

33 – Pinchas – Outline

Pinchas Summary

- God’s covenant of peace and perpetual priesthood with Pinchas
 - one interpretation: it’s possible he was not a priest, even though he was a grandson of Aaron, if the inheritance of the priesthood begins only after Aaron and his sons are inaugurated, Pinchas wouldn’t be a priest because he was born before the inauguration; therefore, God is here making him a priest
 - another interpretation: Pinchas line becomes the most prominent line of priests, the line from which the High Priest is selected for about seven centuries from the time of King David until the intertestamental period
- the second census
 - needed because the Land will be apportioned according to tribal populations
 - the overall number is similar to the first census, 40 years earlier
 - 1,820 fewer fighting men in the second census
 - Grant: 1,820 is 26 (name of God) X 70 (a number of completion)
 - Grant: God’s name occurs 1,820 times in the Torah
 - the tribe of Simeon has lost a great many people, 37,100 people
 - Zimri was from the tribe of Simeon; it’s possible that many Simeonites were lost in the plague of Peor
 - Simeon and Levi are a pair; Jacob curses their anger: “Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. Let my soul come not into their council; O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger they killed men, and in their willfulness they hamstrung oxen” (Genesis 49:5-6)
 - in this section of the calendar where we are particularly being empowered to work on our emotions, we read about how the Simeonites, who carry this violent anger, are diminished in Israel; they will go on to be circumscribed by the tribe of Judah in the Land
 - Levi is also limited in Israel in a way – not given a cohesive tribal land area, tasked with pouring their energies into the work of the Temple, the Torah, and service
- laws of inheritance
 - here clarified due to the brave request of the Daughters of Zelophechad that their father’s inheritance not be lost simply because he had no male children
- passage of leadership to Joshua
 - upon hearing of his impending death, Moses, being a great leader, asks God to appoint a man to take over leadership so that they not be left like a flock without a shepherd
- the daily offerings and additional festive offerings offered in the Temple
 - note that clarifying the mo’edim is among the first things God is doing in this final phase of preparing Israel to live the fullness of life in the Land of Promise

- the mo'edim are vital to the fullness of life, life in the Land, the life of connection to God, family, and community

Placing Pinchas

- The Three Weeks: Death and New Life
 - “Pinchas” = “mouth of a serpent” or “mouth of brass”
 - “mouth of a serpent” = death
 - we have been focusing on death in this season partly because we are heading into the Three Weeks, a period of intense mourning
 - starts with the fast of the 17th of Tammuz, which remembers, among other things, the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem by the Romans, leading to the destruction of the second Temple 3 weeks later (9th of Av)
 - ends with the fast of the 9th of Av, which remembers the destruction of both temples on this day, as well as the evil report of the spies and Jewish expulsions from England, France, and Spain in the 1200's, 1300's, and 1400's
 - as if God turns His back on us: “Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or His ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness” (Isaiah 59:1-3)
 - more than remembering specific events, it's a time to mourn the brokenness of the whole world
 - in the Jewish mind, this brokenness of the world is connected to the destruction of the Temple, which is a barometer for the world; when we are on the path of peace and healing, the Temple will be rebuilt
 - R'Trugman writes, “Each person needs to hear not only the personal challenge being issued but also, and even more importantly, each person must nurture the ability to scream aicha [‘How could this have happened?’ and ‘How can we bear this?'] from his or her innermost soul, in response to the brokenness of the world around us” (<https://thetrugmans.com/how-could-it-have-come-to-pass/>)
 - the balance
 - Zechariah 8:19 tells us these fast days will be turned into days of rejoicing
 - R'Schneerson says that because the hour is late in world history and because these days will be turned to gladness, we should be optimistic during the 3 Weeks
 - Pinchas – read during the 3 Weeks – begins not with the death he brought but with the covenant God makes with him; the story is split between two portions so that this portion can begin with this positivity
 - all new life requires death; we need to be able to look at the serpent as not just the bringer of death but also the doorway of new life
- On the Proper Use of Emotions
 - Pinchas prominently features the idea of “zeal”
 - zeal: a great energy powered especially by the emotions

