

# PARSHAS PINCHAS

תשפ"ב

Last week's parsha ends with the seduction of the Jewish men by the Bnos Moav and Midian to worship idols and commit znus. It came to a tragic level when a nosi of Shevet Shimon – Zimri ben Salu – publicly took a princess of Midian – Kosbi bas Tzur – into his tent for znus. This is where Pinchas comes in to stop them.

In this week's parsha, Hashem says that Pinchas was a kanoi who took up Hashem's kana'us. Here, Hashem is making a public announcement to Klal Yisroel that He approved of Pinchas' act of kana'us. Who was Pinchas? He was an outcast – because his grandfather was Yisro who once worshipped idols. People were critical of Pinchas for starting up with a nosi in Klal Yisroel. Who was he to do such a violent thing to such an important person? Hashem Himself has to come in and make it clear that Pinchas actually saved Klal Yisroel with his act of kana'us.

The Rambam writes that Moshe gave his unique mesorah to three people – Yehoshua his talmid, and Elozor and Pinchas. We see later that Eli Hakohen was mekabel his mesorah from Pinchas. The Rambam traces a line of baalei mesorah from Moshe till Ravina and Rav Ashi – people who were the heads of the Sanhedrin and were placed in charge of preserving the mesorah of Torah Shebaal Peh for their entire generation. Pinchas was one of these special people.

In the end of last week's parsha, we read that Moshe and the Sanhedrin were paralyzed. They couldn't bring themselves to take any action against Zimri and they just cried. Moshe really should have announced the halacha of kano'im pogin bo, but he temporarily forgot it and Pinchas stood up and reminded Moshe Rabbeinu about it. Hashem arranged that Pinchas specifically should get the merit of carrying out this important act of saving Klal Yisroel from destruction.

This teaches us an important lesson about when kana'us is appropriate and when it is not appropriate. Not anyone can stand up and be a kanoi and go wild. You need a talmid chochom who is making sure that everything is being done according to the din. The gemara in Sanhedrin says Yehoshua was paralyzed because he couldn't pasken a sheiloh in front of his rebbe. Pinchas found a way around it by asking Moshe: Didn't you teach us that kano'im pogin bo? Moshe said, since you remembered the halacha, you carry it out.

Rashi on this gemara says true kana'us is when someone is so steeped in Torah and kovod HaTorah burns inside him so thoroughly that he cannot tolerate a violation of the Torah happening in front of him.

Moshe was told to kill all those who worshipped baal peor. It doesn't mention killing those who committed znus which was a chillul Hashem. There was a mageifoh which was spreading, killing everyone, and the moment Pinchas kills Zimri, everyone saw that the mageifoh suddenly stopped.

We have a number of criteria for true kana'us being given here. One is that there is a talmid chochom who is checking that what he is doing is not out of personal agendas, and that the halacha is so precious to him that he needs to defend it – within the halacha.

Pinchas was one of the three foremost talmidim of Moshe Rabbeinu. But instead of being appreciated by the people for saving Klal Yisroel and carrying out what the halacha demands, the people tried to tear Pinchas down and make him to be the upstart who doesn't know his place in society. They ignored the fact that he was a massive talmid chochom just sitting and learning and receiving the mesorah from Moshe Rabbeinu. Those things aren't public so they don't make him

important enough to give Pinchas any respect. Zimri is a nosi. He is a distinguished person! So what he does automatically has to be respected.

This made the chillul Hashem all the more enormous – doing a public sin as a public leader of Klal Yisroel. It is a chillul Hashem of massive proportions because people naturally believe that important people have good reasons for what they do. They believe it is somehow justifiable. So Pinchas had to kill Zimri publicly and show everyone that it was wrong – no matter how great Zimri was in people's eyes. That was the only way to neutralize the chillul Hashem that had been made.

People complained Pinchas was a baal machlokes starting up with someone so much greater in stature than he was. Of course they were right. Pinchas got involved in something he had nothing to do with personally. But as Hashem Himself explained, he only cared about Hashem's agenda – not his own. Pinchas wasn't interested in taking Zimri down in order to build himself up. He was only interested in preserving kovod shomayim and stopping the chillul Hashem. Pinchas didn't get anything out of it personally – just the opposite. He only received insults and mockery for his trouble. Hashem said that this was defending Hashem's honor and it actually caused sholom – not machlokes.

Pinchas was allowed to defend Hashem's honor for a few reasons. One, because he is a talmid chochom who justified everything he did with halacha. He was a great enough talmid chochom to be able to honestly evaluate his own motives and check whether he had any personal interests driving him. Additionally, people have to realize that his battle is ultimately bringing sholom to the world.

Hashem Himself testified that Pinchas fulfilled all three conditions and He gave Pinchas a bris of kehunoh. Why was this necessary? Because only Aharon and his sons were given kehunoh at the chanukas hamishkon. From that moment on, any future children will be kohanim. But their past children – which included Pinchas – were skipped over. They will not be kohanim.

