

A PARASHA THOUGHT

Yetzer Hara

RABBI YITZCHAK ZE'EV HEIGH

Parshas Pinchas begins in the middle of a big commotion. Bilam had guided Moav and Midyan in a sinful war tactic. The immorality of the daughters of Midyan and Moav was successful in causing a great plague to break out, in which twenty-four thousand Jews perished.

How is it possible that the Jews fell to the trap? These Jews were great people, Hashem's divine presence dwelled in their midst, they had Moshe *Rabbeinu* as a leader, and they lived off of great miracles. Surrounding them were the clouds of glory, they ate the miraculous *mann* every day, and they drank water from the well of Miriam! How could such great people be sucked into such a lowly trap so quickly?

The *Netziv* clarifies this idea with careful examination of the *Sifri*. Directly prior to discussing the story of the daughters of Midyan, the *Sifri* discusses the war with Sichon and Og. With the Jews triumphing over these giants, they started taking all of the stores; however, there was so much wealth that they started not to care about the less valuable pillage. They degraded it and only wanted the gold and silver. In *Avos D'Rav Nosson* (23:2) it teaches "*Al tehi baz lechol dvar*"—do not degrade anything. They should not have been so haughty about their new-found wealth. Instead of plundering destructively, they should have calmly saved it for the orphans and widows who could have used it. Instead, they were pulled to another wrongdoing. They started to tear up the clothing and animals. This violated the negative commandments of *bal taschis* (destroying things) and *tzar balei chaim* (suffering of living creatures). One sin dragged along another until they were vulnerable enough to fall into the trap of immorality.

Then the *Sifri* describes the spiritual ambush that was set up for them. It did not happen all at once. The Moavim set up a fair selling all types of fragrant spices. Older women sold spices in the outer stalls and younger women sold them in the inner stalls. When a Jew came to buy something, a young woman would call him inside and offer him a bargain. They knew this would not be enough to ensnare the Jews. So they continued this for three days straight. Only on the third day they knew the Jews were comfortable enough to fall into their hands. From this episode we see how the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) can slowly pull us away from Hashem.

The *Midrash Rus Zuta* (1:20) records the story of a pious man (*chosid*) who was very poor. Eliyahu *Hanavi* disguised himself as an Arab and came and lent him a silver coin. The *chosid* invested the money successfully and became wealthy. However, eventually his wealth led him astray from serving Hashem. Unfortunately, he left his pious ways and turned towards his wealth. Hashem complained to Eliyahu "I had a pious man in my world and you held him back." So Eliyahu re-disguised himself as the Arab and retrieved the loan. Soon after, the man's business fell apart. Eliyahu came back to him and told him. "If you swear to me that you will return to your piety, I will give you back wealth." The man agreed to not allow to pull him away from Hashem and he became wealthy again.

One *aveirah* (sin) leads to the next. Even when we want to do what is best, the *yetzer hara* starts with one small test. Once we are in his web, he can lead us anywhere.

May Hashem give us the guidance to travel the trails of spiritual excellence! 🙏

THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH
RABBI YITZCHOK PREIS

Q. Why are the identities of the villains killed by Pinchas kept anonymous in last week's *parasha* and only revealed this week? If anything, in last week's *parasha*, the story was unfolding and as the key characters they would typically be named. In this week's *parasha* we're only learning how Hashem responded to the Pinchas and their identities seem tangential.

A. The Torah doesn't share the identity of wrongdoers unless there is what be gained by doing so. The *Ohr Hachayim Hakodosh* explains our "need to know" in this instance – so that we can better appreciate why Pinchas is being rewarded. In this context, learning that Pinchas had been facing a powerful tribal leader and a Midianite princess, with all of the potential hazardous ramifications that could follow, significantly increases the heroism displayed in his act of zealotry.