- “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in My zealousness” (Numbers 25:11).
- What does the story of Pinchas teach us about zeal and managing our emotions in general?
 - God designed our emotions to be helps for us
 - they are a powerful tool; they are not to be despised; those with powerful emotions have a great gift, if they can be controlled
 - the emotions help us to process our experiences
 - Pinchas is rewarded greatly as a result of his zeal
 - our emotions can provide a vast amount of energy for action, adrenaline; however, before we act, our emotions need to be examined so that we can properly channel that energy
 - zeal is like charging a battery
 - because our emotions only partly derive from our head, we are not fully conscious of them or what is at the root of them
 - we must learn to be suspicious of our emotional reactions, and we must pause to examine the root to see if it is kosher
 - what are we looking for?
 - self-interest, protection of the ego, protection of our reputation
 - whether our emotions are rooted in a lie, like the insidious lie that if you don’t act now, a chain of events will happen that will end with us ultimately not being provided for, out of the street, even dead – the fear of death
 - emotions rooted in pure self-interest or lies should be rejected, which short-circuits the battery, allowing the energy to seep away harmlessly
 - emotions rooted in jealousy for God and His reputation and His agenda in the world (like protecting the vulnerable) should be acted upon
 - we must also check our intended action against Torah truth and whether we think our spiritual authority would approve
 - the Sages say that Pinchas got permission to do what he did, as the text says that he got up from the congregation to get his spear – perhaps the congregation of leaders
 - all the checking acts to put our mind in control of our emotions
 - the Brit Chadashah reading shows us a time when Yeshua was also filled with zeal – the cleansing of the Temple

Yeshua

- Pinchas as Eliyahu
 - we need to be able to see each story in the Torah and each symbol in the world from multiple angles
 - the Sages have connected Pinchas with Elijah the Prophet, the forerunner of the Messiah
 - we might ask, “Where are they getting that from?” but in the end, the insight leads straight to the Messiah
 - last week we saw in Zimri and Cozbi a picture of the Messiah on the cross, speared through
 - Zimri acted sinfully, but what man meant for evil, God used for good, as a picture of salvation, in the same way that God can use a “blood-covered” cow (the Red Heifer) and a bronze snake as pictures of salvation
 - thus, Pinchas is connected here to a picture of Yeshua on the cross
 - but there is another picture of Yeshua that follows the Pinchas story – the raising up of Yehoshua to take Moses’ place
 - thus, the Jewish understanding that Pinchas is like Elijah leads us right to the name of the Messiah, Yehoshua, the origin of “Yeshua”
 - How does Pinchas open the way for Messiah?
 - his act is rewarded by God, showing that what the people were doing was sinful; this recognition of sin is the first step to repentance
 - the Spirit and John the Baptist, in the same way, lay the foundation for the coming of the Messiah by leading us to repentance
- Two Flocks Brought Together in Yeshua
 - the sacrifices for each mo’ed follow a pattern: 1 or 2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs, 1 goat
 - 2 bulls in the spring; 1 bull in the fall
 - Sukkot blows up the pattern
 - 70 bulls and double the sheep (2 rams, 14 lambs)
 - a reading:
 - Sukkot is about the whole family coming together inside the sukkah, like the four species that are said to represent four types of people are all held together and waved together as one
 - 70 bulls for 70 nations, each coming to Jerusalem to dedicate themselves to God as living sacrifices
 - double the sheep indicates 2 flocks coming together – the Jewish and Gentile flocks
 - what does all of this have to do with Yeshua?
 - Sukkot is the likely time of Yeshua’s birth, the Incarnation
 - He “tabernacled” among us, a Sukkot reference
 - He is the Jewish Messiah that the Gentiles have embraced; in Him and Him alone will the two flocks be brought together

33 – Pinchas – Transcript (not exact)

Hello and welcome to Beth Tikkun and the Spiritual Seasons series. In this group of teachings, we are exploring the weekly Torah portions through the lens of the overall pattern of salvation we see in the yearly calendar. This week we are in portion Pinchas, or Phinehas, Numbers 25:10 through the end of chapter 29.

