

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXXVII: Shelach (Num. 13:1–15:41)

Essay 7. Pinchas and Caleb in Jericho

The Haftorah for Shelach, Joshua 2:1–24, relates that Joshua asked two men to enter Jericho as spies, and they spend the night at the house of Rahab, a prostitute. She hid the men, and when the Canaanites asked her to produce them, she lied and said that they had left.

"**וַתִּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה אֶת־שְׁנֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים וַתַּצְפְּנֵנּוּ**", בְּלִשׁוֹן יַחֲדָי וְלֹא אָמַר "וַתַּצְפְּנֵנִם", וְרַז"ל אָמְרוּ דְּכָלֵב הוּא שְׁהִיָּה צָרִיד הַטְּמֵנָה אֲבָל לֹא פָנְחָס שְׁהִיָּה עוֹמֵד לְפָנֵיהֶם רוֹאֶה וְאִינוּ נִרְאֶה.

“The woman took the two men and hid him” (Joshua 2:4). It is curious that the text says “And the woman took the two men” but then writes the verb וַתַּצְפְּנֵנּוּ [*va titzpeno*] [“and she hid him”] **in singular form, and it doesn’t say “and she hid them.” The rabbis, of blessed memory, said that the two men were Pinchas and Caleb, and that Caleb was the one who needed concealment, but not Pinchas, for Pinchas was standing before them, “seeing but not seen.”**¹

מְקֻשָּׁים דְּהָא כְּתִיב "וַתַּטְמֵנֵנּוּ" וְכֹי' הָרִי שְׁהִטְמִינָה שְׁנֵיהֶם. וְעוֹד קָשָׁה דְּהָלֹא כְּשֶׁהִקַּב"ה עוֹשֶׂה גִסִּים אִינוּ עוֹשֶׂה אוֹתָם אֲלֵא עַל צַד הַהִכָּרָח? דָּאִי לָאוּ הָכִי הָיָה עוֹשֶׂה גִסִּים לְלֹא תוֹעֵלָת וְאִין זֶה מְנַהֲגוּ שֶׁל הַקַּב"ה. וְעוֹד שְׁעֵדִיין פִּינְחָס לֹא הָיָה מְלַאֲךָ רַק כְּאִישׁ כְּשֶׁר בְּעֵלְמָא. וְעוֹד קָשָׁה לְפִי פְּשׁוּטוֹ שֶׁל מְקַרָּא אִידָּהּ הוֹתֵר לְהֵם לְהַתְיַחַד עִם הַנְּכָרִית וּבְפֻרְט שְׁהִיָּתָה זוֹנָה מוֹפְקָרָת, וְהָא אִיתָא בְּשִׁלְחָן עָרוּד אֲבָן הָעֵזֶר (סִימָן כ"ב סְעִיף ה') לֹא תַתְיַחַד אִשָּׁה אַחַת אֲפִילוּ עִם אֲנָשִׁים הַרְבֵּה.

People question this midrash, for it is written in Joshua 2:6, “and she had hidden them under some stalks of flax,” that she had hidden the two of them. Another difficulty is that: isn’t it so that when the Holy One, Blessed be He, performs a miracle, he does not do so unless it is necessary? That is, Pinchas could have been protected by being hidden, so why would G-d have to perform a miracle by making him invisible?² For if this is not so, then He would be performing miracles for no purpose, and this is not the custom of the Holy One, Blessed be

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¹ Yalkut Shimoni on the Prophets, remez 8: “Pinchas said to her, ‘I am a priest, and the priests are similar to an angel, as it says, “For the lips of a priest guard knowledge, and men seek rulings from his mouth; for he is a messenger of the L-rd of Hosts” (Malachi 2:7), and the angel can desire to be seen, [or] can desire not to be seen.’ And she only hid Caleb.” The language used by Zera Shimshon, “seeing but not seen” is also used to describe G-d, in Berachot 10a.

² Nor was Pinchas always invisible to the Canaanites, for in Joshua 2:2, “The king of Jericho was told, ‘Some men have come here tonight, Israelites, to spy out the country.’ ” So someone in Jericho had at some point seen both Caleb and Pinchas.

