

PARSHAS PINCHAS

תשפ"א

This parsha is a continuation of last week's parsha.

Bilaam HoRosho was a very complex individual. He knew that the only ones who could destroy Klal Yisroel were Klal Yisroel themselves. They cannot be cursed. The only way to attack them effectively is to corrupt them with zhus. As a consequence of that, the women got Klal Yisroel to worship baal pe'or which was the most obnoxious form of idol worship you could imagine.

In the middle of this tragedy, the leader of Shevet Shimon, Zimri ben Solu, was mezaneh in public with the Midianite princess – Kosbi bas Tzur. Moshe Rabbeinu was paralyzed, and Pinchos rose to the occasion.

Pinchos was in an unusual position. Although he was a grandson of Aharon Hakohen, the kehunoh passed over him and he was in a kind of limbo state. People even questioned his lineage since he also descended from Yisro on his mother's side who was a priest to avodo zoro.

On the other hand, when the Rambam lists the four major talmidim of Moshe Rabbeinu, one of them was Pinchos.

So we have a man who was a grandson of Aharon and a great talmid of Moshe Rabbeinu. Nevertheless, he is looked down upon by people because wasn't a kohen and didn't have the most perfect lineage. He had no position of honor in society, and was compared negatively to Zimri who was the nosi of his shevet.

Some people only value superficial titles and honorifics and don't appreciate who Pinchos was. They look at how many times a rabbi's picture is splashed on the front cover of the Jewish magazines and newspapers as the measure of a person's greatness. They cannot see sincerity and genuine gadlus baTorah. They are trapped by externals.

Pinchos saw what was happening and remembered the halacha of kanoim pog'in bo, and carried it out. But these stupid, superficial people objected – how dare you kill a human being! An important nosi of a shevet! Somehow these people forgot that Zimri was doing something completely inexcusable. He was publically breaking down the barriers of tzniyus that make Klal Yisroel a holy and pure nation! Besides the fact that this woman was not Jewish, Zimri's crime was utterly repulsive. But amazingly, these superficial people found fault with what Pinchos did and not Zimri.

The gemara tells us about one of the amoraim who died and came back to life. They asked him what he saw while in shomayim. He responded that he saw an upside-down world. All the people who were looked down upon as insignificant in this world, all those who quietly sat and learned and ran away from honor all their lives, they are very much honored in shomayim. Those who are considered important and are given honor in this world are on the low end in shomayim.

Most people in this world can't see the reality properly. They are blinded by superficiality. They complained that Pinchos was a baal machlokes for killing another Jew. In reality, he saved Klal Yisroel and brought peace. They never stopped to think why one of the closest talmidim of Moshe Rabbeinu, one of the greatest talmidei chachomim, would decide to do such a thing. It required that Hashem Himself announce to everyone that Pinchos brought peace because he repaired the relationship between Hashem and Klal Yisroel with his act of kano'us.

To understand this on a deeper level, we need to look at the next pesukim. Hashem instructed Klal Yisroel to wipe out Midian. Why? Because they are considered rodfim – they caused Klal Yisroel to stumble in arayos and drove a dangerous wedge between Hashem and Klal Yisroel. Causing spiritual danger to a Jew is as severe as putting him in physical danger and that person deserves to be killed as a rodef. And not only was the nation of Midian a rodef, Zimri was also a rodef. His public act was such a danger to the spiritual health of Klal Yisroel, that he deserved to be killed on the spot.

But not just by anyone. Only a kannoi has the license to kill someone like Zimri. A kannoi isn't just someone who dresses a certain way and burns garbage cans on the street. A kannoi is someone for whom the truth of Hashem and His Torah is so real and so important, that he cannot tolerate falsehood. Falsehood violates his entire personality and he will even endure great personal cost to stop it.

Hashem instructs Moshe to appoint a successor. Moshe Rabbeinu pleads that Hashem pick someone who fits the criteria of a leader of Klal Yisroel. Today we live in a democracy and we have leaders who have no inkling about how to lead Klal Yisroel with Torah principles. In the beginning of Sefer Yehoshua, Hashem tells Yehoshua that the most important attribute of a Jewish leader is to be strong and not yield one inch in deciding every matter through the Torah. If you can accomplish this, you will be successful in everything you try to achieve.

But how can one stand up to all the challenges of leading a nation, especially one as contentious and quarrelsome as Klal Yisroel? There are enormous political pressures, financial pressures, and social pressures which sorely tempt leaders to compromise on their principles in order to be accepted by the people. Hashem tells Yehoshua that the only way to meet this challenge is to constantly be thinking about Torah day and night. This is how you can stay the course and not compromise. These are the necessary criterion to lead Klal Yisroel.

Why was Yehoshua chosen from all the great talmidim of Moshe Rabbeinu? Chazal tell us Moshe wanted one of his own sons to succeed him, but Hashem refused. Yehoshua was the only one who stayed with Moshe and never budged from his side.

In times of war, most generals stay behind the front lines and direct the army from a safe distance. But in Klal Yisroel, the

leader is out there in front – on the battlefield – leading the charge against the enemy with his army behind him! You need tremendous merits to survive such a situation. And the merit comes from learning Torah constantly.

The midrash says another thing. On the one hand, a Jewish leader needs to be strong and unyielding, but he also needs to understand the unique needs of each and every neshomo and give personal guidance. This is a Jewish leader. But the first criteria is to be suffused with Torah till it becomes a part of your being.

In the end, Pinchos will eventually become a leader of Klal Yisroel, but for now, Yehoshua takes Moshe Rabbeinu's place because he never left Moshe for forty years. He followed every action, every thought process. He was able to successfully lead Klal Yisroel with Torah wisdom alone. Not by going to university to study political science or to a military academy to

be trained in warfare. Just by learning Torah and getting a deep understanding of it, you can understand how to lead a nation and fight battles.

Klal Yisroel in their superficiality couldn't appreciate who Pinchos was. This is why they criticized him. Hashem had to make a very clear statement to rectify their perception.

Moshe Rabbeinu wanted one of his sons to replace him, but Hashem said no – only Yehoshua is worthy. The midrash tells us Yehoshua was the one who set up the benches of the beis midrash before Moshe Rabbeinu's shiur – worrying that everything would go smoothly behind the scenes and never taking credit, never seeking recognition.

The events recorded in Chumash are not just stories. They show us how to evaluate people by what is really important, and see things in the proper perspective.