

Good Shabbos, everyone.

I want to thank the sponsors of today's drasha:

- Shirley and Howard Blumenfeld, in memory of Shirley's father, Yitzchak Goldman, Yitzchak ben Shmuel, whose yahrtzeit is 24 Tamuz.
- Idie and Isser Goldsmith, in memory of Idie's brother, Mr. Yankel Roth, Yaakov ben Yechezkel HaLevi, whose first yahrzeit is this Sunday, 20 Tammuz.
- Pinchas and Toby Fader, in memory of Bernard Yaffe, their beloved "Uncle" whose yahrzeit is 23 Tammuz.
- Cheryl Mitnick and Ron Mitnick, in memory of their brother, Steven J. Mitnick, Shlomo Yaakov ben Chaim Aryeh, whose yahrzeit is (today) 19 Tammuz.
- Selma K. Yaffe, in memory of her husband, Bernard Yaffe, whose yahrzeit is 23 Tammuz; in memory of her daughter, Lois Yaffe; and in memory of Philip Marcus.

Thank you all for your dedication to the Shul. May all the neshamos have an aliyah.

I would like to begin with encouraging news. Baruch Hashem, our members continue to follow the shul's strict safety rules, which helps mitigate the risks of hosting indoor minyanim during this pandemic. However, the less encouraging news is that while the number of Covid19 positive tests in Maryland continues to drop, in the Baltimore Orthodox community there have been many positive cases over the past week. This is very concerning news, as we have seen other states with surges after reopening. We must continue to be vigilant in taking **all** safety precautions—wearing masks when indoors or attending outdoor gatherings, keeping social distancing, and practicing personal hygiene. May Hakadosh Baruch Hu continue to keep us safe and soon bring an end to this terrible mageifa...amen.

On Thursday, we began the period of mourning for the Beis Hamikdash, *called bein hametzarim*—the Three Weeks from Shiva Asar B'Tamuz through Tisha B'Av. It is a period of mourning and introspection. What specific attitude are we trying to cultivate during this time period? We always read Parshas Pinchas at the beginning of the Three Weeks. Is there a connection?

Let us quickly review the episode of Pinchas. This story really began with Bilaam. He decided that, after two unsuccessful attempts to curse the Jewish people, he would more likely bring about their downfall by facilitating sins with Moavite women. As **Rashi** writes, על ידי עצת בלעם כדאיתא בהלך: לזנות אל בנות מואב -

That sin, in turn, led to another grave sin--worshipping their idol, "baal pe'or." Again, eventually this led to yet another grave sin—the public mocking of Hashem's laws and the Jewish religion.

(ו) והנה איש מבני ישראל בא ויקרב בא ויקרב אל אחיו את המדינית לעיני משה ולעיני כל עדת בני ישראל . . .

And behold, a man from among the Children of Israel [Zimri] came and brought the Midianite woman [Kasbi] before the eyes of Moshe and the eyes of the whole community of the children of Israel.

Maaseh avos siman labanim...This episode foreshadowed what would happen in Jewish history, in our long travels in the galus; antisemitism, assimilation, and Jews throwing off the yoke of tradition in public and damaging ways, something we have seen time and time again.

Back to our story--Judaism was in crisis. Many saw what was happening but did not respond.

Unlike the others, Pinchas saw what was happening and did respond. He got involved in stopping the sacrilege by fighting the attack on religion head on.

(ז) וירא פינחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן ויקם מתוך העדה ויקח רמח בידו: (ח) ויבא אחר איש ישראל אל הקבה וידקר את שניהם את איש ישראל ואת האשה אל קבתה ותעצר המגפה מעל בני ישראל:

Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon HaKohen, saw it, arose from the midst of the community and took a spear in his hand. He followed the man of Israel (the perpetrator) into the alcove and pierced both of them—

the man of Israel and the woman through her belly—and the plague was stopped from among the children of Israel.