He. Also, Pinchas wasn't yet an angel,³ but only a man in the world with fit morals. Further, it is difficult, according to the plain meaning of the text, how it was permitted for them to seclude themselves with a non-Jewish woman, and particularly one who was a prostitute available to any man. It is brought in the Shulchan Aruch, Even haEzer (siman 22, se'if 5), that one woman may not be secluded even with many men.⁴

וְהָגַם שְׂיִיחוּד הַנְּכָרִית לֹא אֶסְרוּהוּ אֶלָּא בִּימֵי שְׁמַאי וְהֵלֵל כְּדֹאמְרֵינוּ בְּפֶרֶק ב' דְּעֵבֹדָה זָרָה (דף ל"ו), זֶה נִיחָא לְכָלְלוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבָל לְאֲנָשִׁים צְדִיקִים פְּשִׁיטָא שְׁהִיָּה לָהֶם לְהִזְהַר בְּמָה שְׁעֵתֵי דִין חֻכְמִים לְגִזּוֹר עָלֵיו. כְּדֹאמְרֵינוּ "עֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַע אֲבָרְהָם בְּקִלְיִ" מִלְּמַד שְׁקִיִּים אֶפִּילוּ עִירוּבֵי מִבְּשִׁילִין שְׁהֵם מְדַרְבְּנֵנוּ, וּמִפְּלִ שְׁכַן שְׁכַבְרֵ חֲטָאוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל קוֹדֵם לְזֶה בְּבָנוֹת מוֹאָב בְּשִׁיטִים.

It's true that seclusion with a non-Jewish woman was prohibited only later, in the days of Shammai and Hillel, as it says in the second chapter of tractate Avodah Zarah, page 36b. This was generally fine for the men of Israel, prior to the time of Shammai and Hillel. That is, the Gemara first discusses that the Torah forbade marriage with women of the seven Canaanite nations, and that the students of Shammai and Hillel extended the prohibition rabbinically to cover all other nations. The Gemara then discusses extramarital relations, stating that while the Torah forbade Jewish women from having extramarital relations with a non-Jewish man, the Torah did not forbid Jewish men from having extramarital relations with non-Jewish women. The students of Shammai and Hillel extended the prohibition rabbinically to forbid such extramarital relations. Thus, prior to Shammai and Hillel, as extramarital relations were permitted between a Jewish man and a non-Jewish woman, then seclusion was not a problem.

But for righteous men, like Pinchas and Caleb, it is obvious that they needed to beware of what the Torah scholars were destined to enact. As it is said, "Inasmuch as Abraham obeyed Me [and kept My charge: My commandments, My laws, and My teachings]" (Gen. 26:5), and Yoma 28b states that teaches that he fulfilled even [the mitzva of] *eruv tavshilin*,⁵ a rabbinic ordinance [instituted later]. That is, we have a concept that the righteous will know what to do and what not to do, even prior to the express enactment of laws. **In any case, Israel had already**

³ Later, Pinchas killed Zimri and Cozbi, after which G-d told Moses: "Pinchas, son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the Israelites by displaying among them his passion for Me, so that I did not wipe out the Israelite people in My passion. Say, therefore, 'I grant him My pact of friendship. It shall be for him and his descendants after him a pact of priesthood for all time, because he took impassioned action for his G-d, thus making expiation for the Israelites.'" (Num. 25:11-13). Targum Yonaton to Num. 25:12 interprets: "Swearing by My Name, I say to him, Behold, I decree to him My covenant of peace, and will make him an angel of the covenant, that he may ever live, to announce the Redemption at the end of the days."

⁴ Shulchan Aruch, Even haEzer (siman 22, se'if 5), text of Rabbi Yosef Karo: "One woman may not be in seclusion even with many men, unless the wife of one of the men is present. And similarly, one man may not be in seclusion even with many women."

⁵ *Eruv tavshilin* is a ritual performed prior to a festival that falls on a Friday. Ordinarily, food can be cooked on a festival to be eaten that same day, but not to be eaten after the festival. To allow food to be cooked on a Friday festival for the next day (i.e., the Sabbath, when cooking is not allowed), a small amount of food is prepared for the Sabbath and set aside before the commencement of the festival. Thus, any cooking done on the festival for the Sabbath will not be considered a newly undertaken preparation for the next day, but only a continuation of the cooking that had begun before the onset of the festival.

sinned previously to this scouting mission to Jericho, with the daughters of Moab at Shittim, when Pinchas was so enraged that he killed Zimri and Cozbi.⁶ Thus, Pinchas and Caleb should have been well aware of the danger of secluding themselves with Rahab.

