

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XLI: Pinchas (Num. 25:10–30:1)

Essay 2. Pinchas and the priesthood

"תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר קָנָא לְאַלְהֵיוּ וַיִּכַּפֵּר עַל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל". מִקְשִׁים שָׂאֵלוּ הַתִּיבוֹת "תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר" וְכוּ' "וַיִּכַּפֵּר" וְכוּ' נִרְאוֹת מִיּוֹתְרוֹת, שֶׁהָרִי פָּכַר אָמַר "בְּקִנְאוֹ אֶת־קִנְאוֹתֵי" וּפְרַשׁ רַשִׁי "בְּקִצְפוֹ אֶת הַקֶּצֶף שֶׁהִיָּה לִי לְקִצּוֹף, וּבִשְׂבִיל זֶה מִשְׁמַע שְׂזָכָה לְבָרִית שְׁלוֹם וְלְבָרִית כְּהוֹנָה. וְהָכִי הָנָה לִיָּה לְמִיָּמָר "הַשִּׁיב אֶת־חַמְתֵּי" וְכוּ' "לְכֹן אָמַר" וְכוּ', דְּשִׁלוֹם הִיָּינוּ חַיִּים נְצַחִיִּים "וְהִיָּתָה לוֹ וּלְזָרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו בְּרִית כְּהֹנָת עוֹלָם" וְתוֹ לֹא מִיָּדִי. וְעוֹד מָה שֶׁפְּרַשׁ רַשִׁי "בְּקִצְפוֹ אֶת הַקֶּצֶף שֶׁהִיָּה לִי לְקִצּוֹף" קִשָּׁה אִם הִיָּה לוֹ לְהִקָּב"ה לְקִצּוֹף לְמָה לֹא קִצַּף, וְאִם לֹא קִצַּף הִקָּב"ה שְׁמַע מִיָּנָה שְׁלֹא הִיָּה מִן הַרְאוֹי לְקִצּוֹף לְאִיזוֹ סִבָּה וּמָנָא לִיָּה לְפָנֶתֶס לְקִצּוֹף, וּבִשְׂלֵמָא בְּלֹא פְרוּשׁ רַשִׁי "וַיִּחַא שְׂקִינָא לְשֵׁם הַקָּב"ה.

“The L-rd spoke to Moses, saying: ‘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 covenant of peace, and it shall be for him and his descendants after him a covenant of priesthood for all time, because he was zealous for his G-d, thus making expiation for the Israelites.”’¹

People question that these words, “because he was zealous for his G-d, thus making expiation for the Israelites,” appear to be superfluous. That is, He already said “when he avenged My avenging,” which Rashi explained as, “when he displayed the anger that I should have displayed.”² Because of this, we hear that he merited the covenant of peace and the covenant of priesthood. He should have said, “He 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 covenant of peace’ ”—for peace is eternal life—“ ‘and it shall be for him and his descendants after him a covenant of priesthood for all time,’ ” and not said anything else.

Also, regarding what Rashi explained, “when he displayed the anger that I should have displayed,” a difficulty is if the Holy One, Blessed be He, should have displayed anger, why didn’t He display anger? Also, as the Holy One, Blessed be He, didn’t display anger, we hear from this that it wasn’t appropriate to display anger for some reason, and how did Pinchas know to show anger? Granted, without the explanation of Rashi, it is fine that he was zealous for the sake of the Holy One, Blessed be He.

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¹ Num. 25:10–13.

² Rashi on Num. 25:11.

