

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

With Pinchas a new type enters the world of Israel: the zealot. "Pinchas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the Priest, has turned My anger away from the Israelites by being zealous with My zeal in their midst, so that I did not put an end to them in My zeal." (Num. 25:11)

He was followed, many centuries later, by the one other figure in Tanach described as a zealot, the prophet Elijah, who tells God on Mount Horeb, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, God Almighty" (1 Kings 19:14).

In fact, tradition identified and linked the two men even more closely: "Pinchas is Elijah" (Yalkut Shimoni, Torah, 771). Pinchas, says Targum Yonatan (to Num. 25:12), "became an angel who lives forever and will be the harbinger of redemption at the End of Days."

What is truly fascinating is how Judaism -- both biblical and post-biblical -- dealt with the idea of the zealot. First, let us recall the two contexts.

First is that of Pinchas. Having failed to curse the Israelites, Bilaam eventually devised a strategy that succeeded. He persuaded the Moabite women to seduce Israelite men and then lure them into idolatry. This evoked intense Divine anger, and a plague broke out among the Israelites. To make matters worse, Zimri, a leader of the tribe of Shimon, brought a Midianite woman into the camp where they flagrantly engaged in intimacy. Perhaps sensing that Moses felt powerless -- he had himself married a Midianite woman -- Pinchas seized the initiative and stabbed and killed them both, ending the misbehaviour and the plague by which 24,000 Israelites had already died. That is the story of Pinchas.

Elijah's story begins with the accession of Ahab to the throne of the northern kingdom, Israel. The king had married Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon, and under her influence introduced Baal worship into the kingdom, building a pagan temple and erecting a pole in Samaria honouring the Ugaritic mother goddess Asherah. Jezebel, meanwhile, was organising a programme of killing the "prophets of the Lord." The Bible (1 King 16) says of Ahab that "he did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him."

Elijah announced that there would be a drought

to punish the king and the Baal-worshipping nation. Confronted by Ahab, Elijah challenged him to gather the 450 prophets of Baal to a test at Mount Carmel. When all assembled present, Elijah issued the challenge. The prophets would each prepare sacrifices and call on God, and so would Elijah. The one who summoned fire from heaven would confirm the true God. The Baal prophets agreed, made their preparations, and then called on their god, but nothing happened. In a rare show of scornful humour, Elijah told them to cry louder. Perhaps, he said, Baal is busy or travelling, or having a sleep. The false prophets worked themselves into a frenzy, gashing themselves until their blood flowed, but still nothing happened. Elijah then prepared his sacrifice and had the people douse it three times with water to make it even harder to ignite. He then called on God. Fire descended from heaven, consuming the sacrifice. The people, awestruck, cried out, "The Lord -- He is God! The Lord -- He is God!" words we say nowadays at the climax of Neilah at the end of Yom Kippur. The people then executed the false prophets of Baal. God had been vindicated.

There can be no doubt that Pinchas and Elijah were religious heroes. They stepped into the breach at a time when the nation was facing religious and moral crisis and palpable Divine anger. They acted while everyone else, at best, watched. They risked their lives by so doing. There can be little doubt that the mob might have turned against them and attacked them. Indeed after the trial at Mount Carmel, Jezebel lets it be known that she intends to have Elijah killed. Both men acted for the sake of God and the religious welfare of the nation. And God Himself is called "zealous" many times in the Torah.

Yet their treatment in both the written and oral Torah is deeply ambivalent. God gives Pinchas "my covenant of peace," meaning that he will never again have to act the part of a zealot. Indeed, in Judaism, the shedding of human blood is incompatible with service at the Sanctuary (King David was forbidden to build the Temple for this reason: see 1 Chronicles 22:8, 28:3). As for Elijah, he was implicitly rebuked by God in one of the great scenes of the Bible. Standing at Horeb, God shows him a whirlwind, an earthquake and a fire, but God is not in any of these. Then He comes to Elijah in a "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19). He then asks Elijah, for the second time, "What are you doing here?" and Elijah

replies in exactly the same words as he had used before: "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty." He has not understood that God has been trying to tell him that He is not to be found in violent confrontation, but in gentleness and the word softly spoken. God then tells him to appoint Elisha as his successor.

Pinchas and Elijah are, in other words, both gently rebuked by God.