Let's start with a summary of the portion with a few beginning thoughts. The parsha begins with the conclusion of the story of Pinchas. Last week the narrative cut off rather abruptly after Pinchas dramatically takes matters into his hands by taking hold of a spear and thrusting it through an Israelite man and a Midianite princess who were apparently involved in performing an idolatrous act of fertility worship at the Tabernacle. Last week we saw that Pinchas' action led God to stop a plague that was devastating Israel, a plague that had already killed 24,000. So we were given this indication that what Pinchas did was good and life-giving, but God confirms that it was the right thing to do in the beginning of this portion. God says to Moses that Pinchas turned back his wrath by acting zealously on His behalf. And the text continues, "...Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace, and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel" (Numbers 25:12-13).

There are a couple of ways to understand what God is doing for Pinchas here. The rabbis say that Pinchas actually was not a priest, even though he was a grandson of Aaron, and that God is making him a priest here. The idea is that the inheritance of the priesthood only begins with those who are born AFTER Aaron and his sons were elevated to the priesthood. Pinchas was born before this important moment of elevation, so he barely missed out, coming about as close as a person could to the priesthood without receiving it. Remember that this consecration process for Aaron and his sons lasted a whole week, during which they couldn't leave the Tabernacle at all, as if they were being unmade and re-formed in the Tabernacle, becoming a different kind of human being. So this would actually support what the rabbis are saying here. Aaron and his sons were CHANGED when they were consecrated for the priesthood, and that change could be passed on to their descendants, but Pinchas was already born, so he was a product of the old Aaron and the old Eliezer, who was his father. But here, God makes Pinchas a priest, and he would have likely had to go through the inauguration process like Aaron and his father Eliezer did.

Another idea is that God is blessing Pinchas' line to not only remain strongly attached to the priesthood but also be the primary priestly line from which the High Priests will be selected. We know that this is, indeed, what happened in history. At the time of King David, about five centuries after Moses and Aaron, a priest named "Zadok" aligns himself with David and stays faithfully by his side. King David raises him to the position of High Priest, and for something like seven centuries thereafter, the high priests would come from the line of Zadok. Well, Zadok was descended from guess who? Pinchas. Zadok was the 9th generation descendant of Pinchas. We are given the genealogy in Ezra. Ezra, himself, was a descendant of Zadok.

Well, after this special covenant God makes with Pinchas, God directs Israel to take a second census. The dying in the wilderness is over. This second census is needed because the Land will eventually be apportioned partly based on the population of each tribe. The overall number of the census is very similar to the first census 40 years earlier. In the second census, there are 1,820 fewer fighting-age men. Grant points out that the number 1,820 is the number of God's name, which is 26, multiplied by 70, which is a number of perfection. He also says that the name of God occurs 1,820 times in the Torah. It would seem that God is indicating that it is He Who brings death, and He does so very carefully and exactly. It is God Who carefully controlled what was happening in the wilderness all those 40 years. Those who needed to go, He took, including everyone from that first generation except Joshua and Caleb. He did not take one soul more than was necessary.

We learn a bit more from this second census. Though the overall number was similar to the first census, a couple of the tribes radically changed in number over the 40 years. The biggest occurred in the tribe of Simeon, which lost a staggering 37,100 people, becoming about 63% smaller. Since this census was taken right after the deaths of the 24,000 from the plague at Peor, the plague that God stops because of Pinchas, it's possible that many who died in the plague were from the tribe of Simeon. And we are specifically told that the Israelite man that Pinchas killed was a prince of the tribe of Simeon.

Simeon and Levi are a pair. It's the two of them that murder the city of Shechem after the rape of their sister Dinah. Jacob's final words to these two are found in Genesis 49: "Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. Let my soul come not into their council; O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger they killed men, and in their willfulness they hamstrung oxen" (Genesis 49:5-6). So there was a problem with anger, here. Let's take note of that because in the calendar we are focusing on how God is particularly empowering us in this section of the year to bring correction in the area of our emotions. Here, we see that this tribe of Simeon that carried this energy of violent anger is diminished in Israel. On the other hand, God helped Levi to channel that bloodthirstiness through the occupation of the priesthood, with its sacrificial system. Simeon, on the other hand, simply had to be hemmed in, eventually receiving an inheritance that was surrounded by Judah. God is gracious, though. Since Simeon's territory was surrounded by Judah, this would mean that Simeon survived when other tribes did not because the territory of Judah eventually becomes the Jewish heartland and the center of Jewish life and culture while most of the other tribes were mixing with local peoples and were eventually carried away and lost.

