

Parsha Ponders

Balak | July 18, 2024 | 13 Tammuz 5784

Pinchas' justified suspicion causation¹

וירא פינחס בן-אלעזר בן-אהרן הכהן ויקם מתוך העדה ויקח רמח בידו

Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon HaCohen saw, and he got up from the assembly and took a spear in his hand²

The end of this week's *parsha* describes the tragic sin of *Pe'or*. The Midianite women came to the Jews in order to entice them to sin. There were thousands who fell for their scheme and succumbed to idol worship and illicit relations. Zimri, the leader of the tribe of Shimon, brazenly took one of the non-Jewish women and was together with her in a public fashion.

Pinchas, the grandson of Aharon, knew that this wasn't just. He recalled the law that if someone brazenly displays such a public act of desecrating Hashem's name, the observer has the right to take the law into their own hands. He went to Moshe to confirm the teaching, and Moshe told Pinchas that since he was the one who remembered it, he should carry it out³. Pinchas took a spear and was able to stop Zimri and his mistress from continuing this dreadful sin.

One could ask on this story: It's very nice that the one who remembered should carry it out. However, what was Moshe doing? Why didn't he get involved? Why did he wait for Pinchas to bring up the idea of taking the law into one's own hands? This was such a disgrace to Hashem's name. Why didn't Moshe perform a *Kiddush Hashem*, a sanctification of Hashem's name, like Pinchas subsequently did⁴? Basically, why didn't Moshe pre-empt Pinchas?

Our Sages fill in the details of the story⁵. As Pinchas was approaching the tribe of Shimon in order to stop Zimri, he stopped to rebuke them. He asked them why they were debasing themselves with the Midianite women. As he carried on towards Zimri, the tribe of Shimon said amongst themselves that they should ignore Pinchas, for he obviously is also going to go after the Midianite women. Others said that it must be that the leaders of the generation permitted this behavior, as they saw Pinchas approaching the action.

If Pinchas' actions created such confusion and led to more mistaken behavior, what indeed was the permit for his actions? He himself created a *Chillul Hashem*, a disgrace of G-d's name! People thought someone as righteous as Pinchas was committing sin! It must be that it was worth it to take the law into his own hands. It stopped the subsequent plague which was to occur and punish the sinners, and it created a tremendous *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of Hashem's name⁶.

This could only be true for Pinchas, who at the time wasn't as well known. However, Moshe was the leader of the generation. He was the one who took them out of Egypt, and he was the one who brought down the Torah. It's untenable that someone of his stature would, even for a moment, be suspected of sin. The *Chillul Hashem* that would result would be too great to bear, even weighed against the large *Kiddush Hashem* that would come with it. As such, only Pinchas was the man for the job.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on [Ayeles HaShachar](#) to [Numbers](#) 25:7, by [Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman](#)

² [Numbers](#) *loc. cit.*

³ [Rashi](#) *ad. loc.*, quoting [Sanhedrin](#) 82a

⁴ [Sanhedrin](#) *loc. cit.* says that the *halacha* was withheld from him. This is seemingly talking about Moshe, that for whatever reason he forgot the *halacha*. [Rav Shteinman](#) is seemingly asking that even if he forgot the *halacha* of taking the law into one's own hands, why didn't Moshe stop Zimri anyways due to the *Chillul Hashem* involved?

⁵ [Sanhedrin](#) 82b

⁶ This is a big novelty, that the ends justify the means, at least regarding a small *Chillul Hashem* being permitted if it causes a large *Kiddush Hashem*