Halachically, the precedent of Pinchas is severely limited. Although his act was lawful, the Sages none the less said that had Zimri turned around and killed Pinchas instead, he would be deemed innocent since he would have acted in self-defence. Had Pinchas killed Zimri even one moment after the act of immorality, he would have been guilty of murder. And had Pinchas asked a court of law whether he was permitted to do what he was about to do, the answer would have been no. This is a rare instance of the rule, halachah ve-ein morin kein, "It is a law that is not taught" (Sanhedrin 82a).

Why this moral ambivalence? The simplest answer is that the zealot is not acting within the normal parameters of the law. Zimri may have committed a sin that carried the death sentence, but Pinchas executed punishment without a trial. Elijah may have been acting under the imperative of removing idolatry from Israel, but he did an act -- offering a sacrifice outside the Temple -- normally forbidden in Jewish law. There are extenuating circumstances in Jewish law in which either the king or the court may execute non-judicial punishment to secure social order (see Maimonides, Hilchot Sanhedrin 24:4; Hilchot Melachim 3:10). But Pinchas was neither a king nor acting as a representative of the court. He was acting on his own initiative, taking the law into his own hands (avid dina lenafshei). There are instances where this is justified and where the consequences of inaction would be catastrophic. But in general, we are not empowered to do so, since the result would be lawlessness and violence on a grand scale.

More profoundly, the zealot is in effect taking the place of God. As Rashi says, commenting on the phrase, "Pinchas... has turned My anger away from the Israelites by being zealous with My zeal", Pinchas "executed My vengeance and showed the anger I should have shown" (Rashi to Num. 25:11).

In Judaism, we are commanded to "walk in God's ways" and imitate His attributes. "Just as He is merciful and compassionate, so you be merciful and compassionate." That is not, however, the case when it comes to executing punishment or vengeance. God who knows all may execute sentence without a trial, but we, being mere humans, may not. There are forms of justice that are God's domain, not ours.

The zealot who takes the law into his own hands is embarking on a course of action fraught with

moral danger. Only the most holy may do so, only once in a lifetime, and only in the direst circumstance when the nation is at risk, when there is nothing else to be done, and no one else to do it. Even then, were the zealot to ask permission from a court, he would be denied it.

Pinchas gave his name to the Parsha in which Moses asks God to appoint a successor. Rabbi Menahem Mendel, the Rebbe of Kotzk, asked why Pinchas, hero of the hour, was not appointed instead of Joshua. His answer was that a zealot cannot be a leader. That requires patience, forbearance, and respect for due process.

The zealots within besieged Jerusalem in the last days of the Second Temple played a significant part in the city's destruction. They were more intent on fighting one another than the Romans outside the city walls. Nothing in the religious life is more risk-laden than zeal, and nothing more compelling than the truth God taught Elijah, that God is not to be found in the use of force but in the still, small voice that turns the sinner from sin. As for vengeance, that belongs to God alone. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l* © 2025 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aaron the High Priest turned back My wrath from upon the children of Israel when he zealously expressed My zealousness amongst them.... Therefore tell him I have given him My covenant of peace.” (Numbers 25:11–12) A covenant of peace? To pursue why God's gift of peace was bestowed upon Pinchas the zealot, we need to turn to the book of Joshua, examining an incident from the later history of the Jewish people which highlights Pinchas as a mediating peacemaker rather than a fanatic zealot – and would confirm our previous commentary.

Many years had passed (Joshua 22); the Bible records that under Joshua's leadership, the major conquest of the land had been accomplished, paving the way for the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Menashe to return to inhabit Transjordan, the land of Gilead on the eastern side of the Jordan River – good grazing land for their cattle requested long ago from Moses before the battles against the Canaanites had begun (Numbers 32).

The two-and-one-half tribes arrived in their desired and apportioned lands and immediately erected an altar near the Jordan, “a large altar, for everyone to see” (Joshua 22:10), a veritable showpiece. The other tribes of Israel were incensed; they saw the erection of a large altar in Transjordan – far from the central Sanctuary in Shilo – as an act of rebellion against the

God of Israel, a “declaration of independence” from the rest of the tribes. “And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered at Shilo to rise up in battle [against the two-and-one-half tribes in Transjordan]” (Joshua 22:12).