ונש לומר דבגמרא אמרינו דבתרי וקשרים שרי וכמו שקתוב נשם בהגהה. אלא דבגמרא דקידושין (דף פ"א) מסיק דאפילו רב ורב יהודה לא מקרו פשרים אלא כגון ר' חנינא בר פפי ורחבירי, ואם כן אפילו עשרה פשרים אסורה להתנחד עמהם, ועיי"ש בהקלקת מחוקק.

It can be said that in the Gemara (Kiddushin page 80b), it says that [a woman can be secluded] with two men of fit morals, as it is written there in the Shulchan Aruch, Even haEzer (siman 22, se'if 5), in the annotation of the Rema.⁷ However, in the Gemara Kiddushin (page 81a), it concluded that even Rav and Rav Yehuda weren't called [men of] fit morals, rather only Rabbi Chanina bar Pappi and his colleagues were considered to be on such a high level! If so, then even [if there are] ten people who we would consider to be fit men, [a woman] is forbidden to be secluded with [the men], because who really knows if they are truly deserving of that label. See there in the Chelkat Mechokek (100:7).⁸

ומעתה נבא לביאור הכתוב, אין הכי נמי שהאשה הצפינה שגניהם כדכתיב "ותמגמם בפשתי העץ", אלא פי הכי דלא תקשי איך נתנחדו בלילה בית אשה זונה ונכרית, משום הכי אמר הכתוב "ותצפנו", שלא היתה צריכה להטמין אלא פלב, מפני שפינתס הנה צדיק כמלאך ה', והראיה שסופו נעשה מלאך ואין יצר הרע שולט בו, והיינו ר' חנינא בר פפי ויתר ממנו. וגם פלב שהלך עמו בנדאי שהיה דומה לו צדיק כמותו, ואף אם לא יהיה חשוב כמותו עם כל זה פינתס הנה שומר אותו.

Now we will come to an explanation of the Scripture. It is indeed so that the woman hid the two of them, as it is written, “and she had hidden them under some stalks of flax” (Joshua 2:6). Rather, in order that there not be a difficulty as to how they secluded themselves at night at the house of a non-Jewish prostitute, for that reason Scripture said “and she hid him,” and that as taught in Yalkut Shimoni, it was necessary for her to hide only Caleb. That is because Pinchas was a righteous man, like an angel of G-d. The proof is that at his [life’s] end, he was made into an angel. Thus, if Rahab had not hidden him, then G-d would have created a miracle to save him. This status of Pinchas explains how he and Caleb were able to be secluded with Rahab. No evil inclination ruled over [Pinchas], like Rabbi Chanina bar Pappi and even

⁶ Num. 25:1–3: “While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people profaned themselves by consorting with the Moabite women, who invited the people to the sacrifices for their god. The people partook of them and worshiped that god. Thus Israel attached itself to Baal-peor, and the L-rd was incensed with Israel.”

⁷ Shulchan Aruch, Even haEzer (siman 22, se'if 5), note of the Rema: “Note: And there are those who say that a woman may seclude herself with two ‘good men’ [of fit morals] when in-town. And men are to be considered as good men, generally. But if they are ‘steeped’ [in sexual immorality], it's forbidden to be secluded even with ten of them. And all this [applies] when in-town. However, in the field, or during the night even in-town, three men are required to be there, even if they are ‘good men.’ And there are those who permit one man with many women, if his business is not [primarily] involved with women.”

⁸ Moses ben Isaac Judah Lima (c. 1615 – c. 1670), Lithuanian scholar, rabbi of Brest-Litovsk, Slonim, and Vilna. His son published his manuscript, Chelkat Mechokek, a commentary on the first 126 chapters of the Shulchan Aruch, Eben HaEzer.

more so. Also, Caleb, who traveled with him, was certainly similar to him, a righteous man like him, and even if he wouldn't be considered exactly like him, nevertheless Pinchas was guarding him and keeping Caleb far from sin.

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