

PARSHAS PINCHAS

תש"פ

This parsha is really a continuation of what happened at the end of Parshas Bolok.

Klal Yisroel are coming to Eretz Yisroel. They posed a threat to all the other nations in the region. They have conquered the two powerful nations of Sichon and Og, and everyone in Eretz Canaan are terrified. Rochov hazonoh told the two spies who came to her that everyone is terrified because of kriyas yam suf and what happened to Sichon and Og. Of course, the only nation that should not have panicked was Moav – since the territory of Ammon and Moav was promised as an inheritance to the children of Lot and would not be conquered by Klal Yisroel. But regardless, Moav was intimidated and they hired Bilaam to give Klal Yisroel a kloloh. Bilaam didn't succeed in giving a kloloh but rather many brochos. So in order to collect his fee, Bilaam gives Bolok advice: there is only one thing that can destroy Klal Yisroel. Klal Yisroel can destroy themselves through arayos and znus. If Klal Yisroel remain a goy kodosh, nothing can touch them. But arayos and znus will remove their Divine protection and they will be vulnerable.

However, an additional element was added – avodah zoroh. These two things, avodah zoroh and znus, go hand-in-hand. Chazal teach us that Klal Yisroel only worship avodah zoroh because it gives people tremendous freedom to rationalize and justify znus. If there are no absolutes, you can decide whatever you want to do is right. It becomes a philosophy of hefkeirus in order to justify pursuing all your taivos. This is avodah zoroh. The strategy of Moav was not to get a one-time violation. It was to integrate Klal Yisroel into Moav's whole culture and their permissive lifestyle. This is what attracted the Jewish men.

When Klal Yisroel complained about the mon, they also cried because of the restrictions on arayos. One of the biggest ways Klal Yisroel distinguishes itself from the rest of the world is by our gidrei tzniyus. The gemara says when there is a gezeiras shmad, then there is a mitzvah of yehareg ve'al yaavor even to change your shoe laces. Rashi explains that the difference between our way of lacing shoes and the non-Jewish way involved a geder of tzniyus. The Shulchan Aruch says that one of the areas included in the prohibition of bechukoseihem lo seleichu is dressing and acting with tzniyus and not pritzus. Our lifestyle of kedushoh involves consciously setting up strict gidrei tzniyus. Breaking down those barriers inevitably invites arayos to happen.

Megillas Esther starts with Achashveirosh's long drunken feasts full of arayos and znus going on for days and weeks and months – as was the custom of Persia in those times. The Megillah mentions that they served wine with the keilim of the Beis Hamikdosh. We recite that posuk to the tune of Eichoh to emphasize the tragedy. What is shocking is that even the Jews got drunk with those keilim at the feast! How could they descend to such a low level? Wouldn't we be utterly repulsed by the sight of Persian goyim getting drunk on our holy keilim of the Beis Hamikdosh? The answer is that once you are surrounded by znus and arayos and it becomes normal, then your whole level falls and you lose all sensitivity to anything of kedushoh.

Here, we have Klal Yisroel marching through to Eretz Yisroel. Nothing can stand in their way. Sichon can't stop them. Og can't stop them. Bilaam can't stop them. Everyone is trembling in their boots! What stops them? 24,000 pretty girls. When they enticed a Jewish man, and he was ready and willing to commit arayos with her, she suddenly stops and takes out an idol. She demands that he first worship Baal Peor. This avodah zoroh is the most degrading and obnoxious avodah

zoroh you can imagine! How could a Jewish man degrade himself to worship it? The answer is that once you are caught up in lust for arayos, or a lifestyle of znus, you lose all reason and common-sense and you can do the most disgusting things.

Zimri, the nosi of passionate Shevet Shimon, takes Kosbi the Midian princess and is mezaneh in front of everyone. He does this in order to taunt Moshe Rabbeinu. He says: "Why is my Midian wife any different from yours, Tzipporah?" They turn to Moshe Rabbeinu to stop what's going on. But he is too stunned to do anything. Pinchas stands up and kills them on the spot. Moshe later agrees that it was Pinchas' mitzvah to carry out.

Hashem rewards Pinchas because he has genuine kin'oh for Hashem. There is true kana'us and there is fake kana'us. For some unique individuals, the truth of the Torah and the falsehood of the znus and avodah zoroh are so clear to them that they cannot tolerate the sheker. True kana'us means the truth is so important and essential to your being, that you cannot stand by and watch a violation of Torah happen and not react.

Who is Pinchas? The Rambam lists the leading talmidim of Moshe Rabbeinu: Yehoshua, Elozor and Pinchos. When the Rambam lists the chain of mesorah, he lists Moshe, Yehoshua and Pinchos. Who has the right to take that drastic step to stand up to stop a public violation of Torah? It is someone whose understanding of Torah is clear and not muddled by any other considerations. He sees what is necessary to restore Klal Yisroel's madreigoh and bring the Shechinoh back. Until you learn enough and absorb enough Torah, the truth of Torah doesn't really burn inside you. Seeing the Torah and kedushas Klal Yisroel desecrated and violated has to demand a response.