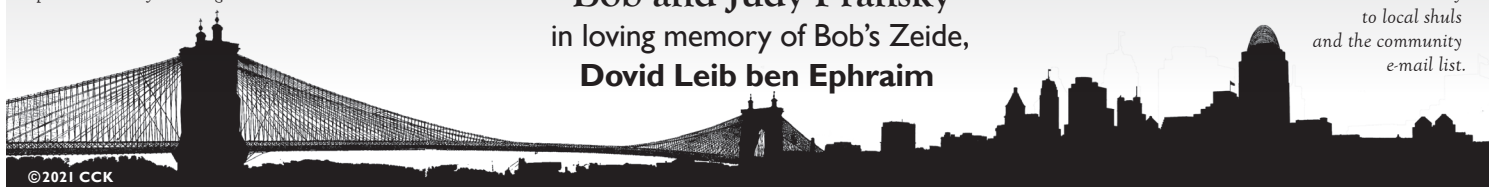
Rav Zalman Sorotzkin shares another perspective. As a rule, *sheim reshoim yirkav*, (the identity of the wicked should rot), and it is appropriate to avoid highlighting wicked people. As such the Torah does not draw attention to their identities while the narrative was

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

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simply one of evil behavior. But once Pinchas executed them and triggered a reversal from the national spiritual decline, it turns out that Zimri and Cozbi were factors in generating *teshuvah* and *Kiddush Hashem*. Although this was not their intention, they did serve as catalysts for something positive, and in this regard they are identified. 🕯

Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week's)? Ask! Submit a question on the parasha by Monday at noon by emailing parasha@cincynkollel.org. Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.



A SHINING EXAMPLE

RABBI EPHRAIM SKOLNIK

Moshe and Lisa Gelbstein were getting ready to go to PTA for their 4th grade son Zevy. In Zevy's school there was a tradition that all the boys would leave a note on their desks to their parents along with their books and school things. As they were getting ready to leave the house, Zevy turned to his parents and said, "Mommy, when you get to school and go into my classroom you are going to see the note on my desk is only addressed to Daddy and does not have your name on it. The letter is really for you as well, but I didn't want to put your name on it because the boy sitting next to me recently lost his mother and was only addressing his letter to his father. I thought that if he would see my letter addressed to mom and dad it would remind him of his loss and he would feel bad, so I only addressed the letter to Daddy but it is really for both of you." Thinking about the person next to us. The essence of every Jew. 🕯

TEFILLA TIDBITS

RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUK

Last week we began discussing *al Naharos Bavel*, the chapter of *Tehillim* dealing with the exile from Yerushalayim. The first *possuk* relates that the Jewish people sat on the banks of the Babylonian River and wept as they remembered Zion. The *Malbim* points out the greatness of these Jews who wept. They were now captives being taken by a ruthless king to a foreign country. They lost their homes, livelihood, and members of their family. They were exiled from the land flowing with milk and honey. Yet, they cried when they reflected upon Zion, when they remembered the *Beis Hamikdash* and the constant connection to Hashem which it provided. They cried not over financial loss, but because they were now spiritually distanced from Hashem.

In our times, many centuries removed from the *Beis Hamikdash*, it is difficult to feel that the lack of *Beis Hamikdash* detracts from our service of Hashem. However, it is important to realize that without the *Beis Hamikdash*, we are lacking the ability to connect to Hashem in the fullest way possible and for this we are mourning. 🕯

THE TRAGIC ARREST & IMPRISONMENT OF MAHARAM OF ROTHENBERG (PART III)

RABBI NOSSON WIGGINS

During Maharam's seven years in prison, one of his disciples, Rabbi Shimshon ben Tzadok, was permitted to visit, and during these visits, Rabbi Shimshon recorded many of his master's customs and rulings which later became the basis of his *Sefer Tashbeitz*. Maharam also penned many *responsa* from the Ensisheim castle in France and to some degree still remained the leader of the generation despite his confinement.

Chida, in his *Shem Ha-Gedolim*, citing *Maggid Meisharim* of Rabbi Yosef Karo, notes that while in prison, Maharam soared to lofty spiritual heights. Thus, although Maharam desired to move to Eretz Yisrael to live the rest of his life on its holy soil, the Divine plan was for him to climb the ladder of spirituality while in a prison cell in France.

After seven years in prison, Maharam passed away on the 19th of Iyar, 1293. However, even after Maharam's death, the greedy Rudolph I wouldn't release Maharam's body until the ransom was paid. For reasons unknown, no one came forth with the money and Maharam's body remained confined for fourteen years.

Finally, a wealthy German Jew by the name of Rabbi Alexander Ziskind Wimpfen raised the money and redeemed Maharam's body in 1307. Maharam's body was transported to his hometown, Worms, where he was finally laid to rest in the Old Jewish Cemetery. Rabbi Alexander Ziskind Wimpfen made one request, that upon his death he would merit to be buried next to Maharam. Several years later, Rabbi Alexander's wish was fulfilled as he was buried next to the illustrious Maharam of Rothenberg. 🕯