וְנִשְׁ לֹמֵר דְּבַפְרָק ט' דְּסִנְהֶדְרִין אֲמַרְיִנּוּ וְהַבּוֹעֵל אֲרַמִּית, קִנְאִין פּוֹגְעִין בּוֹ. לֹא פָּגְעוּ בּוֹ קִנְאִין כְּתִיב בֵּיהּ "נִכְרַת ה' לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂנָה", לֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ עֵר וְעוֹנָה נְכוּ'.³

It can be said that in the 9th chapter of tractate Sanhedrin, it is said, “one who engages in intercourse with an Aramean woman, zealots strike him [and kill him].”³ If zealots do not strike him, it is written about them, “May the L-rd cut off from a man who does this one who calls and one who answers,”⁴ and it is explained in the Gemara, he should not have anyone [among his descendants] who calls [and initiates conversation] among the Torah scholars, nor one who answers among the students [i.e., who can answer questions posed by the Torah scholars].⁵

וְאִם כֵּן כָּל עוֹד שְׁלֹא פָּגְעוּ בּוֹ קִנְאִין בְּזִמְרִי הָעוֹנֵשׁ שְׁלוֹ הָיָה שֶׁהַקָּב"ה נִכְרִיחֵנוּ מִן הָעוֹלָם, אֲבָל כָּל מִי שֶׁחַיִּיב כָּרַת אֵינּוּ מֵת מִכַּף וּמִיָּד שֶׁחַטָּא אֱלֹא לְאַחַר זְמַן, וְכִשְׁפָּגַע פְּנַחַס בְּזִמְרִי שֶׁפִּיר מִקְרִי שֶׁקָּצַף הַקָּצֵף שֶׁהָיָה לוֹ לְהַקְב"ה לְקַצּוֹף דְּהֵינּוּ לְהַכְרִיתוֹ מִן הָעוֹלָם, אֲבָל הַקָּב"ה הָיָה עוֹשֶׂהוּ לְאַחַר זְמַן וּפְנַחַס עָשָׂא מִיָּד שֶׁכָּף הַיָּתֵה הַחֹבֶה מוֹטְלֵת עָלָיו, וְלִכֵּן מִדָּה כְּנִגְדַּ מִדָּה נָתַן לוֹ הַבְּרִית שְׁלוֹם דְּהֵינּוּ חַיִּים נְצַחִיִּים נִגְדַּ הַמִּיתָה שֶׁנָּתַן לְזִמְרִי וְנִגְדַּ הַחַיִּים שֶׁהֵשִׁיב.

If so, as long as zealots did not harm Zimri, his punishment would be that the Holy One, Blessed be He, would cut him off from the world. But everyone who is obliged to be cut off does not die directly and immediately after he sins, but after a while. When Pinchas struck Zimri, it was fitting to refer to this as displaying the anger that the Holy One, Blessed be He, should have displayed, which was to cut [Zimri] off from the world. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, would have done this after a while, whereas Pinchas did this immediately, for thus was the obligation imposed upon him. Therefore, as a measure-for-measure reward, the covenant of peace was given to him, which is eternal life, against the death that was given to Zimri and against the anger that [Pinchas] turned back by his zealotry.

וּלְפִי שֶׁבִּהְרִיגָתוֹ לְזִמְרִי הוֹעִיל נְמִי לְבָנָיו, שֶׁהָרִי אִם לֹא הָיוּ פּוֹגְעִין בּוֹ קִנְאִין הָיָה נִכְרַת וְלֹא הָיָה לוֹ עֵר בְּחַכְמִים וְעוֹנָה בְּתַלְמִידִים, וְאִם הוּא פָּהֵן לֹא הָיָה לוֹ בֶּן מְגִישׁ מִנְחָה, אֲבָל אִם יִפְגְּעוּ בּוֹ קִנְאִין שֶׁנַּעֲשֶׂה בּוֹ הַדִּין אִזְ הַבָּנִים יְכוּלִים לְהִיּוֹת חַכְמִים וְכֹהֲנִים, שֶׁהָרִי עוֹנֵשׁ זֶה לֹא שֶׁמַּעֲנּוּ אוֹתוֹ אֱלֹא סְמוּךְ לְיִכְרַת ה' דְּהֵינּוּ כְּשֶׁלֹּא פָּגְעוּ בּוֹ קִנְאִין. וְעוֹד דְּכֻשְׁיֵי דִין לְמַטָּה אֵין דִּין לְמַעְלָה.

