

Zera Shimshon

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

Essay 3. The shame of Zur

Chapter 25 describes that the Israelite men were consorting with Moabite women, who then invited the men to the sacrifices to the Moabite god. The men partook of these sacrifices and worshipped the Moabite god! In one especially brazen incident, an Israelite man, Zimri, brought a prominent Midianite woman, Cozbi, to the Israelite camp, consorting with her and causing a plague that left 24,000 Israelites dead. Pinchas, acting as a zealot when everyone else was too shocked to act, killed Zimri and Cozbi, stopping the plague. G-d told the Israelites to treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them.

"ראש אמות" פירש רש"י וילפי שנהג ביזיון בעצמו להפקיר בתו, מנאו שלישי. קשה, אם לפי האמת הוא ראש על כלם, מה איכפת אם הפתוב מנאו שלישי, דבשלקמא אם היה הפתוב מספר דהמדיינים הורידוהו מגדולתו ניקא. אבל השתא שעדיין הוא ראש לכלם במדין, מהו הגרעון שהפתוב מנאו שלישי, אדרבא אין האמת פו, שאינו שלישי אלא ראשון.

“The name of the Midianite woman who was killed was Cozbi, daughter of *Zur*; he was **the head of the people** of an ancestral house in Midian” (Num. 25:15).

After the battle, described in Numbers 31, Scripture notes: “Along with their other victims, they slew the kings of Midian: Evi, and Rekem, and *Zur*, and Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian . . .” (Num. 31:8).

Rashi explained on Num. 25:15: “[*Zur*] was one of the five kings of Midian: ‘Evi, and Rekem, and *Zur*, etc.’ (Num. 31:8). He, however, was the most important of all of them, as it is said, ‘the head of the people,’ but **because he made himself despicable by abandoning his daughter** [i.e., allowing her to use her body to seduce an Israelite to idolatry],¹ **it enumerates him** [not first in Num. 31:8, but only] **third.**” **A question is: If he was truly head of all of them, what difference does it make if Scripture enumerates him third in Num. 31:8? Granted, if Scripture had said that the Midianites brought him down from his greatness, we would be content with him being listed third. But we don’t have such a statement, and now that he is still head of all in Midian, what is [his] deficit that the Scripture numbers him third? To the contrary, the truth is not so, for he is not third, but first, as stated in Num. 25:15.**

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¹ Not only did he encourage the other Midianite women to engage in sexual immorality for the purpose of seducing the Israelites to idolatry, but he even allowed his own daughter, a princess of Midian, to behave in this manner.

וַיֵּשׁ לֹאמֹר שְׁבִיבִיל שְׁלִשָּׁה דְבָרִים אֲדָם זֹכֶה לְמַלְכוּת, אוּ מִפְּנֵי שְׂבָא מִמְּשַׁפַּחַת מְלָכִים הִרְאוּהָ לְכָבוֹד גָּדוֹל, אוּ מִפְּנֵי הַחֲכָמָה שֵׁישׁ בּוֹ נִשְׂרָאוּי לְמִלּוּךְ, אוּ מִפְּנֵי גֹדֵל עֹשֶׁרוֹ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁהָיָה אֶחָשׁוּרֹשׁ דְּאַמְרֵינּוּ בְּפָרָק קַמָּא דְמַגִּילָה דִּינֵהִיב מְמוֹנָא יִתִּירָא וְכוּ'. וּמִי שֶׁנֶּעְשָׂה רֹאשׁ בְּשִׁבִיל הַמָּמוֹן, וְלֹא בְּשִׁבִיל כְּבוֹד הַמְּשַׁפָּחָה, וְלֹא בְּשִׁבִיל הַחֲכָמָה, הוּא הַדְּבָר הַיּוֹתֵר גְּרוּעַ מִכָּל הַשְּׁלִשָּׁה שְׂאֵמְרָנוּ. וּמִתְחַלְלָה הָיָה רֹאשׁ אוֹמֵרוֹת בְּכָל הַשְּׁלִשָּׁה דְבָרִים, שֶׁהָיָה לוֹ כְּבוֹד הַמְּשַׁפָּחָה, כְּבוֹד הַחֲכָמָה, וְכָבוֹד הָעֹשֶׁר, וְכִשְׁהִפְקִיר בְּתוֹ, אֲבָד הַכְּבוֹד וְהַחֲכָמָה, וְנִשְׁאַר רֹאשׁ בְּשִׁבִיל הַטַּעַם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי הַגְּרוּעַ, דִּהְיִינוּ הָעֹשֶׁר, וְלִרְמוֹז עַל זֶה, מְנַאֵז שְׁלִישֵׁי דְנֻקָּא.

It can be said that because of three things, a man merits the kingship: either because he comes from a family of kings that is worthy of great honor, or because the wisdom he has that he is worthy to rule, or because of the greatness of his wealth. This is as we find with Ahasuerus, as it says in the first chapter of tractate Megillah (11a), that “some say that to his disgrace, that he was not fit to be king, but he gave large amounts of money [to influence people], and [in that way] rose [to the throne].” One who becomes head because of money and not because of the honor of the family and not because of the wisdom, this is the most inferior of all the three [things] that we have said. From the beginning, [Zur] was head of the people because of all three things, in that he had the honor of family, the honor of wisdom, and the honor of wealth, but when he abandoned his daughter, i.e., allowing her to use her body to seduce an Israelite to idolatry, he lost the honor and the wisdom, and he remained head of his ancestral house only because of the third inferior reason, which is the wealth, and to hint at this, he is specifically enumerated third in Num. 31:8.

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