army once entered a city and attempted to conquer it, but without success. He and all his soldiers were taken prisoner.

At that point a simple soldier gave him some wise advice that helped him to escape.

Upon learning this, the king sent a gift to the commander of the army and instructed him to present it to the simple soldier who had saved him. The gift would also serve as a rebuke to the commander, who had not made enough of an effort to ensure his own safety on the battlefield.

This is the meaning of the parable: Moshe did not demonstrate enough eagerness or zeal for Hashem. Only Pinchas gathered up his courage and sacrificed himself for the sanctification of the Divine Name. Hence Moshe was the one who was instructed to inform Pinchas of his reward.

This is the meaning of the expression: “Therefore say” – you yourself will inform Pinchas that I am giving him My covenant of peace.

### The Foundations of Faith

It is written, “But the sons of Korach did not die” (Bamidbar 26:11).

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian had difficulty understanding this verse, for our Sages affirm that a child can bestow the merit of his own good deeds to his parents. That being the case, why was Korach not saved by the merit of his sons’ good deeds?

The fact is, this principle does not apply when a man has overturned the foundations of faith in G-d. If a man sins by completely denying G-d, the merit of his children’s good deeds will be unable to help him.

Hence measure for measure, because such a man has ceased behaving like the son of his Father in Heaven – having no faith in divine providence and no longer observing Torah and mitzvot – likewise the merit of his children will not help him avoid destruction and Gehinnom.

That is precisely what happened in this week’s parsha: Because Korach and his assembly renounced their faith in G-d, Korach did not escape death despite the merit of his sons, who were righteous men.

### His Daughters’ Sons

It is written, “He had no sons” (Bamidbar 27:3).

The verse should have more accurately stated, “He had not had sons,” for Zelophehad never had sons! Why then does the verse say, “He had no sons”? Rabbi Haim ben Attar answers this question by citing the Gemara: “Sons of sons are like sons” (Yebamot 62b). The same applies to sons of daughters, who are also considered “like sons.” Hence the verse states, “He had no sons,” meaning that he never had sons in his lifetime. Yet he still hoped that his daughters would have sons, in which case they would be “like sons” to him.

### Not the Children of Israel

It is written, “Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the kohen, turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume the Children of Israel in My vengeance” (Bamidbar 25:11).

How did Pinchas turn G-d’s wrath from the Children of Israel? After all, it is written: “The dead in the plague were 24,000” (Bamidbar 25:9). If only one of them had died, we could have said: “[Pinchas] turned back My wrath.” But since so many people died, what does this expression mean?

The answer is clear: Woe to a person who does not protect his progeny.

The only ones who died belonged to the tribe of Shimon. When the erev rav (“mixed multitude”) converted and had children, they married women from the tribe of Shimon, and some of them died during the sin of the golden calf, while others died during a plague. Those who remained died in this incident.

This is the meaning of the expression, “The dead in the plague.” It does not say, “Those who died,” but rather “The dead” – as if speaking of people who were already (spiritually) dead. Since the Children of Israel protected themselves and all their children remained holy, not one of them died. Thus it is written, “I did not consume the Children of Israel in My vengeance.” The others, meaning the erev rav, were destroyed, but not the Children of Israel.

## In the Light of the Parsha

### For Hashem Alone

It is written, “Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the kohen, turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel” (Bamidbar 25:11).

Rashi explains that the tribes disparaged Pinchas by saying, “Have you seen this son of Puti, whose mother’s father [Jethro] fattened calves for idols, and who killed a leader of an Israelite tribe?” Hence the verse traces his lineage back to Aaron. We need to better understand this, given that the tribes already knew that Pinchas was Aaron’s grandson! That being the case, what were they trying to say by linking him to Jethro? Furthermore, Jethro had already converted and was now a tzaddik. Hence there was nothing humiliating in the fact that Pinchas was a descendant of Jethro. The Mishnah in Sanhedrin tells us, “If one...cohabits with an Aramean woman, he is punished by zealots” (Sanhedrin 81b), and Rav Hisda says: “If the zealot comes seeking advice, we do not instruct him” (ibid. 82a).

Rashi explains that a zealot is not told what to do if, in the heat of the moment, he asks the Beit Din if he should strike the offending party. This halachah only applies to a person who is motivated by internal zeal, and such a person does not ask questions.

This is because if he is not acting solely for the sake of Heaven, then he becomes a criminal. It is therefore impossible to give him the halachah, for we do not know what the intentions of his heart truly are.

Thus when the Children of Israel exclaimed, “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 to defend Hashem’s honor, which had just been profaned. Instead he sought personal fame and glory. 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).

According to the Gemara, although he was the grandson of Aaron and Jethro (who was now a sincere convert), we may think that Pinchas killed a leader from a tribe of Israel for his own honor, and that these actions were related to Jethro, who had fattened calves for idolatry. Now pride is similar to idolatry, and even if Jethro was a sincere convert at that point, in the past he had served idols, and it was from there that Pinchas derived the potential to act in this way.

It was therefore to refute this view that the text mentions Aaron, telling us that on the contrary, Pinchas was the grandson of Aaron, who was a very humble man (having said of himself and Moshe: “what are we?” [Shemot 16:7]). Likewise Pinchas was infused with this modesty, and he avenged G-d’s honor without any trace of pride or a desire for glory.