But before they declared a civil war, they dispatched none other than Pinchas the son of Elazar the priest, together with ten heads of tribes, to attempt a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Pinchas’ delegation brilliantly reminded them of the disastrous plague that had descended upon the entire nation when they had first begun to worship the Peor idol and to cohabit with Moabite and Midianite women, an obvious reference to the idolatry which had led to Pinchas’ own act of punishment which brought about the plague’s cessation (Numbers 12:10–18). Pinchas warned that the building of their altar separate from the central altar in Shilo would cause repercussions, endangering the entire nation of Israel; the remaining ten tribes might be forced to take action against them to prevent a disastrous plague from striking these rebellious upstart idolaters.

The underlying motif of Pinchas’ argument was the integrity of remaining one nation – each responsible for the actions of the other – despite the distance that separated them. In the interest of unity, he told them that if they felt “defiled or contaminated by their distance from the Sanctuary on the other side of the Jordan, then they ought return to mainland Israel,” even though it would mean giving up some of their own land in the requisite redistribution of territory which would have to take place (Joshua 22:19).

The response of the two-and-one-half tribes magnified the theme of unity; it was never their intention to use their altar to replace the Sanctuary in Shilo for sacrificial offerings. Theirs was not an act of rebellion, urging religious or civil acts of disobedience. Indeed, they intended their altar to serve as a symbol for future generations of the unity of faith and nationality between the tribes on both sides of the Jordan River. Their actual sacrifices would be offered only in the Sanctuary in Shilo.

His return to the children of Israel in Canaan marked Pinchas as a successful mediator and peacemaker, revealing the essence of his personality as a true kohen and lover of peace who, when younger, had been forced by extreme circumstances to step out of character and punish without due process in order to prevent Moses and his directives from becoming marginalized.

Or perhaps there is an alternative perspective: that in fact Pinchas had acted upon his emotions of zealotry, but since, in a fateful moment for Israel, his action actually saved the nation, God granted him the gift which is truly the goal of Israel, the gift of peace and the covenant of compassion. And now we see from the book of Joshua (22) that Pinchas learned his lesson

and eventually became a successful mediator of peace!

Whatever may have been the initial character of Pinchas, one message is clear from the text: even if a momentary act of zealotry is called for in an unusual circumstance, fanaticism must neither be our national norm nor our national goal. Our norm and our goal must always be God’s covenant of peace!

The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin’s book Bemidbar: Trials & Tribulations in Times of Transition, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid and available for purchase at bit.ly/RiskinBemidbar. © 2025 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The recounting of the mandatory Temple sacrifices for the holidays of the Jewish year occupies a significant amount of space in this week’s parsha. The overall meaning and matter of animal sacrifices has been discussed a number of times previously by me in these parsha articles. But I wish to now attempt to dwell on the uniqueness of the sacrifices that are meant to somehow characterize the holiday itself.

For example, the sacrifices offered on the seven days of Succot differ for each day of that holiday. This is not true regarding the sacrifices ordained for the last six days of Pesach which are all identical. This difference has halachic implications regarding the recitation of a Haftorah blessing on the Shabat of Chol Hamoed. On Succot because of the fact that a different sacrifice was offered each day, the blessing is a holiday blessing and not only a Shabat blessing.

On Shabat Chol Hamoed Pesach the blessing is a purely Shabat blessing. Aside from the halachic implication just described, a subtle message of general insight is provided here. Pesach, representing a one-time redemption from Egyptian slavery, a great but essentially singular event, repeats its same sacrifice throughout the six latter days of the holiday.

Succot, representing the Divine protection over Israel and all individual Jews, is a renewed daily event which captures the differing circumstances that each day of life brings with it - a new salvation each and every day. Hence, the different sacrifices offered on the Temple altar on each individual day of Succot.

The description of the holiday altar sacrifices for the holiday of Shavuot is also significant. The Torah describes the holiday as Yom Habikurim – the day of the offering of the first fruits of the agricultural year. It also states that a new offering – the offering of the two loaves of bread - is to be part of the mincha offering of that day.

Even though all of the holidays revolve around the natural and agricultural year in the Land of Israel - Pesach is the holiday of springtime and the offering of the grain sacrifice symbolizing the harvest of the winter

wheat crop and Succot represents the holiday of the fall harvest season – it is the offerings of the holiday of Shavuot that are most intertwined with nature and agriculture.

We know Shavuot as the holiday of the granting of the Torah on Sinai to the Jewish people. The Torah does not mention this directly but rather concentrates upon nature, agriculture and the blessings of the bounty of the earth. The Torah, by not dwelling especially on the granting of the Torah aspect of the holiday, sublimely suggests to us that Torah is as natural and necessary to us as is the seasons of the year and the bounty of the earth.