The epilogue: Hashem affirms that Pinchas acted correctly and courageously... and that his brave act restored order and Godliness to the world.

(יא) פינחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן השיב את חמתי מעל בני ישראל בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם ולא כליתי את בני ישראל בקנאתי: (יב) **לכן אמר** הנני נתן לו את בריתי שלום: (יג) והיתה לו ולזרעו אחריו ברית כהנת עולם תחת אשר קנא לאלהיו ויכפר על בני ישראל: *Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon Hakohen, has turned My anger away from the Children of Israel by bringing my rights to bear (taking my revenge) in their midst, so that I did not destroy the Children of Israel, by bringing my rights to bear (taking my revenge). Therefore, proclaim it: Behold I give him my covenant: Peace. And to him and to his descendants after him will be a covenant of everlasting priesthood, because he brought the rights of God and effected atonement for the children of Israel.*

It is important to take note of the Torah's very clear message: acts of zealotry are only a last resort. Indeed, they need Hashem's affirmation to know it is the proper way to act. We live in a society where zealotry—religious and otherwise—is the first reaction for many—and that is extremely dangerous. And rather than practice zealotry and promote zealotry, the lesson is that we need to stand up to the fanaticism wherever it rears its ugly head...

But this story leaves us with an important question. The 13th century Rabbeinu Asher ben Yechiel, known as the **Ro"sh**, asks simply in his commentary: Did everyone else not see what Pinchas saw?

פירוש הרא"ש על התורה במדבר פרשת בלק פרק כה פסוק ז
(ז) וירא פנחס בן אלעזר. וכולם לא ראו והלא לעיני משה ולעיני כל עדת בני ישראל?

Everything happened in plain view. The Pasuk even testifies that others—Moshe, community leaders, common men and women—also saw what was happening. Was Pinchas the only one to see what was going on? Why did no one else react to the rebellious and immoral behavior that mocked everything they stood for?

I believe a possible answer is that while, on the surface, they all saw the same thing, the depth of **what you see**, and therefore **how you react**, depends largely on your perception--**how you see things**.

As the **Mesilas Yesharim** writes, we must make sure that we control the way we see things, that our eyes follow the direction of our hearts, that our intellect and value system inform the way we see things...

ספר מסילת ישרים פרק יא

אמנם, באמת, כל זה נמשך ממה שתחת היות הלב מושל בעינים שלא יניח להיות נעים להם את של אחרים, העינים מושכים את הלב לבקש היתרים על מה שנראה להם יפה ונחמד, על כן אמר איוב, שהוא לא כן עשה ולא הלך לבו אחר עיניו, על כן לא דבק בכפיו מאום.¹

Rav Boruch Sorotzkin writes that Chazal hint to this when they write the הלכה ונוצר the הלכה that Pinchas saw and remembered the halacha. He saw things with clarity and judgment, informed by his values.

¹ This is hinted to in the mitzvas of tzitzis. As **Rashi** teaches us, tzitzis literally means—to see...

רש"י במדבר פרשת שלח פרק טו פסוק לח דבר אחר ציצית על שם וראיתם אותו, כמו (שה"ש ב, ט) מציץ מן החרקים:

We are told that seeing the tzitzis, and internalizing what they represent, will help with our vision...

במדבר פרק טו (לט) והיה לכם לציצית וראיתם אתו וזכרתם את קלימצות קנן ועשייתם אתם ולא תתורו אחר לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם אשר אתם זנים אחריהם:

They shall be for you as "tzitzis," look at them and remember the commandments of Hashem, so that you do not follow your heart and your eyes in your lustful urge.

How does it work? Looking at the tzitzis, the Torah tells us will assist us in not being swayed by our hearts and eyes. We would think the order should be reversed—we see something with our eyes—and **then** we are swayed in our hearts. But the **Yalkut Shimoni** teaches that the order is precise; our eyes are influenced by our hearts. Our values, our life experiences, our character, our ambition, and our worldview color the way we view things--how we interpret things—and, therefore, **what we see**.