Also, the killing of Zimri also benefited [Zimri's] sons, for if he had not been struck by zealots, he would have been cut off by G-d after a while, and “not have anyone among his descendants who calls and initiates conversation among the Torah scholars, nor one who answers among the students. If [the sinner] were a priest, he would not have a son who will present a meal-offering.”⁶ But if he were struck by zealots who would carry out the law against him, then his sons would be able to be wise and priests, for this punishment affecting

³ Mishnah Sanhedrin 9:6; Sanhedrin 81b.
⁴ Malachi 2:12.
⁵ Sanhedrin 82a.
⁶ Id.

offspring would only be heard for one being cut off by G-d, which is the case when he is not struck by zealots. Also, when there is justice below, there is no justice above.⁷ I.e., if a human court or zealot acts, then G-d does not need to act.

לְכֹן מִדָּה כְּנִגְד מִדָּה נִיתְּנָה לוֹ בְּרִית כְּהוֹנֵת עוֹלָם שֶׁהִפְתָּן גְּדוֹל יְהִיָּה לְעוֹלָם מְזַרְעוֹ שֶׁל פְּנִיחָס, וּמִמִּילָא יְהִיָּה גַם כֵּן תַּלְמִיד חֶכֶם שֶׁהָרִי כְּתִיב "כִּי־שִׁפְתַי כִּהְיוּ יִשְׁמְרוּ־דַעַת וְתוֹרָה יִבְקָשׁוּ מִפִּיהוּ" וְכוּ'. וּמִשׁוּם הַכִּי חִזַּר לוֹמֵר "תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר קָנָא לְאַלְהֵיוּ וַיִּכְפֹּר" וְכוּ', כְּלוֹמֵר זֶה הַבְּרִית שֶׁל כְּהוֹנֵת עוֹלָם שֶׁאֲמַרְתִּי אֵינּוּ רוֹצֵה לומר שֶׁיְהִיָּה הוּא וְזָרְעוֹ פִּהֵן, מֵה שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה עַד עַכְשָׁיו שֶׁלֹּא נִתְּפָהוּ פְּנִיחָס עַד שֶׁהָרְגוּ לְזִמְרִי כְּנוֹדָע, אֲלֵא רְצוֹנוֹ לומר בְּרִית כְּהוֹנֵת עוֹלָם שֶׁיְהִיָּה הוּא וְזָרְעוֹ פְּהֵנִים גְּדוֹלִים, וְלִמָּה כָּה לְפִי "אֲשֶׁר קָנָא לְאַלְהֵיוּ", כְּלוֹמֵר שֶׁבְּקִצְפוֹ הוּא אֵת הַקָּצָף שֶׁהָיָה לוֹ לְהַקִּיב"ה לְקִצּוֹף כְּדִכְתִּיב "וַיִּכְרַת ה' ", הוֹעִיל לְבָנִים לְהִיּוֹת תַּלְמִידֵי חֶכְמִים וְלֹא יְהִיָּה בְּכָלֵל עַר וְעוֹנָה וְכוּ', וְלִכֵּן אִף בְּנָיו יְהִיוּ פְּהֵנִים וְתַלְמִידֵי חֶכְמִים.

Therefore, measure-for-measure, he was given a covenant of priesthood for all time, that the High Priest would forever be a descendant of Pinchas. In any case, he would also be a Torah scholar, as it is written, “For the lips of a priest guard knowledge, and rulings are sought from his mouth, for he is a messenger of the L-rd of Hosts.”⁸ Because of this, He repeated, “because he was zealous for his G-d, thus making expiation for the Israelites,” as if to say, this covenant of priesthood for all time that I mentioned doesn’t necessarily mean that he and his offspring will be common priests. This was not even the case until now, for Pinchas did not attain the priesthood until he had killed Zimri, as is known. That is, the priesthood was given to Aaron and his sons who were anointed with him, and to their offspring who were born after that time. But Pinchas had been born before them, and had not been anointed with Aaron. Thus, he did not become a priest until he killed Zimri.⁹

Rather, His intent was to say that the covenant of priesthood for all time will be that he and his descendants will be High Priests. Why is this so? “Because he was zealous for his G-d,” as it is said that by his displaying anger, that the Holy One, Blessed be He should display anger, as it is written, “May the L-rd cut off from a man who does this one who calls and one who answers,” since his sons will be Torah scholars and won’t be in the category of one who calls and initiates conversation among the Torah scholars, nor one who answers among the students. Therefore, even his sons will be priests and Torah scholars.