Torah is truly our lives and the length of our days and is therefore an integral part of nature itself, the very wonders of nature that Shavuot itself celebrates. Perhaps that is the intent of the rabbis in their statement that the world itself was created in the image of God's Torah. © 2024 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

After Pinchas kills the Jewish man and Midianite woman committing immoral acts, God applauds Pinchas, granting him a "brit shalom" (covenant of peace; Numbers 25:12). Can we deduce from God's approval that zealotry – which often involves taking the law into one's own hands – is desirable?

Netziv sees the brit shalom as a corrective measure to zealotry. He notes that "the nature of [Pinchas's] act, killing with his own hand, tends to leave a harsh feeling in the heart. He who acted for the sake of heaven, was [therefore] granted a blessing to remain gentle and peaceful." Here, Netziv points out the need of an antidote for zealotry. The zealot should scrupulously develop a counter-trait of shalom.

Another view can be suggested: rather than approving zealotry if balanced with shalom, the Pinchas story may teach the opposite. Zealotry is limited to the case of Pinchas, who received the brit shalom from God. In other cases, where God does not offer His explicit imprimatur, zealotry is prohibited.

Note that Pinchas is a descendant of Levi, who participated in the killing of all males in the city of Shechem (Genesis 34:25). Levi's father Jacob was incensed, and on his deathbed disavowed any connection to Levi's brutal act (Genesis 49:6).

Note also that Pinchas's descendant, the prophet Elijah, may have been removed from his position because of his zealousness. This occurs when Elijah declares in the haftarah for Parashat Pinchas, "Zealous have I been for the Lord...for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant" (I Kings 19:10).

God then indicates to Elijah that His spirit is not found in the wind, or in earthquake or fire. Rather, God's presence is best felt through "a still small voice" (I Kings 19:12). After Elijah persists in being zealous, God tells him that he will be replaced by his student Elisha (I Kings 19:16).

In fact, a reading of the Book of Joshua reveals that Pinchas himself changes his ways. Years after his zealous act, Pinchas brokers a truce between Israel and the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh (Joshua 22). Some commentaries suggest that only after Pinchas's intercession, which avoids a split within the Jewish People, is he completely embraced as a leader (Tosafot, Zevachim 101b, s.v. "hahu").

The pathway to redemption is not the way of Pinchas in Parashat Pinchas, but rather that of Pinchas in the Book of Joshua. This pathway to redemption will reach its crescendo when Elijah, the descendant of Pinchas, learns the lessons of the "still, small voice" returning parents to children and children to parents as he announces the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 3:23–24; Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 47). © 2021 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

An opinion recorded in the Talmud states that prayers correspond to the daily sacrifices offered in the Temple (Numbers 28:4, Berachot 26b). As there were morning and afternoon standard offerings, so are there morning and afternoon services. As the limbs and the fats of the daily sacrifices could burn continuously during the night, so is there an evening service.

This opinion may be the conceptual base for our standardized prayer. Since sacrifices had detailed structures, so too do our prayers have set texts.

Maimonides elaborates on the need for a fixed text, arguing that after the destruction of the First Temple and the exile to Babylonia, the Jewish People lost its ability to speak articulately in Hebrew or, for that matter, to speak clearly in any language. Living in Babylonia (the Hebrew name for which, Bavel, literally means "mixture"), Jews began to speak in a combination of many tongues. In that setting, some individuals lost their ability to fully express themselves. A hierarchal model emerged in which Jews found themselves on different levels: some prayed eloquently, others with difficulty, and some perhaps not at all. Thus, a standard text was introduced to equalize the entire populace; it was a way to declare that all Jews are equal in the eyes of God (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Prayer 1:4).

Moreover, having a set text unites Jews

regardless of geographical location or level of Jewish observance. One can enter a synagogue in France, India, or Russia and feel a powerful sense of connection in reciting the same Shema, the same Amidah.

Not only does set prayer connect us to our fellow Jews in what can be called horizontal unification, but it also fosters a sense of connection to past generations of Jews who recited these same tefillot.

And not only does this vertical unification reach backward in time, but it projects a link into the future, when our children and our children's children will recite the same tefillot. Its sameness connects past to future, shaping a wondrous existential present.

