

Derech Ha-Rif

Excerpts from the Torah discourse delivered by The great Rabbi Yoshiyahu Yosef Pinto Shlita

For the Torah portion Pinhas | Volume 74 | 21 TAMUZ



First Shabbat Meal

**"Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen, turned back My wrath (Bamidbar 25:11)."
Pinchas came to atone for the deeds of Nadav and Avihu, and therefore he saw the sin of Zimri son of Salu.**

A foundation stone in interpersonal interactions is to know that if one sees negativity in others, is symptomatic of one also possessing negativity within himself. For example: If one declares someone else to be a thief, or a deceiver, then it is clear that he too bears a deficiency. In contrast, a Tzaddik, perfect in Middot (character traits), does not see the failings of others. Therefore, even if one desecrates Shabbat, or steals items, before a Tzaddik, the Tzaddik will not see it. Indeed, it is recorded that when in the presence of individuals lighting candles during Shabbat itself, the Tzaddikim are said to have only been able to see darkness; they simply couldn't perceive the lights and the evil Shabbat desecration which they represented.

One begins to see evil in others when he himself undergoes a spiritual descent. Although before his descent, he wouldn't have seen the Shabbat desecration, nor the theft; now, following his descent, the desecration and theft would suddenly become apparent to him.

This insight sheds light on the Parasha. The Parasha features Zimri son of Salu, the Prince of the Tribe of Shim'on, who was a tremendous Tzaddik. Yet, in a moment of absurdity, he sinned with the woman from Midyan in the presence of all the Jewish people. Upon witnessing this, Pinchas was appalled and appealed to Moshe, arguing that Moshe himself had taught them from Sinai that zealots would be justified in exacting revenge on anyone who had relations with an Aramean woman. However, Moshe, on account of his exceptional piety had not witnessed the sin, for he didn't perceive evil in others (in line with the principle above).

The scoffers in that generation noted that unlike Moshe, Pinchas had seen the evil of Zimri. They therefore castigated Pinchas, declaring that unlike Moshe, who was a Tzaddik, Pinchas must be deficient. Indeed, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 82b) records the interaction as follows: The scoffers labeled Pinchas as 'the son of Puti,' homiletically alluding to his ancestor, Yitro, who fattened (literally: pitemmed, connected to the word 'puti') livestock to be offered to idolatry. In response to this, the Torah refers to Pinchas as "Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Priest." The Torah

rebutted their claims highlighting that Pinchas was in fact following in the righteous ways of his esteemed ancestors. Moreover, the Torah was further alluding to the idea that Pinchas, as a grandson of Aharon, was privy to contain remnants of the souls of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon's sons, within him.

Pinchas merited to see the act of Zimri, son of Salu not on account of a deficiency, G-d forbid, but on the contrary, because he was coming to atone for the Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon. They had offered an alien fire, and had issued Halachic rulings in the presence of their teachers, for which they were deserving of the death sentence. Therefore, to atone for their sin of not having consulted with their teacher when issuing Halachic rulings, Hashem had to construct a certain scenario. It had to be a scenario in which one would not strictly speaking have to consult with their teacher, yet despite that, go above and beyond to consult with them. Therefore, Pinchas had to witness the sin, and Moshe needed not to see it. This was because this sin justified an immediate response, yet despite that, Pinchas brought the matter to Moshe's attention, consulting with him, for Moshe himself had not seen it. This act of consulting with Moshe to ascertain the Halacha, was a perfect atonement to the sin of Nadav and Avihu and explains why Pinchas had to see the sin, and Moshe not.



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Soul Of the Rif

Toil for spiritual things is a toil which comes more from perfect Emuna (faith), rather than from clear faith, effort and pouring out one's soul to Hashem. Spirituality, sanctity and this light are received by pouring out one's soul and praying to Hashem to receive them. These are received through spiritual toil, they are unlike physical toil, where a person toils to make a profit or a person works to build a house or to attain something. There are two different types of toil. Many times, people confuse the toil of working for money and attaining things with the toil of Torah. The toil of studying Torah is spiritual toil, in truth, this is the way of the Torah, 'Eat bread with salt...and sleep on the ground (Avot 6:4).' However, this is something spiritual, this is a different longing of one's soul. Toil in Torah is a different type of toil, physical toil in work is a different type of toil. When a person prays with the power of faith, their prayer will be different. A person who prays without faith will have an entirely different form of prayer. A person can pray three times a day with incomplete faith, this is one type of inferior prayer, a person can pray three times a day with strong Emuna, the power of such a person's prayer will be incomparably mighty.