וְעוֹד דְּאָמְרִינוּ בְּפֶרֶק קַמָּא דִּיּוֹמָא וּמַעְבִּירִין לְפָנָיו פְּרִים אֵלִים וּכְבָּשִׁים, וְתַנָּא דִּידֵן אַמַּאי לֹא תַנִּי שְׁעִירִים? כִּיּוֹן דְּעַל חֲטָא אָתוּ וְחִלְשָׁא דְעַמְתִּיה, אִי הָכִי, פְּרִים נְמִי עַל חֲטָא הוּא דְאָתוּ! וְחִלְשָׁא דְעַמְתִּיה פֵּר כִּיּוֹן דְּעִלְגִי וְעַל אָחִיו הַפְּהֵנִים הוּא דְאָתוּ אִי אִיכָּא אִינִישׁ דְאִית בֵּיה מִלְתָּא, מִידַע נְדַע בֵּיה וּמִהֲדַר לִיה בְּתַשׁוּבָה. בְּכִלְהוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, לֹא נִדַע ע"כ.

Also, it is said in the first chapter of tractate Yoma:

On Yom Kippur eve [in the] morning, [the Elders] stand him at the eastern gate [of the courtyard] and pass before him bulls and rams and sheep so that he

⁷ Shmuel de Uçeda, Midrash Shmuel on Avot, 1:18.

⁸ Malachi 2:7.

⁹ Rashi on Num. 25:13; Zevachim 101b.

will be familiar [with the animals] and be accustomed to the service [as these were the animals sacrificed on Yom Kippur].

...

[A different Tanna] taught [in the Tosefta]: **Even goats** [were brought before him. The Gemara asks:] **And the Tanna of our** [Mishnah], **what is the reason that he did not teach that goats** [were among the animals that passed before the High Priest?] **Since** [goats] **come** [as atonement] **for sins**, [passing them before the High Priest will evoke transgressions and he will] **become distraught**.

If so, a bull [should not be passed before him], **as it too comes** [to atone] **for sin**. [The Gemara answers that there is a difference in the case of] **a bull, since** [it is to atone] **for his** [sins] **and for** [the sins] **of his brethren the priests that it comes; among his brethren the priests, if there is a person who has a** [sinful] **matter**, [the High Priest] **would know** [about it] **and** [lead] **him back to** [the path of righteousness] **through repentance**. [Therefore, passing a bull before the High Priest will not render him distraught, as it will merely remind him of his responsibility toward his priestly brethren. On the other hand], **with regard to the entire Jewish people, he does not know** [of their sinful matters and is unable to facilitate their repentance. Passing goats before the High Priest will evoke their sins as well as his inability to correct the situation, leaving him distraught.]

- Yoma 18a

ואם כן דרף הפהג גדול להחזיר הפהגים בתשובה, וכשנתן לו הפהגה "תחת אשר קנא לאלהיו" על פרתה צריף לומר שהיא הפהגה גדולה, שעדיין יכול לאחוז במידתו להיות תמיד מקנא, דאילו פהג הדיוט אין לו כח להחזיר שאר הפהגים בתשובה, ועוד "ניכפר על-בני ישראל" שעקר הכפרה שהיא בעבודת יום הכיפורים אינה כפרה אלא בכהן גדול.

If so, the path of the High Priest is to bring the priests back in repentance, and when the priesthood is given to him “because he was zealous for his G-d,” you must necessarily say that this was the High Priesthood, that he can still grasp his measure of always being zealous. That is, if he were a common priest, he would not have the power to bring the other priests back in repentance. Also, Scripture said, “thus making expiation for the Israelites,” that the main atonement, which is in the Yom Kippur service, is not legitimate unless conducted by a High Priest.