Jewish law insists that the intent of fixed prayer is not to stifle personal emotions, but to inspire spontaneous dialogue with God (Orach Chayim 119:1). Still, our analysis reveals the importance of standardization. Through the set text, Jews are democratized and united, not only horizontally through space but vertically through time. © 2024 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

“**A**nd it was, after the plague [P] and Hashem said to Moshe and to Elazar, son of Aharon HaKohain, saying.” (Bamidbar 26:1) At the end of Parshas Balak, we find the story of Zimri, who brought into the camp a Midianite princess, as fulfillment of Bilaam's evil plan to lure the Jews into sin with the daughters of Midian. Pinchas slew them both publicly, and avenged the honor of Hashem. However, a plague had erupted and before it was done, it took 24,000 lives. This plague taught how evil immorality is, because it was brought on by the lewd behavior of Zimri.

After this plague, Moshe was commanded to count the Jews. The Midrash likens it to a flock which had been attacked by a wolf. The sheep are counted to see how many were lost and how many remain. When the Jews were counted, it was done by family and each group was given a unique syntax. The letter hei was added to the beginning, meaning “the” and the letter yud to the end, which translates to “similar group,” so HaReuveni means, the Reuvenites. However, this isn't just grammar.

Rashi, quoting the Yalkut Shimoni, says the nations of the world had mocked the Jews and suggested the Egyptians had molested their women, so their families were not actually the lineage they claimed. Hashem therefore attached two letters of His name (the yud and the hei) to the family names, to attest that they had remained pure during their

enslavement.

This could also be why this counting was done by father's name, to further underscore our kosher genealogy. Amazingly, the counting brought about by the sin of immorality, highlighted just how moral the Jews were!

Despite the fact that Zimri had succumbed to the lure of the Midianite women, with the insidious plot to ensnare the Jewish men with immorality and idolatry, that was not the essence of the Jewish People. Though they might sin, essentially, they are pure and good. The failures of giving in to the Yetzer Hara are external to our being and don't define us.

The commentaries discuss why there is a separator in the Torah (delineated here and in the chumash with a [P]) in the middle of a posuk. On one hand, it was the fact that the sin and plague occurred which prompted this new census, hence they are one verse. However, they are separated because the Jews aren't defined by the plague and its sin. It doesn't change who we are or who we can become.

Instead, it's a break in the natural pattern of holiness and greatness that is inherent in our natures, instilled by our holy Avos and Imahos, our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and (four) mothers, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah.

When we falter or stumble, this would be a good message to remember. Hashem didn't give up on us when we did; He just began anew with a fresh count of who was left. It was taking stock of this valuable resource called the Jewish People, and that's a heartening idea for us. Don't give up, just start over - and make it count.

It was a beautiful summer day. There was no school - just blue sky, green grass, and warm breezes. The little boy stood with his bat and ball, and as he looked out at the imaginary audience, he declared, “I am the greatest hitter in the entire world!” He then tossed the ball in the air and swung the bat mightily. Whoosh! He missed the ball completely.

Undaunted, he tossed it again, and swung with more intensity – Whiff – missed again, strike two. Finally, a third time, and a third swing and miss.

Most people would be devastated, but not our hero. He stood there a moment, then smiled, raised his arms, and proclaimed to the non-existent crowd, “I'm the world's greatest pitcher!” © 2025 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Non-Kohein Kohein

The story of Pinchas ben Elazar is unique in many ways. The story takes place in one parasha and concludes in the next parasha. This is so unusual that the non-Jewish Bible lists both aspects of the story within the same chapter. We are told very little at this stage about Pinchas other than that he was counted

earlier by name in the Torah. We also know that he was not one of the Kohanim who was anointed when Moshe anointed the Kohanim because the only ones who were anointed were Aharon and his four sons. Our Rabbis tell us that Pinchas was the only one of the third generation of Kohanim who was already alive at this time. We also know that at the beginning of this parasha his name is written with a yud z'irah, a small yud. All of these different factors lead us to understand that Pinchas is at least unusual if nothing more.