ילקוט שמעוני תורה פרשת שלח רמז תשנ

...הא מה ת"ל ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם מגיד שהעינים הולכים אחר הלב,

ובזה יובנו דברי חז"ל על פנחס - וירא פנחס: ראה מעשה ונזכר הלכה, היינו שלא הי' זאת מתוך כעס ואי שליטה על רגשיו, רק ראה המעשה וחשב חשבון הדבר איך צריכים מצר ההלכה להגיב על דבר כזה.

In his words: "One whose life centers around Hashem sees things with a different pair of eyes, with the eyes of the Torah."

כי אדם שכל תכליתו ' בחיים הוא התורה מביט על החיים בעינים אחרים, הוא אינו רואה סתם מעש אלא מביט ע"ז בעיני התורה - בעיני תכליתו בחיים - ואז רואה בכל מעשה את ההלכה ואז יודע איך להגיב על זה.

Returning to the story of Zimri and Kasbi, everyone noticed what was happening with the Jewish people and the Moavite women, **but only Pinchas really saw—only he had clear vision about what was happening and, therefore, what needed to be done in response.**

במדבר פרק כה

(ז) **וירא פינחס** בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן ויקם מתוך העדה ויקח רמח בידו:

And because he saw things more clearly than everyone else, his vision led to proper action, and he saved the Jewish people from annihilation.

When we see something uncomfortable, something we would rather not see, it is natural to look away. It is sometimes difficult to see things for what they really are. That can sometimes lead us to live in denial or to accept things the way they are—just throwing up our hands in frustration. Pinchas was different. He looked carefully at the situation and understood how terrible it was. He understood that it didn't need to be that way. Who taught Pinchas how to see things clearly?

The **Gemara in Sanhedrin 82a** says that Pinchas remembered **Moshe Rabbeinu's** actions when he descended from Har Sinai. It is interesting that the verb used with Pinchas וירא is used in that context regarding Moshe Rabbeinu. When Moshe **saw** the Jews worshipping the egel, he did not look away; he did not accept this as a new reality. Instead, he reacted—he broke the luchos.

שמות פרק לב

(ט) ויהי כאשר קרב אל המחנה וירא את העגל ומחלת ויחר אף משה וישלך מידיו את הלחת וישבר אתם תחת ההר:

This was in character for the great Moshe Rabbeinu. This same strength was demonstrated in two earlier acts (and the word וירא features prominently in all Moshe's actions). First, when Moshe **saw** the pain of the Jewish people in Mitzrayim and **saw** a Jew being beaten by an Egyptian, he did not look away; he did not just accept the reality, even though most Jews had already resigned themselves to it. Instead, he reacted and struck the Egyptian.

שמות פרק ב (יא) ויהי בימים ההם ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלתם וירא איש מצרי מכה איש עברי מאחיו:

(יב) ויפן כה וכה וירא כי אין איש ויך את המצרי ויטמנהו בחול:

The second incident was at the burning bush, where the Torah records that Moshe saw the burning bush and turned again to see why it burned but was not consumed.

שמות פרק ג

(ב) וירא מלאך ה' אליו בלבת אש מתוך הסנה וירא והנה הסנה בער באש והסנה איננו אכל:

(ג) ויאמר משה אסרה נא ואראה את המראה הגדל הזה מדוע לא יבער הסנה:

(ד) וירא ה' כי סר לראות ויקרא אליו אלהים מתוך הסנה ויאמר משה ויאמר הנני:

The **Seforno** writes: **להתבונן בדבר**: וירא ה' כי סר לראות. that Hashem saw that Moshe turned back to look at the bush—to think about it-- using his "heart" to inform his eyes. Moshe did not turn away from something that didn't seem right—he did not pretend the uncomfortable or challenging did not exist. He looked again, with depth and concern, and asked himself--how can I make things right? Then he took action.