2nd Shabbat Meal

"Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen, turned back My wrath from upon Bnei Yisrael, when he avenged My zealously among them (Bamidbar 25:11)."

The Great Reward of Pinchas Who Inculcated Bnei Yisrael with Zealousness for Acts of Abomination

The holy Zohar in this week's portion (p. 213b) states: And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, Pinchas, son of Elazar etc. Rabbi Elazar introduced saying, "Listen my son, to the reproof of your father and do not abandon your mother's teaching (Mishlei 1:8)." All the commentators ask the following question on the words of the Zohar: What is the connection between Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen, and the words of Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai?

Perhaps this can be explained based on the words of the Noam Elimelech, commenting on the Parasha. The Noam Elimelech says that there are various kinds of people who fulfill the word of Hashem. A person may attain achievements and understanding, he sees something and knows that it is a Mitzva to fulfill the given thing, so he stands up and does so; for this, he has great reward. Another kind of person sees an opportunity for a Mitzva and does not understand that it is a Mitzva at all. Rather, he thinks that this is just another ordinary thing, and the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination) paints it to be another color in his perception, and the person therefore does not know that it is a Mitzva.

A person can pass by something for years and years without doing anything, because he does not think and understand with the depth of his perception that it is in fact a Mitzva, until he sees a Tzaddik and a great person do something similar. Then, upon seeing this, such a person will understand that to take the given action is in fact a Mitzva. Through this, he will then get up and do the Mitzva. This is like a person who passes a place and sees a poor person but does not know that helping such a person entails Chessed and is a great thing, until he sees someone else pass and help that person. After that, he himself goes to help that person and fulfills the Mitzva in the merit of that Tzaddik who he saw fulfill a Mitzva.

The Noam Elimelech says that until Bnei Yisrael sinned in Shittim, they did not know of the severe punishment for such evil actions, until Pinchas arose and did as he did. Only then did Bnei Yisrael understand the immense severity in the harsh and evil action which Zimri took. When they all understood this, i.e., the zealously for a person who does evil acts, this comprehension became engraved in the Jewish people for all generations. Therefore, the Torah says, "when he avenged My zealously among them," as he inculcated this zealously within the Jewish people. Until then, this aspect was not found among them, but Pinchas made it part of the Jewish people. This is like a person who sees a Mitzva and does not know that it is a Mitzva until he sees a Tzaddik doing it, a person then understands that it is a Mitzva, and it becomes part of him. The Noam Elimelech says the same thing about how the Jews did not have zealously, until after Pinchas rose and avenged on behalf of Hashem; at that point the concept of zealously entered the very blood of the Jewish people. This entailed a new acquisition of zealously. Therefore, the reward of Pinchas was very great, for as the verse details, he made this zealously a part of the nation.

This is a key concept, there are Tzaddikim who merit great heights and great reward after their death because they took something and brought it into the foundations of the nation, giving it something which it did not have prior to then. Bnei Yisrael did not know what the given thing was and did not fulfill it, and those Tzaddikim brought the given aspect into the Jewish people. Then, the reward is great for all generations. Therefore, a person needs to know that there are things which people disgrace, Mitzvot which are defined as a "dead Mitzvot," as people do not know their value. When a person makes the right light shine, people begin to observe and fulfill those Mitzvot. A person is then defined as the "redeemer of the blood" for those Mitzvot, and they became inscribed with his name, for through his merit, Klal Yisrael keep them.



Q & A with the Rif



Question:

Dear Rabbi, I do not speak to my sister and now she is getting married, what should I do?

Answer:

It is forbidden for a person to break bridges in life, this includes any bridge. Do not break any bridge, for you do not know what bridge you will need, whether with one's father, mother, sister, brother etc. Only in cases like Yaakov and Eisav, or Kayin and Hevel, are there true problems and this is decidedly rare.

A person needs to maintain their connections with their brothers, sisters and others and maintain the relationships, unless terrible things have happened and this is rare. Not everything that happens is awful, it is uncommon that a person breaks a window which cannot be fixed. In the case of Yosef and his brothers, Yosef made peace with them, he did not see them any longer, even when they came down to Egypt, he did not see them anymore. For seventeen years in Egypt, he did not see them, after Yaakov died, he saw them at the funeral, and he saw them via the messengers who spoke on his behalf to them. He loved them, honored them and helped them, but that was it.