Balak, the King of Moav, tried to curse the Jewish people through Bilaam, but was unsuccessful. Bilaam did, however, tell Balak that he could destroy the people by enticing them with his women. "And (these women) called to the people to bring sacrifices to their gods and the people ate and they bowed down to their gods. And Yisrael became attached to Ba'al P'or and Hashem's wrath flared up against Yisrael. And Hashem said to Moshe take all of the (ring)leaders of the people and hang them before Hashem opposite the sun and the flaring wrath of Hashem will withdraw from Yisrael. And Moshe said to the judges of Yisrael, each man shall kill his men that were attached to Ba'al P'or. And behold a man from the Children of Yisrael came and he brought near to his brothers a Midianite woman before the eyes of Moshe and all of the entire assembly of the Children of Yisrael and they were weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. And Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aharon the Kohein saw and he stood up from the assembly and he took a spear in his hand. And he came after the Yisraelite man into the tent and he pierced them both, the Yisraelite man and the woman into her stomach, and the plague was halted from upon the Children of Yisrael. And those who died of the plague were twenty-four thousand."

Here we see that Pinchas, in his zeal, took a spear and killed the Yisraelite man and the Midianite woman. In defiance of Moshe, this man had taken a Midianite woman into the camp and the Midrash says that he brought her to the Ohel Mo'eid in order to have relations with her there in defiance of Hashem. It was only Pinchas' decisive action which was able to assuage the anger of Hashem. Many of the B'nei Yisrael complained that Pinchas acted incorrectly and killed a man without a warning and a trial. HaRav Matis Weinberg quotes a Midrash which says that Moshe Rabbeinu also questioned the correctness of Pinchas' actions. Moshe complained to Pinchas that having relations with a non-Jewish woman is not punishable by death. Pinchas remind Moshe that Moshe had taught the law that a zealot can put someone to death if he witnesses the sin. This is what Moshe had taught them at the Golden Calf when he told them that they could kill those sinners without trial.

In Parashat Pinchas the Torah continues: "And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying. Pinchas the son of

Elazar the son of Aharon the Kohein turned back My wrath from upon the B'nei Yisrael when he zealously avenged My vengeance among them so that I did not consume the B'nei Yisrael in My vengeance. Therefore, say behold I have given him My covenant of peace. And it will be for him and his children after him a covenant of eternal priesthood because he took vengeance for his Elokim and he atoned for the B'nei Yisrael."

Pinchas is told that he and his children will now enter the world of the Kohanim. Is it possible that Pinchas is not already a Kohein? The K'li Yakar explains that Pinchas was not directly accepted into the K'hunah for several reasons: Elazar married a daughter of Puti'eil, a descendent of Yitro who fattened calves for the purpose of serving other gods. Pinchas was concerned that the troublemakers of his generation would say that his father had no right to marry a daughter of Yitro who had served idols. Pinchas was also worried that people would say, "how can a descendent of an idol worshipper be zealous against a leader of Yisrael." He was left in a state of limbo, he was an unanointed Kohein and he was not a descendent of an already anointed father. Pinchas, therefore, did not become a Kohein until Hashem bestowed that reward on him and his children at this time.

Pinchas also receives a special covenant of peace. Just as the name Pinchas is written with a yud z'ira, a small yud, the word shalom here is written with a vav k'tiah, a broken vav. There are many different explanations for this altering of the letter. The Abravanel suggests that this was peace from the relatives of Zimri who might wish to exact revenge for his death. HaRav Zvi Yehudah Berlin ties this reward to Pinchas' act of zealous vengeance. The peace which Pinchas receives is the peace of inner wholeness. Pinchas himself must have suffered tremendously from his actions. "Killing a human being without due process of law is liable to cause ...inner demoralization." Pinchas was torn by feelings that he acted too brashly. The Netziv explained that Pinchas was rewarded that he should not be quick-tempered or angry. "Since it was only natural that such a deed as Pinchas' should leave in his heart an emotional unrest afterward, the Divine blessing was designed to cope with this situation and promised peace and tranquility of soul." HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the small yud is a sign that perhaps his name was originally spelled without it but it was added to his name at this time. Here the yud indicated to all that Hashem understood Pinchas' zeal and he was correct.

It would be wrong of us to act as zealots today because we can not be certain of our motives. Pinchas was careful that his actions solely reflected the will of Hashem. He served Hashem completely and could not allow the desecration of Hashem's dwelling place by

such licentious behavior. May we also be devoted to Hashem and protect the very nature of His holiness and purity against those who would desecrate it. © 2019 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

Have you ever wondered why, in the Mussaf Amidah of a Jewish leap year (when there are two Adars), we add the phrase "ulichaparas posha -- and for atonement for sin"? It is a 13th phrase in the list of brachos at whose end it is added, which makes sense for a year with 13 months. But why "atonement of sin"? The Nachlas Tzvi has a fascinating suggestion.