In these incidents, what impressed Hashem about Moshe and led Him to choose Moshe to lead the Jewish people was his vision. He did not accept what he saw as reality—he used his vision to consider how things should be and could be, and he took the necessary steps to make that happen.

The lesson from Pinchas for us, especially during these Three Weeks, *bein hametzarim*, is to try to develop a perspective of how things are currently and how they **could** be with a restored Beis Hamikdash...to internalize what we are lacking in our current reality, to create a vision, which leads to action.

We are in *galus*, but do we see clearly the current state of affairs? Do we internalize that the growing anti-semitism, the increasing assimilation, and the constant threats to Israel's very existence are not the way things should be? *על ראש שמחתי את אעלה את ירושלים* Do we think of Jerusalem? Do we yearn for Mashiach?

Rav Yaakov Galinsky points out that the Shulchan Aruch begins (Siman 1) that every God-fearing person should be distressed and pained over the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.

אורח חיים סי' א' סעיף ג': ראוי לכל ירא שמים שיהא מיצר ודואג על חורבן בית המקדש.

It is appropriate for all those with fear of heaven to worry and be distressed over the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.

Rav Galinsky asks: Why is this an obligation **only** on those with a fear of Heaven? He answers that we are **all** obligated, but without fear of Heaven, we cannot really be distressed and worried about the lack of the Beis Hamikdash. Without a spiritual vision and perspective, everything seems normal. We just accept our reality. It takes a certain clarity of thought, a purity of vision, to understand how much we lack in our reality. It takes vision and clarity to see things properly, in a way that develops within us fear of Heaven.

As the Pasuk says (Shemos 14:31): *'וירא ישראל את היד הגדולה אשר עשה ה' במצרים ויראו האם את ה'*

The period of *bein hametzarim* is a time to look clearly at what it means to be in *galus*, what it means to be a persecuted nation. Reminders abound. This week, on his personal Instagram account, the three-time NFL Pro-Bowl selection DeSean Jackson posted a vicious antisemitic quote, which he attributed to Hitler. After many protested, his “apology” was even more jarring. He insisted that the posts were taken “the wrong way.” There is no right way to take hateful antisemitic statements lauding Adolf Hitler. Do we see our situation?

We must develop the ability to look at our current reality, our exile, to see things for what they really are. And if we want to change our reality, **we must truly yearn for salvation and commit to make the changes necessary to bring it about.** Each of us must do our part.

Immediately after Pinchas's act of zealotry stopped the plague, Hashem told Moshe to count the entire nation. What is the connection? I heard an intriguing explanation. When Bnei Yisrael saw Pinchas's display of vision and leadership, they may have felt absolved of any obligation to take an active role in community matters. After all, with a powerful individual like Pinchas at the helm, who needs others to get involved? In order to dispel this notion, this act of great courage is immediately followed by Hashem's command to count the individuals in Bnei Yisrael, teaching that each member of the Jewish people is necessary and significant. Many times in life, we may feel overshadowed by those who are in the spotlight, actively engaged in *klal* activities. We may not bother trying to participate, feeling that in comparison, our contributions are insignificant. However, the message we can take from this census is that each and every one of us is a fundamental part of *Klal Yisrael*. We each have something important to contribute. But this takes vision.

At this time in our history, very troubling and difficult challenges face us. Read the headlines—the coronavirus pandemic, the great political unrest throughout the world and our country. This is a time to open up our eyes. It is time to look around like Pinchas and understand what's happening and not settle for the state of the world the way it is. It is time to look inward, and to find the strength to make a difference. We need to begin with our *avodas Hashem*, specifically starting with the way we treat each other. This *galus* is the result of *sinas chinam*, and as **Rav Kook** taught, we must repair it with *ahavas chinam*. We need to appreciate our own ability to change things in a very practical sense. We can effect change by doing our part to bring *kedusha* and kindness into our world. May Hashem protect us and keep us healthy, ...and restore the world to a state of clarity of vision...with a restored Beis Hamikdash *bimhera vityamenu...*amen.