A person needs to know how to deal with arguments, whether these are arguments that need to be overcome, or things which can impact on a person's life, or if they are things which entail a person being stabbed in the back, in any case, repair, forgive and continue. If it is a problem which can go forward and disturb your Yirat Shamayim (fear of Heaven), your Avodat Hashem (service of G-d), the education of your children, in any of these cases, disengage.

These matters do not have general rules, there is no rule detailing the punishment a person gets if they cut you up on the road. If someone tries to cut off your life entirely, then this is different, one needs to examine things carefully, with knowledge and reasoning.





3rd Shabbat meal

**“And the name of the slain Jewish man who was slain (Bamidbar 25:14).”
There are People in this World who are like the Dead, without Life-force in their Souls, They just Walk in Life like a Body**

These days are the Hillula of our teacher, the holy Ohr Hachaim, who was a holy person of Hashem, with the most tremendous power. The teaching of our holy Rabbis is known, that when a person says Torah in the name of a Tzaddik, one needs to imagine the Tzaddik with one's eyes and imagine that he is standing there, asking the difficulty and answering the question, saying the novel Torah idea. A person is then impacted by the root of that Tzaddik in heaven, and one receives great power from heaven.

Our teacher, the holy Ohr HaChaim's lips are definitely murmuring in the grave as we learn his strong question on this week's Parasha. The verse states, “And the name of the slain Jewish man who was slain with the Midianite woman, was Zimri, son of Salu.” The Ohr Hachaim asks, why is the wording doubled to say “the slain man who was slain”? It would be enough to say, “The name of the Jewish man who was slain.” It is known that the Torah is precise with its words, and is brief with its words; no word in the Torah is there without reason. Therefore, why is the double wording used? The Ohr Hachaim answer with a critical concept. Every Jew has power above, and when his power above increases, his power below also increases. When one's strength above is reduced, Heaven forbid, then his strength below is also reduced. The same is true for every nation, if one sees a nation fall, it is a sign that its heavenly angel has fallen. Conversely, if one sees a nation getting stronger, this is a sign that its heavenly representative is becoming stronger. Above, a person has power, if one's power descends, a person also descends and so too vice versa. When a person's power in the upper world descends, it is like a person has died and been lost from the world; if one's upper world strength dies, a person also dies.

On this, the Ohr Hachaim comments that when Pinchas arose and stabbed Zimri, Zimri was already dead in the upper world, for at the moment that he touched the Midianite woman, he lost his life-force. The moment that he spoke rudely against Moshe, he lost his life; in the upper world, he was already dead. His body lived on for a short time after, but in the upper world, he was already considered dead.

We can compare this to the story of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Yehuda ben Garim. Yehuda ben Garim slandered Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and caused him pain. The moment Yehuda ben Garim did this, he was already considered dead. He remained alive in the lower world, but his inner soul had already died. He lived for another thirteen years until Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai emerged from the cave, laid his eyes on him and thereby made him into a pile of bones. “Their protection has been removed from them (Bamidbar 14:9)” – the moment that their protection has gone, and a person's upper light has descended, a person can live, but they are like a dead person. When a person assaults a Tzaddik or the Torah and holy things, they lose their portion above. Then, their lot in the lower world can easily fall, and when it does, they are already defined as a “dead man,” that has already died, it has nothing and no life-force.

Therefore, Zimri ben Salu no longer had life-force within him from the moment he touched the Midianite, therefore, it says, “And the name of the slain Jewish man who was slain,” as he was already dead, he was only alive in terms of his body. Pinchas did a small act, but the life-force within Zimri was already lost.

This also answers the question of how Pinchas killed Zimri. For in truth, Pinchas did not do such a severe act, for Zimri was already a dead man, therefore the act of killing him was no great action like murder, as he was already dead. So teaches the holy Ohr Hachaim.

It is possible to add further. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 128:35) states that if a Kohen killed someone, even by accident, he cannot raise his hands [i.e., perform the Priestly Blessing], even if he performs Teshuva. Birkat Kohanim (the Priestly Blessing) is a blessing of peace and good, and someone who killed, even if accidentally, cannot ascend to perform Birkat Kohanim, as they took a Jewish soul, peace and good are not with them. On the other hand (Orach Chaim 128:36), a Mohel (one who performs circumcision) who is a Kohen who performed a Brit on a baby that died during the Brit is permitted to ascend for Birkat Kohanim, for only if one killed a [halachically living] person is one barred from ascending. Zimri was already dead, Pinchas merely performed a small act to complete this, and therefore, the double language is understood.