אי נמי בדרף אחרת דאיתא בגלוקוט סוף פרשת בקל, "וכפר על-בני ישראל" אינו אומר אלא "ניכפר", שעד עכשיו לא זו אלא עומד ומכפר עד שיחיו המתים עכ"ל. ולפי דרף זה יש לומר שקפל הכתוב "תחת אשר קנא" וכו' "ניכפר" וכו' בלומר זה הכרית של כהונת עולם שנתתי לפנחס הוא דוקא כשיעמוד ויכפר כמו שעשה עתה "אשר קנא לאלהיו".

Alternatively, in a different way of interpretation, it is brought in the Yalkut Shimoni at the end of parashat Balak, remez 771, “It is not written ‘to atone for the children of Israel,’ but ‘and he will atone for the children of Israel.’ Until now he only stands and atones until the

revival of the dead.” I.e., instead of simply standing and praying for forgiveness, do something for the sake of atonement! **According to this way of understanding, it can be said that the Scripture repeated “because he was zealous for his G-d, thus making expiation for the Israelites,” as if to say this is the covenant of eternal priesthood that I gave to Pinchas, him especially, when he will stand up and atone as he did now “when he was zealous for his G-d.”** I.e., the High Priest should strive to bring people to atonement, or should strike out against evildoers.

וְכַפֵּל נָמִי "תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר קָנֵא", דְּאִיתָא בְּכָלֵי יְקָר בְּשֵׁם הַמְּדַרְשׁ עַל פְּסוּק "כִּי־מִכְבְּדֵי אֲכַבְדּוּ" שְׁמִתְחַלְלָה מִשׁוּם מַעֲשֵׂה דְשִׁיטִים גִּיתְנָה הַכְּהוּנָה גְדוּלָה לְאֶלְעָזָר וְנִרְעוּ דֵּהִינּוּ פְּנָחָס. וּבִימֵי פִלְגָשׁ בַּגְּבֻעָה פָּקְרוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרַב מִצּוֹת. וּמִי גָרַם לָהֶם? פְּנָחָס, שְׁהֵי לֹו לַעֲכָב וְלִילָף מַעִיר לַעִיר לְהוֹכִיחֵם. וְאִזּוּ נִיטְלָה מִמֶּנּוּ כְּהוּנָה גְדוּלָה וְנִתְּנָה לְזֶרְעוֹ שֶׁל אִיתְמָר דֵּהִינּוּ בֵּית־עֲלִי, וּכְשֶׁנִּבְנְהָ הַבַּיִת גָּרַשׁ שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת אֲבִיתָר שְׁהֵי מִזְרַע אִיתְמָר וּקְרַב אֶת צְדוֹק שְׁהֵי מִזְרַעוֹ שֶׁל פְּנָחָס וְעֵי"שׁ.

[Scripture] also repeated “because he was zealous for his G-d,” as is brought in the *Keli Yekar* in the name of the Midrash on the verse, “For I honor those who honor Me, but those who spurn Me shall be dishonored,”¹⁰ that initially, because of the incident at Shittim, where Pinchas killed Zimri, that the High Priesthood was given to Aaron’s son Elazar and his offspring, that is, to Pinchas. But in the days of the Concubine of Gibeah,¹¹ Israel had renounced most of the commandments, and who caused this? Pinchas, for he should have prevented this by going from city to city to reprove them. Then, the High Priesthood was removed from him and given to the offspring of Aaron’s youngest son Itamar, which was the House of Eli. When the Temple was built, Solomon sent away Eli’s great-great-grandson Abiathar, who was a descendant of Itamar, and brought Zadok, who was a descendent of Pinchas, to serve as High Priest.¹²

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¹⁰ I Sam. 2:30.

¹¹ Judges chapters 19–21 relate that a Levite’s concubine was upset with him and fled to her father’s house. He retrieved her, and while journeying home, stayed in Gibeah with a visiting Ephraimite. Local Benjamites demanded the surrender of the Levite man, stating they intended to sodomize him. He instead sent out his concubine, and she was assaulted and died. This led to a war between the other tribes and the tribe of Benjamin.

¹² This is not the more famous *Keli Yekar* commentary on Torah, authored by Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz (Lublin 1602), but rather the commentary on Prophets by Samuel ben Abraham Laniado (Venice 1603).