## *In the Footsteps of our Fathers*

### *Seeking Merit*

It is written, “Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aaron the kohen, turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel!” (Bamidbar 25:11).

It is not without reason that the genealogy of Pinchas is explicitly mentioned here. In fact the Kli Yakar explains it as follows: He was the “son of Elazar” – who had married a daughter of Putiel (Jethro), who had fattened calves for idolatry. He did not avoid marrying her, despite criticisms from the scorners of his generation who said, “Who permitted the daughter of Jethro to you?” He was also the descendant of Aaron the kohen, who had participated in the sin of the golden calf, for which he was criticized. Yet despite all these things, Pinchas did not fear that his reputation would suffer.

The text implies additional praise for Pinchas: Although he was in the midst of the community, meaning that his life was in danger because he found himself among Zimri’s relatives [when he killed him], Pinchas nevertheless risked his own life to save the Jewish people. We find an allusion to this in the verse, “He took a romach [spear] in his hand” (Bamidbar 25:7), meaning that he put all 248 of his ramach [limbs] into action.

This devotion for the Jewish community has been transmitted as a heritage from generation to generation. In each community, we find people who are ready to risk their lives for their fellow Jews. We also find people who help others without material assistance, but simply through wise advice that confers merit upon the community.

In his memoirs, Rabbi Moshe Schneider (the Rosh Yeshiva of Torat Emet and a disciple of the Chafetz Chaim) did everything possible to bring his fellow Jews closer to Torah. Even when his approach seemed unlikely to succeed, he experienced incredible achievements in this area.

In regard to this subject, Rabbi Schneider would often recount the following story in the name of his teacher, the Chafetz Chaim:

The Midrash (Kohelet Rabba 1:1) tells us that when Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa saw the residents of his city taking vowed offerings and free-will offerings to Jerusalem, he exclaimed: “Everyone is taking vowed offerings and free-will offerings to Jerusalem, but I am taking nothing!”

He went out to the waste area of his city, and there he saw a rock that he hewed, chiseled, and polished. He tried to hire workers to transport it to Jerusalem, but they wanted five selayim for the work, money that he did not have.

G-d then arranged for five angels to appear to him in the likeness of men. They said to him, “Give us five selayim and we will carry your rock to Jerusalem, but on condition that you place your hand and finger with ours.”

The Chafetz Chaim asks: “Why did G-d wait for Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa to first try and find laborers himself, rather than sending him angels right away? Also, what is the meaning of the angels’ demand that ‘you place your hand and finger with ours’?”

The Chafetz Chaim responds: “This teaches us that regardless of our situation, we must do everything possible to fulfill a mitzvah, even if our mission seems impossible. Only then will Hashem assist us in a miraculous way. In fact assistance from above only occurs once we have done everything that we can do.”

### *The Greatest Merit Possible*

At the Merkaz HaRav yeshiva, the custom was to send groups of ten students to all parts of the land of Israel, to kibbutzim and

cities that were not observant, or which had no organized prayer services. These groups of youngsters went to pray in these communities during the Yamim Noraim (Days of Awe) in order to confer merit to two prayer services each year: That of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Hacoen Kook loved to see his students bringing their brothers closer to Torah. However he insisted upon one thing: A group of ten students, not less, had to go to each city and kibbutz.

This initiative brought about a tremendous sanctification of G-d’s Name. In fact numerous people who were far from Torah came closer and did complete teshuvah.

A student once complained to Rav Tzvi Yehudah that it was easier for him to concentrate in yeshiva rather than on a kibbutz.

In response, the Rav said to him: “To confer merit upon the community constitutes the greatest merit possible.”

## *The Faithful Ones - Accounts from the Tzaddikim of the Pinto Family*

### *An Answer to Prayer*

Rabbi Mordechai Knafo recounted the following story: He owned a wine business in the Moroccan city of Tiznit, but his losses were equal to his gains. Moroccan Arabs did not purchase wine on account of their religious beliefs, and his main clients were French nationals, who were few in number in Morocco. Furthermore, fights often broke out among the drunks near Rabbi Mordechai’s store, which caused him great distress.

With his worries increasing, he went with his friend Rabbi Israel Cohen to Mogador in order to pray by the grave of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol. There he prayed that by the merit of the tzaddik, the authorities would come and shut down his business, thereby ending his misery. And so it happened, during the very same week, that police officers ordered him to close down his business, claiming that since the French had left the country, he had no potential clients to purchase his wine.

When the police arrived, Rabbi Mordechai collapsed and cried out in tears: “You’re taking my livelihood away!”

Rav Israel Cohen, who was present at the time, was stunned by his reaction. “Why are you crying?” he asked. “You yourself prayed for the authorities to close your store, and now your prayer has been answered!”

Rabbi Mordechai Knafo ended up moving to Casablanca, where he started another business that flourished.

## *Guard Your Tongue*

### *Repenting on the Same Day*

We must also set aside a time each day to study the laws regarding forbidden speech. If we should ever forget that we have a duty to guard our tongue, and if we allow ourselves to speak Lashon Harah, we must repent and continue to be vigilant. If this happens to a talmid chacham, he will not delay his repentance, be it even for the duration of a night. Instead he will do teshuvah at that very moment, before even going to sleep, so as not to let any impurity tarnish his soul.