One needs to know that a person's name carries great power. Within one's name, there are Tzaddikim who can see the upper part of a person and if it is living or dead. The Gemara (Yoma 83b) says that Rabbi Meir would derive from people's name, and when they would come to ask him, he would check a person's name and explore the depth of their name to see if they had life-force in heaven or not. The Gemara tells of how Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Yossi once went to stay at someone's house. Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Yossi entrusted the man with their money, but Rabbi Meir did not and hid his money in the cemetery. On Motzei Shabbat, they requested that he return them their money and he denied having ever received it, and Rabbi Meir was saved. The Sages asked Rabbi Meir how he knew not to give his money to this man. He told them that the man's name was Kidor, like the verse, “Ki Dor Tahpuchot Heima – they are a crooked generation (Devarim 32:20),” indicating that he was a dishonest man, and therefore, he did not give him his money.

The Tzaddikim knew how to determine if a person has life-force in heaven based on their name. Therefore, people were particular to give Tzaddikim a paper with the name of one who needs a blessing, as they knew how to descend to the depths of a person's name, and thereby to understand how much life-force they had, as well as the blessings and the specific salvations that they would need.



Treasure charms from the Rif



The 23rd of Tammuz is the Hillulah of the RaMak, Rabbi Moshe Cordovero. The RaMak was an exceptionally exalted Kabbalist, who was both a teacher and study-partner of the Ari HaKadosh. Perhaps his primary Sefer (book) is Sefer Tomer Devorah. Many great Rabbis, including Rabbi Chaim Halbertsam of Sanz (the 'Divrei Chaim'), have said that learning this Sefer is a tremendous Segulah to activate a Refuah for those unwell. Therefore, we beseech all those who are able to learn all of this Sefer, or to divide its sections amongst a group, to do so, and learn it on the eve of his Hillulah. Doing so will, G-d willing, stimulate salvation and success for us all.



The fourth Post Shabbat meal

Stories from the Rif

Rabbi Elazar Abuhatzaira

If we think and contemplate, it is simply surreal to think that such a murder could have occurred within the Jewish people! It feels like just yesterday when Rav Elazar, my uncle, was sitting in my father's home, with us all enjoying each other's company. Never could we have imagined that within a year, my uncle would be tragically taken from us. Yet now we talk about his passing as something from the past - how could this be?!

In the final two years of his life, he and I would speak constantly, sometimes as much as ten times a day on the phone; we were incredibly close. Yet a month before his murder, we couldn't escape a heavy feeling in our heart that something terrible was on the horizon. Therefore, from then on, we began to accept Shabbat upon ourselves earlier than strictly required and we stood firmly by this. Additionally, we also took upon ourselves to read the entire Sefer Tehillim each Shabbat. Moreover, we tried to spread Torah to others, and had 230 men accept upon themselves to begin wearing Tefillin. All of this was done in response to the ominous feeling in the air at that time.

When terrible things are about to happen, it is possible to feel the tension in the air. During these periods, it is imperative to appreciate that we are all involved in these things, such that even if we personally believe ourselves to be righteous, we must know that we are all intertwined and inextricably linked to one another. Therefore, we cannot focus exclusively on our own Avodat Hashem (service of G-d) and say 'since I am learning Torah, all is good,' rather we also need to focus on others, internalizing the precept 'kol Yisrael arevim zeh la'zeh' (all the Jewish people are guarantors for one another).

