

PARSHAS PINCHAS

תשע"ט

At the conclusion of last week's parsha, Bolok chastises Bilaam for blessing Klal Yisroel instead of cursing them; Bilaam gives his final nevuah about the fate of all the nations and leaves. The Haftarah fills in a gap in the narrative—it tells us that before Bilaam departs, he gives Bolok a piece of advice. The only way to triumph over Klal Yisroel is to sever their connection and damage their relationship with Hashem. For as long as Hashem is with them, they are invincible.

In the brochos Bilaam gave when he gazed at the grandeur of Klal Yisroel, he proclaimed that Klal Yisroel is a nation apart. They are not reckoned along with the other nations of the world—and this is the secret of our national survival. As long as we remain separate and unassimilated into the surrounding non-Jewish culture, we can fulfill our purpose and thrive and flourish. Bilaam noted we are descended from the Ovov who are our physical and spiritual ancestors. They bequeathed to us a permanent legacy to follow and a unique heritage through which base our identity.

Bilaam praised our middoh of tznius and realized that the way to subjugate Klal Yisroel is by breaking down the barriers of arayos. So Moav sent out their women and seduced Klal Yisroel into worshipping the most vile and vulgar of idols—Baal Peor. It boggles the mind—how could a nation that experienced first-hand all the supernatural wonders and ongoing miracles which protected and sustained—and sometimes punished—an entire nation of millions of people in the Wilderness for forty years, suddenly trade their worship of Hashem for such a degrading and debasing religion such as Peor?

Chazal explain that Klal Yisroel only worship avodo zoro in order to justify living a morally loose lifestyle. So Moav used arayos and avodo zoro—working in tandem—to cause Klal Yisroel's downfall and near destruction. Chazal describe the method in which Klal Yisroel were seduced. Hashem commands Moshe to execute all those who fell prey to their temptation. The highest noblemen in Klal Yisroel took the highest noblewomen of Moav and Midian for zhus, so they have to be publicly killed to avenge this grave aveiroh.

At that moment, in front of everybody, Zimri takes Kozbi bas Tzur. The leadership of Klal Yisroel are in shock—they are paralyzed. Pinchas is the one who stood up in front of everyone despite the flaw in his lineage and personal status—for he was not yet fully a kohen at that point. He could not remain still and passive in the face of such a chillul Hashem. He killed Zimri and Kozbi and the plague which took 24,000 lives was halted.

What is Klal Yisroel's response to such an incident? Yes, Boruch Hashem, everyone stopped dying! But on the other hand, people's egos feel stepped on—it is hard for them to accept rebuke from someone who they considered inferior to them. "Who are you to just get up and kill the nosi of Shevet Shimon? And who sanctioned your kanaus? Who says your intentions were pure enough?"

Because of all this, the opening pesukim of this week's parsha establish that Hashem approved of Pinchas' actions. The one who fulfills the halacha and is mekaneh for Hashem's kovod is the one who brings true sholom. This is because true kanaus mends the rift that forms when Klal Yisroel stray from their task to remain separate and start to intermarry.

People called him a baal machlokes! He took the law into his own hands—overruled Moshe Rabbeinu's beis din! But the truth is that he knew the halacha—kanoim pog'in bo. He knew that Klal Yisroel were

dying by the thousands and something had to be done. He knew that striking down Zimri and Kozbi at that exact moment would not only bring sholom between Hashem and Klal Yisroel, but also within Klal Yisroel itself.

A kohen's role is to bring sholom in all spheres and that is why Aharon became the Kohen Godol—because he was a rodef sholom, as the Mishnah in Ovov says.

Then there is a command to wage war with Midian. Why? Because they are out to destroy the Jewish people. How? By trying to cause Klal Yisroel to stumble in arayos and avodo zoro. Chazal learn a vital lesson from this: a spiritual threat is more dangerous than any physical threat. An army is then drafted to go out to war. They kill the kings of Midian, all the men, and any woman who was of age to commit zhus.

The Torah teaches us a simple lesson—the most important value in our lives is our relationship with Hashem. As long as this bond is strong, we are protected from physical harm. Once that bond is weakened and starts to tear, we are in immediate danger. Bilaam realized that the ovov laid down a foundation of a relationship that is indestructible. He sees their tznius and their commitment to fidelity. No military force can conquer them in this state. There is only one way to put a wedge between them and Hashem—tempt them with zhus and avodo zoro. It is the only way.

Once Midian set themselves upon this path to separate Klal Yisroel from Hashem, the Midrash says they had a din of a rodef and we are allowed to take pre-emptive measures to eliminate them. Although we already learned this halacha from the din of a boh be'machteres, this halacha refers to a physical danger. This lesson here is to teach us that the same applies to spiritual dangers. The Rambam in a number of places speaks at length about such dangers and how we need to deal with them.

The fact that these women were sent out by the leaders of Midian to represent the Midian nation to weaken the moral fiber of Klal Yisroel, the entire nation was marked for destruction. The Torah takes spiritual assaults very seriously.

The Rambam explains why there is such a severe reaction in halacha to a boel aramis—a Jewish man living with a non-Jewish woman is committing a chilul of kedushas Yisroel. If he does it in public, he is severing the kesher between Klal Yisroel and Hashem. He must be stopped by whatever means necessary. By intermarrying with a non-Jewish woman, one is betraying the bris with Hashem.

This parsha gives us insight into the problems we face in our communities today. We see that Hashem despises zhus but we live in a world where zhus dominates the universal culture. We have to be separate and different. We have to erect strong gedarim to limit our exposure and prevent us from stumbling.

Those who are going home for bein hazmanim will likely be subject to all kinds of temptations and dangers. Having access to unfiltered internet means almost certain failure to withstand the temptations and trials of arayos. We have to be prepared for the coming nisyonos and set ourselves up in advance to succeed in steering ourselves away from possible michsholim.

Bilaam realized that the first step to inserting a barrier between ourselves and Hashem is by making breaches in arayos. The biggest rodef of Klal Yisroel was Bilaam because he exposed this weakness and

advised Bolok to unleash a charm offensive.

An Israeli politician made big headlines in the Jewish media recently, by accusing the assimilated and intermarried Jews in America of perpetrating a second holocaust. All the liberal Jews were immediately offended and outraged by the comparison. But the truth is this is exactly what Chazal say based on the pesukim we read—a movement that engages in spiritual warfare against Klal Yisroel and actively tries to push assimilation and intermarriage to make us lose our unique identity are yes, worse than the Nazis.

And ironically, Pinchas who used violence is identified by the Torah as the man of peace. He restored the frayed connection between Hashem and Klal Yisroel who succumbed to arayos en masse. When there is sholom between ourselves and Hashem, this is the ultimate sholom. Most of the time it should be done by peaceful means. But sometimes

more extreme measures are necessary and Pinchas was elevated—eventually to inherit his father's position as Kohen Godol—because of his extreme pursuit of peace.

Unfiltered internet is something you simply should not have access to while you are home in the summer. I often tell parents that giving a young man a smartphone is like giving a young man four bottles of vodka and keys to your car and then telling him to have good time. You are setting your son up for certain destruction and it is simply irresponsible parenting. If the parents give in to such a request it is most probably because the parents themselves don't have the good sense to filter their own internet access.

Hashem despises zimoh; the biggest barrier between us and Hashem is znus. It destroys the fabric of ruchniyus in our lives and the foundation of kedushoh which the Jewish home is built upon.