Our parsha lists a number of special communal korbanos. On Rosh Chodesh, the day of the new moon, among other sacrifices, a chatas, a sin-offering, is brought (Bamidbar 28:15). Unlike other chata'os brought on holidays, though, it alone is called a chatas laHashem. The halachic import of that fact, as Rashi notes, is that it atones for tum'ah contamination of the mikdash or kodoshim that no person ever knew about, only Hashem.

But the Midrash (also cited by Rashi) says something flabbergasting, that the korban is brought as an "atonement" -- whatever that might mean -- on behalf of Hashem, for His having "lessened" the moon. The reference, of course, is to the Midrash's account of how the moon complained that "two kings cannot wear one crown" and, as a result, was divinely demoted.

The reason for a Jewish leap year, says the Nachlas Tzvi, is that the Jewish calendar, which is essentially lunar, requires an occasional additional month, to bring the Jewish months into alignment with the seasons (which are the result of the sun's rays' angle toward the hemispheres of an axis-tilted earth). The Nachlas Tzvi suggests that the "lessening" of the moon may refer not only to a muting of brightness or size but also to the fact that it takes less time for our satellite to orbit around the earth 12 times than it takes the earth to revolve around the sun, rendering a lunar year "less," in a temporal sense -- shorter -- than a solar one.

He sees the "atonement" as being for the moon's complaint. But it would seem that it might better refer to the confounding Midrash cited that Rashi cites, whatever it might mean. © 2025 Rabbi A. Shafraan and torah.org

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

I must have been a teenager when I first saw the movie: 2001: A Space Odyssey. No, dinosaurs were already long gone, but it was decades ago. It was quite spectacular for its time, and its message was quite prescient, but there was also so much I just didn't get.

Then I read the book years later. I was amazed at how much I didn't pick up while watching the movie, and how much the movie failed to convey. I learned at that time how easy it is to think that what you see is all there is when, in fact, there is so much more to know to properly understand a story. That is certainly the case with this week's parsha.

There is a joke about a man who goes to an Orthodox rabbi whom he asks to make him a kohen. "I'm even willing to pay," he tells the rabbi, who refuses the money saying, "The kehunah is not something you can buy into." Undeterred, the would-be kohen goes to a less scrupulous rabbi and makes the same request, but this time his request is granted and the money is paid. Upon concluding the transaction and the fake ordination, the "rabbi" asks the man, "Tell me, why is it so important for you to be a kohen?" The man sighs heavily and answers, "My father was a kohen, and so was his father before him. So, I want to be a kohen too!"

The joke is that he already was a kohen because his father was one. But, in the case of Pinchas, it was no joke. Pinchas's father had been a kohen, but that did not mean that Pinchas could be one as well. Only children born henceforth from kohanim automatically became kohanim, which excluded Pinchas who had already been born at the time.

Not to worry. Pinchas found a workaround when he killed Zimri in the middle of a sin, though he had not known it at the time. He had only been avenging God when he dispensed with Zimri at the end of last week's parsha, and only found about his reward of becoming a kohen after the fact at the beginning of this week's parsha. As the expression goes, "It ain't over until it's over."

That's the story. Now, what's the story behind the story?

It's like archery. Sometimes you can only figure out what the archer was aiming for after they hit their target. Likewise, if we know the end of the story about Pinchas, we can better understand why he had to "earn" his way into the kehunah.

The Ba'al HaTurim provides that information at the beginning of this week's parsha by pointing out that Pinchas was Eliyahu HaNavi, or more accurately, became Eliyahu HaNavi. He doesn't explain how he knew this, or why he was compelled to mention it here, but the Arizal did generations later in Sha'ar HaGilgulim. That is where we find out that Pinchas began his transformation to one of the greatest prophets to have ever lived and herald of the final redemption the moment he put everything on the line and put an end to the Zimri-Cozbi fiasco.

The Torah only speaks about his visible reward, which was becoming an active kohen and getting Bris Shalom, God's "Covenant of Peace." What was not visible was the drawing and absorption of the

souls of Nadav and Avihu, which gave Pinchas prophecy. This led to the addition of two more souls, one called "Eliyahu HaTishbi," and "Eliyahu HaGiladi," to make the transformation from "only" Pinchas to Eliyahu HaNavi.