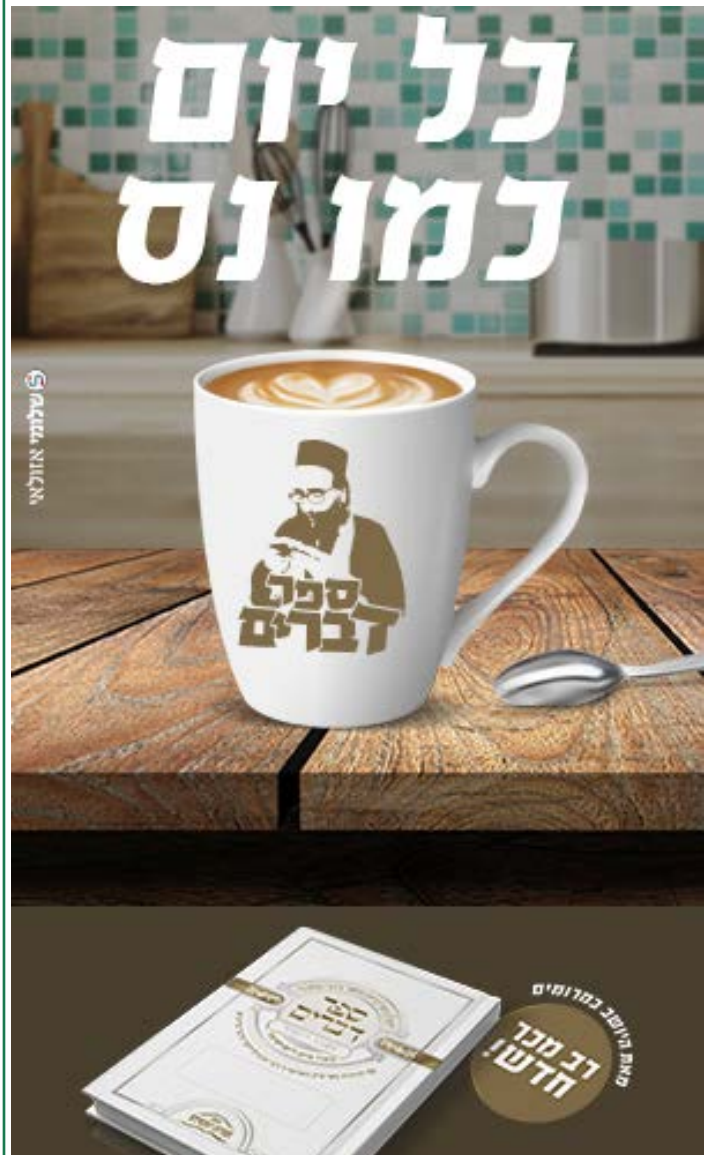
We thought that perhaps there is a parallel between the death of our uncle, Rav Elazar Abuhatzaira, and a personality from the Talmud, Rav Elazar ben Shamua. Rav Elazar was killed on Friday, and the great Rav Elazar ben Shamua, one of the ten holy martyrs, was also killed on Friday. Moreover, Rav Elazar ben Shamua was killed by the sword, just like my uncle. Finally, our uncle's name was Rav Elazar ben Simcha, which in Hebrew is only two letters different from Rav Elazar ben Shamua; this further parallels these two Tzaddikim. This suggestion is in line with a teaching of the Ari HaKadosh, who taught that there are in fact ten people martyred in every generation, just like those ten recorded in the Talmud; these ten are to atone for the brothers' sin of selling Yosef.

The verse reads: "And the number of your days, I will fill (Shemot 26:23)." Our sages understand this to mean that Tzaddikim will 'fill up their days,' in that they will pass away on their birthdays. Indeed, my uncle passed away and his birthday was on the final day of Shiva; he filled up his days, being a true Tzaddik.

Rabbi Elazar, my uncle, had a great merit, in that when he died shortly before Shabbat, the entire Jewish people were shocked by his death and were drawn towards feelings of Teshuva; thus, even in death he sanctified the Name of G-d. The Kabbalistic Sefarim teach that when one passes away the angels listen to people's reactions. If they hear people announcing that a great Tzaddik has passed, they will consult with Hashem, informing Him that a great Tzaddik has passed. They will then ask where the Tzaddik should be placed, for Gan Eden is composed of a plethora of rooms, with each room accommodating people of different levels of righteousness. The Sefarim further teach that the Tzaddikim in the same Heavenly room as the newly deceased sense that a peer of theirs has passed. They therefore leave their Heavenly room to welcome him into his new home.

Each year, after the Tzaddik's death, if his children, grandchildren, and others, commemorate his Yom Hillula, then angels from a more exalted Heavenly room will come to greet him and welcome him into their room for the coming year. This is repeated each year, with the Tzaddik ascending to a higher place in Gan Eden, following each Hillula. This is the reason that the death-anniversary is called a 'Hilulla,' for Hillula is from the root 'Hallel' which means to rejoice, in that each year we rejoice that the Tzaddik has ascended to a higher place.

Someone told us that he heard from an aged Tzaddik in Yerushalayim, that the Tzaddik had been in the presence of Rabbi Meir Abuhatzaira, shortly before he died. He related that just before his death, Rabbi Meir had said to him, "I am scared that my son, Rabbi Elazar, will not die with a knife in his heart (for this is needed as an atonement)." This was said over thirty years ago, long before Rabbi Elazar's death; thus we see Rabbi Meir's Ruach HaKodesh (Divine Intuition). He understood that each soul descends to this world for a reason, to remedy something within the world. Just like the ten martyrs in the Talmud, Rabbi Elazar, my uncle, descended to atone for previous sins. He did so, and accordingly sanctified G-d's name in an awesome way.



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