

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn



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A JEW'S UNLIMITED POWER

Parshas Pinchas begins with a description of the reward given to Pinchas: "He and his descendants after him will have a *bris* of everlasting *kehunah*, because he acted zealously on behalf of Hashem."

This is a unique type of reward, the likes of which we do not find elsewhere. We find that people were rewarded for their actions with material benefits, and even with meriting higher levels of spirituality, for example, receiving *nevuah* or *ruach hakodesh*. But *kehunah* is something hereditary; either you were born a Kohen or you were not. How can a non-Kohen be given the reward of becoming one?

A UNIQUE PUNISHMENT

Pinchas received this reward for killing Zimri, who was in the process of sinning with a non-Jewish woman. This was in accordance with the *halachah* that "If one sins with a non-Jewish woman, zealots smite him."

According to one approach in Rishonim, it is not just that the *zealot* is given permission to kill such a person, but furthermore—the *sinner* is liable to receive the death penalty. The difference is that while most death penalties are executed by Beis Din, this one is meted out by zealots.

Another difference is that with other sins, the punishment is given *after* the sin took place. Let's say someone desecrated Shabbos, *chas veshalom*. The sinner is brought to court and they investigate the matter; if no *limud zechus* is found, he is punished with stoning.

With this sin, however, the punishment must be administered *during the actual time of the sin*. Even a moment after the sin was completed, he may not be killed. (Indeed, this was one of the miracles Pinchas experienced, that Zimri and Kozbi were still in middle of sinning when he killed them.)

What makes this specific sin different from all others?

THE POWER OF FREE CHOICE

To explain this, let's first discuss a special ability we possess—the

power of free choice.

The power of free choice is an unlimited ability: A Jew can choose whatever he desires, even if it is against the nature of his *nefesh habahamis* and his *nefesh ha'elokis*.

How is it that we possess such an unbelievable power? Because we are connected to Hashem Himself. Just as Hashem has no restrictions whatsoever and can do anything He desires, a Jew similarly has no restrictions, and can choose to do anything he wishes. Of course, this G-dly power can be used either to do good or to sin, *rachamana litzlan*; but it itself is a lofty power that stems from Hashem Himself.

When a person chooses to sin—say, to desecrate Shabbos—he is placing the energy of his *nefesh ha'elokis* into *kelipah*. However, which part of himself is he placing there? Merely his faculty of action.

A worse type of sin is one associated with forbidden relations.

Here, he is placing a much deeper part of himself into *kelipah*—the power of birth.

The ability to reproduce comes from the *etzem hanefesh*, the essence of the soul. This is why a child sometimes displays certain talents that are unseen in the parent. If the parent doesn't have this talent, how is it that the child does? This is because the power of birth comes from the *etzem hanefesh*, where certain abilities lie latent, enabling the child to access them.

Accordingly, when one sins with a forbidden Jewish woman, he is channeling his *etzem hanefesh* into *kelipos*. In a certain way, this highlights the tremendous power of *bechirah chafshis* even more, demonstrating the extent of what a Jew can choose to do.

CHOOSING TO OPT OUT

But then there is something even worse: sinning with a non-Jewish woman.

With any other sin, the sinner has never left the realm of Jewishness. He remains a Jew, and his faculties are still associated with his Jewish identity. Even if he sins with a forbidden Jewish

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woman and she gives birth to a child, the child may be a *mamzer*, but he is still a Jew.

But when one sins with a non-Jewish woman, he is taking a sacred, G-dly power—the power of birth, which is meant to be utilized to beget other Jews—and transferring it to the realm of non-Jewishness, utilizing it instead to beget a non-Jew.

This is something unparalleled by any other sin. It demonstrates how far free choice can go in a way not expressed anywhere else: A Jew can choose to do whatever he wants with the special powers Hashem gave him, including even to remove them from the realm of holiness and Jewishness.

This is why the Torah describes Pinchas's action as an act of zealotness "on behalf of Hashem": Pinchas was fighting against an act that had taken a G-dly power and disassociated it from Jewishness.

TOUCHED TO THE CORE

We can now understand why this sin is dealt with differently from all others.

Other sins are handled in an orderly manner. The court investigates the matter and tries to find a *limud zechus*, and if none is discovered, they carry out the punishment.

But this sin expresses a far deeper part of a person than his limited side. It demonstrates more than anything else the unlimited power of free choice, which has no restrictions whatsoever. To rectify this, the punishment must be meted out by someone who works in a similar fashion—a zealot.

A zealot does not work with reason. The misdeed he has seen touches his very *etzem hanefesh*, and this is what motivates him to take action. It is he who is given the task of rectifying the sin

of one who has chosen to remove his deepest powers from the realm of Jewishness.

This highlights the tremendous power of *bechirah chafshis*, demonstrating the extent of what a Jew can choose to do.

This is also why this sin can only be punished during the actual moment. With other *aveiros*, the sin's negative results are ongoing. Even with forbidden relationships, where the child born is a *mamzer*, since he is still a Jew and remains in the realm of *kedushah*, it is possible to push him even deeper into *kelipos*. This is why punishment is given although the act has long terminated.

But with a relationship with a non-Jewish woman, the negative results occur during that moment, and that moment only. Once the act is over, it is too late—his G-dly power has already been transferred to the sphere of non-Jewishness. This is why punishment can only be administered during the act itself.

BECOMING A KOHEN

This is also why Pinchas was rewarded with *kehunah*. With most rewards, the person remains in the same state as he was before, and the reward merely serves to enhance his existence, by giving him *ruach hakodesh* or the like. But since Pinchas went beyond the limits of his own nature when reacting to Zimri, the reward he received was also one that defied natural boundaries, allowing him to transform from a Yisroel to a Kohen.

The severity of this sin is expressed by the Rambam, who writes that although it is not punishable with death by the court, the negative effects it creates are unlike those of any other forbidden relationship.

All this also helps us appreciate the importance of preserving the distinction between Jews and non-Jews.

For further study, see לקו"ש חלק ח' בלק ב'.

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