None of this had been incidental. All of it had been planned, beginning with Pinchas not becoming a kohen with the rest of his family, which was a part of his personal development to become the heroic Pinchas at the end of last week's parsha. The Zimri episode occurred to bring all that out of him to fashion him into the proper vessel to receive the necessary levels of Divine light to become the prophet he became, and angel he is now.

This was true of Pinchas, and it is true for all of us as well. Our personal lives may seem somewhat random, but Divine Providence is working behind the scenes to help us reach our final destinations. Successes and adversities are Divinely planned to help us become better vessels for the light of God, which we need to reach higher levels of ourselves, something only God knows in advance. © 2025 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

This week's Parashah opens with Pinchas' reward for his courageous act of killing Zimri. Our Sages teach that Bnei Yisrael criticized Pinchas; in contrast, the Torah records, Hashem praised him, as we read (25:11), "He zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume Bnei Yisrael in My vengeance." In the toxic environment created by those who made a great Chillul Hashem / desecration of G-d's Name, Pinchas made a Kiddush Hashem / sanctification of G-d's Name, writes R' Menachem Ben-Zion Sacks z"l (1896-1987; rabbi and pioneering educator in Chicago).

Nevertheless, continues R' Sacks, as great as Pinchas' merit was, Hashem saw fit to reward him with His "covenant of Shalom / peace." Hashem was emphasizing that zealotry has a place, and Pinchas did a great thing, but zealotry must not become a way of life. Zealotry must be exercised only within the framework of Shalom.

Midrash Rabbah teaches: "Great is Shalom, which was given to Pinchas, for the world operates only with Shalom." We read (Mishlei 3:17) about the Torah itself, notes R' Sacks, "Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its pathways are Shalom."

R' Sacks concludes: The last prophet, Malachi, defines the covenant of Shalom as follows (Malachi 2:5-6), "My covenant of life and Shalom was with him...The Torah of truth was in his mouth, and no injustice was found on his lips; he walked with Me in Shalom and fairness, and he turned many away from sin." Those are the hallmarks of Shalom. (Menachem

Zion)



"Command Bnei Yisrael and say to them, 'My offering, My food for My fires, My satisfying aroma, you shall be scrupulous to offer to Me in its appointed time.' And you shall say to them, 'This is the fire-offering that you are to offer to Hashem--Kevashim bnei shanah / male lambs in their first year, unblemished, two a day, as a continual Olah-offering. The one Keves / lamb shall you make in the morning, and the second Keves / lamb shall you make in the afternoon... It is the Tamid / continual elevation-offering...' (28:2-4, 6)

The Mishnah (Ta'anit 4:6) teaches that five calamitous events occurred to our forefathers on the 17th day of Tammuz. One of these was that the bringing of the Tamid was interrupted by the Romans, and it has not been reinstated since.

R' Zvi Yisrael Thau shlita (founder of Yeshivat Har Ha'mor in Yerushalayim) writes: From amongst the many Korbanot / sacrifices that were offered in the Bet Hamikdash, the Tamid stands out in its centrality and importance. The Tamid, which was offered every day, was the foundation for all other sacrificial offerings. The daily service began with the morning Tamid and ended with the evening Tamid. Thus, the Tamid framed all the other Korbanot.

R' Thau continues: The Jewish People aspire to elevate nature--to refine it and sanctify it. For the most part, nature is consistent and cyclical, as we say in Kiddush Ha'levanah, "He gave them a law and a schedule, that they not alter their assigned task." The Tamid, which was offered with unrelenting regularity, sanctified the Jewish People's routines and ensured that they did not devolve into being just another part of nature. (Kovetz Sichot L'bein Ha'meitzarim: Avodat Ha'Tamid)

R' Yitzchak Drohobycer z"l (one of the earliest disciples of the Ba'al Shem Tov; died 1750) observed: People usually hold on to their anger at other people until Erev Yom Kippur, when people appease each other. That is not proper, however. Rather, before one goes to sleep each night, he should forgive anyone who wronged him during the preceding day. If someone wrongs him at night, he should forgive that person before morning, says the Zohar.

This is alluded to in our verses, says R' Yitzchak: This is the offering that will be a "satisfying aroma," i.e., that will be pleasing, to Hashem. Take your anger, which is "Kevashim bnei shanah" / pent-up ("Kavush") within you for a whole year, and address it properly twice daily instead. (Imrei Yechiel) © 2025 S. Katz and torah.org