There is a question: if a Kohen kills another human being, even accidentally, it is an aveiroh of murder, and he is disqualified from doing the avodoh. So how could Pinchas become a Kohen? Not just any Kohen but a Kohen meshuach milchomoh! This is why Hashem testified that this wasn't murder. Zimri's death was a great mitzvah. Many nissim were made to demonstrate that this killing was completely justified.

There was a meeting of the main rabbonim of Russia which Rav Chaim attended. It was at the height of haskoloh and large numbers of Jews were leaving Yiddishkeit to a shocking extent. It even got to the point that Jews were stopping bris miloh for their sons and it was a very painful situation. The rabbonim wanted to strengthen bris miloh so at least the children of these Jews would have some connection to Yiddishkeit. Someone proposed to threaten any father who didn't circumcise their son would be declared non-Jewish and therefore would not be buried in a Jewish cemetery. We will treat them as non-Jews and this will frighten them into giving bris miloh. Rav Chaim said this is against halacha. One cannot say that someone who does not give his son a bris is not Jewish. Even though there are good intentions behind it – strengthening bris miloh. But changing the Torah for any reason is not excusable. Kana'us cannot go without bounds. It has to be done according to the Torah.

Rashi in Sanhedrin says kana'us has to come from a person who is so close to Torah, and can't stand to see it be trampled. Pinchas was able to remember the halacha and merited to fulfill it.

Usually a Kohen cannot do the avodoh if he killed someone. Metal tools cannot be used on the mizbeich. Killing is the antithesis of avodas Hashem which is supposed to bring shalom. But this act of publicly killing Zimri and Kosbi actually brought shalom between Hashem and Klal Yisroel – which is exactly what the avodas kohanim is supposed to achieve. This is why Hashem gives Pinchas the bris of kehunoh for doing what he did.

We mentioned last week, the total number of Jews who committed zhus was only about 4% of the total Jewish population. Yet, their actions put the entire Jewish people in jeopardy. They were all about to die in the magedoh if not for Pinchas. Why were they all in danger? The answer is that when you stand by silently and watch a chillul Hashem unfold and do not do anything to protest, you are implicated in that aveiroh. Pinchas was the only one who had the courage and got up to do something about the chillul Hashem, and this saved the rest of Klal Yisroel

There is a frightening gemara in Shabbos which says there was never a time when Hashem's decree for good was changed for the bad – with one exception. At the time of the churban bayis rishon, Hashem commanded the malochim to put a letter tav on every Jew. If the Jew is righteous, put a black tav for Torah on his forehead to protect him. If the Jew is wicked, put a red tav on his forehead for to'eivoh. The black tav is to be spared and red tav is to be killed.

The middas hadin came before Hashem and asked Him why He is sparing the tzaddikim for destruction? Hashem said because they are tzaddikim! They didn't do any aveiros! The middas hadin responded: yes, but they knew about the wicked and the aveiros they were doing and they didn't do anything to stop them! Hashem said – I know for a fact that the protests of the tzaddikim would not have had any effect.

They couldn't have stopped the wicked from sinning.

The middas hadin responded – yes, You can know this because You are Hashem and You know everything, but the tzaddikim didn't know that. They didn't protest – not because they knew for sure it wouldn't have stopped them, but because they didn't care. And for not caring, they should not be spared the fate of the wicked. Hashem agreed to the middas hadin and changed the decree and told the malochim to put a red tav on all the Jews – tzaddikim and reshaim alike. And begin by killing the tzaddikim.

It is amazing because tzaddikim are killed when they don't care enough about the chillul Hashem going on around them. It has to bother you, and you have to respond in some way. If you aren't bothered, you become somehow complicit in the same aveiroh. This is exactly what was going on with the Bnos Moav. The entire kedushoh of Klal Yisroel was being violated. It should have burned everyone up inside! But they didn't react – so they were all in danger of being destroyed.

Pinchas saved Klal Yisroel and Hashem had to announce it. There is this humble talmid chochom sitting in a corner anonymously and when he sees something that can't be tolerated he stood up. Even though it meant upsetting a lot of people who preferred to look the other way and excuse the chillul Hashem of a nosi. Pinchas had two grandfathers – he continued the legacy of Aharon Hakohen who brought peace.

We live in a world where the word kanoi has a bad name because people do all kinds of wild, irresponsible things in the name of kana'us. They justify every obnoxious thing they do by saying they are doing it for kovod shomayim, but they don't bother to do it through Torah and halacha. They have their own personal agendas mixed in. This isn't true kana'us. Only someone who is steeped in Torah and can be completely honest about his motives to do everything according to the Torah with no personal gain is fit to act against others for kovod shomayim.