Why did Moshe Rabbeinu not respond even though he also had that clarity of the truth? It was because Zimri personally challenged him about his own wife Tzipporah. If Moshe killed Zimri himself it might have had the appearance of coming from personal motives. So Moshe was paralyzed. He couldn't act. Pinchas was not personally involved so he could act. The whole issue in his life was the truth of Torah.

As a result, Hashem gave Pinchas His bris of sholom. What does this mean? The fact that Pinchas could make such a decision according to Torah produces sholom. Chazal say talmidei chachomim increase sholom in the world. A true talmid chochom – emphasizing *true* – makes all his decisions according to the Torah. There are all kinds of conflicting values and competing interests that have to be balanced out in order to find the correct path to lead Klal Yisroel through difficult times. Moshe gave Yehoshua one tool for guiding Klal Yisroel – integrate Torah so deeply inside you that it will guide you through all these compromising situations. Dovid Hamelech did the same for Shlomo. Have the Torah so clear and so deep inside you that it can balance you and strengthen you from caving into all the pressures. People will always try to pull you down – accusing you of personal interests and bad middos. The only thing that will keep your straight and not veer into needless machlokes on one side, or needless compromise on the other, is following the Torah.

Pinchas was the only one who could have done this because he was able to balance all of the factors involved according to the Torah. On the face of it, he looked like a baal machlokes. But Hashem testified that Pinchas saved Klal Yisroel with his act of violence. When we have leaders who insist that Klal Yisroel has to do everything according to

Torah, it brings sholom and harmony between Jews, and between Hashem and Klal Yisroel.

What is interesting is that Hashem commands Klal Yisroel to annihilate Midian – not Moav! Why? Because Moav at least felt physically threatened by Klal Yisroel and thought they were defending themselves from an aggressor. Midian on their own decided to give away their princess – the highest group in their society – to try to bring about Klal Yisroel's downfall. Why? Midian saw Klal Yisroel as representing Hashem in this world – living a lifestyle of kedushoh and taharoh. Midian, Bilaam and all baalei taivoh cannot tolerate having Klal Yisroel exist. That idea is a threat to a lifestyle of znus and hefkeirus. If Klal Yisroel will set themselves up to life in Eretz Yisroel on a higher level, it will obligate everyone else to measure themselves against a higher standard.

Hitler laid this attitude out very clearly in his book, *Mein Kampf*. The drive of German culture is to live life like an animal. Having Jews in the world who represent a conscience and a neshomo will make us feel guilty and morally inferior. It won't let us live the life we want. So Jews have to be eliminated so we can live our animalistic lives without regrets.

Moav was a nation founded on znus between Lot and his daughter. They were so proud of it that they didn't try to hide it but rather named their nation after it. They were still proud 400 years later. This culture of znus is deeply threatened by Torah.

Pinchas brings sholom in this world by fighting to ensure Klal Yisroel lives their lives on a higher level. Midian has to be destroyed because they sacrificed their highest end of society to bring Klal Yisroel down – a nation so dedicated to fight kedushoh and taharoh has to be destroyed.

Midian loses in battle, and additionally, lost all the wealth they amassed. Klal Yisroel took everything away as spoils of war. So not only were their lives ended, but their entire culture and lifestyle were also eliminated. Nothing of the evil of Midian remained.

What do we learn from the story of Pinchas? We learn that only people who have a deep understanding of Torah can understand clearly where the dangers of Klal Yisroel lie and how to face them and deal with them. So even if on the surface they seem violent and extreme, their understanding of Torah which guides all their actions not only makes peace between Hashem and Klal Yisroel, but also among Jews themselves. Only when we are united in our values of kedushoh and taharoh can there be harmony in Klal Yisroel to live in true sholom with each other.

Pinchas is Eliyahu who is the malach of sholom. Who will announce the coming of Moshiach when the entire world will finally recognize the truth about the world? When the world accepts the emes of Torah and it will be ready to have the ultimate sholom to the world, Eliyahu will come to announce Moshiach. Only through a deep understanding of Torah can we structure a world where true sholom can emerge and Moshiach can come.

We see what is happening in the United States today. Society is falling apart. Even though they are using slogans of equality, justice, and freedom from oppression, they are the ones causing violence and destruction – allowing murder after murder in the streets. If you don't have the truth of Torah, there is no way to have sholom between people or between Hashem and Klal Yisroel. Pinchas established sholom because he saw the danger to the lifestyle of kedushoh and taharoh of Klal Yisroel which Moav and Midian were actively trying to induce and couldn't remain silent. He couldn't tolerate the violation of the truth of Torah. Midian felt so threatened by Klal Yisroel's whole existence because they wanted to have their lifestyle of znus without feeling there is anything higher, they destroyed themselves entirely in the process.

In such difficult times in the history of Klal Yisroel and the history of the world that we are living through, we need to remember that we can only structure society with the truth of Torah. All the false ideas and slogans – totally devoid of Torah – that are being peddled today in these crazy times can only cause more hatred and division and remove sholom further from the world.