In truth, though, Levi is also limited in a way within the body of Israel. Levi is dispersed throughout the nation since they don't inherit a cohesive tribal land area. And the occupation God gives them forces their energies into the Torah and into service for the rest of Israel. Simeon is contained in a physical way, and Levi is contained in a more spiritual way.

Well, after the census, we have the laws of land inheritance. The clarification here for how land is to be passed on comes about because the 5 daughters of Zelophechad step up and ask that their father's inheritance not be lost simply because he had no sons. God agrees with them, and in the process, we get a full list of commandments clarifying how land is to be passed on.

Moving on in the text, God tells Moses that he is to ascend Mt. Abarim and there see the Land. After he does, he will be “gathered to his people.” We see the greatness of Moses here. His response to God is not to ask for some kind of leniency. Instead, he is a good shepherd to the end. His response is, “Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd” (Numbers 27:16-18). God acquiesces and instructs Moses to lay his hand on Joshua in the sight of Eleazar the high priest and the people and transfer some of his authority to him. So, God tells Moses that he is about to die, and Moses’ first thought is to make a provision for his flock.

It must have been a moving scene. Joshua loved Moses. He would have known that what Moses was doing as he laid his hands on him were among his final acts on earth. And what a weight those old hands carried! How exhausting to bear the burden of the people for a generation. But Moses had been faithful. Joshua must have been wondering how he would measure up. Moses had set a high bar. Maybe it was some comfort to Joshua that the hands that carried the staff of God now rested on him as Moses invested him with some of his authority. In truth, though, God had already laid the foundation for Joshua’s leadership by filling Joshua with the Spirit. When God tells Moses to lay his hand on Joshua in the sight of the people, God says that Joshua has spirit in him, already. God is always moving pieces into place far beforehand. He had been preparing Joshua for years for the task that was ahead of him. God’s perspective is infinitely higher than ours. We just need to trust Him. Trust that whatever task He has for you now, big or small, He has been preparing you for a long time to do it.

Lastly in our portion, God goes through the mo’edim once again, this time giving the sacrificial offerings for each mo’ed, including the daily offerings, the Sabbath and New Moon offerings, and all the offerings for the annual appointed times. We’ll come back to these offerings later, but for now let’s just note that clarifying the mo’edim is among the first things God is doing in this final phase of preparing Israel to live the fullness of life in the Land of Promise. These mo’edim keep popping up in the text in some of the most critical places. Truly, God’s appointed times are absolutely critical to the mature life of living in the Land of Promise, the good life, the life of connection to God and family and community.

Placing Pinchas

Let’s do a little thinking now to place Pinchas in the flow of the calendar. Let’s start where we usually do, the name of the portion. Strong’s suggests the name “mouth of a serpent” for “Pinchas,” and BDB says “mouth of brass.” The words for “serpent” and “brass” are similar in Hebrew. Well, we haven’t had to go far to find a connection to the topic that we have been focusing on in the calendar recently, the topic of death, or death and the first glimmers of new life. What is the mouth of the serpent most evocative of? Death.

The Three Weeks: Death and New Life

We have been focused on death partly because we are now entering the Three Weeks. In fact, today as I’m recording is the 17th of Tammuz, the dawn-to-dusk fast that begins the Three Weeks. It’s a time of mourning, mourning for the great losses that the Jewish people have experienced

during this part of the calendar from the very beginning of the nation and particularly mourning the loss of both the Temples on the 9th of Av. Today, the 17th of Tammuz especially remembers the breaching of Jerusalem's walls by the Romans. The result three weeks later was the destruction of the second Temple on the 9th of Av. The first Temple was also destroyed on the 9th of Av. Other events that happened during this three week period include Moses breaking the first set of tablets, the evil report of the spies, and Jewish expulsions from England, France, and Spain, in the 1200's, 1300's, and 1400's. It's hard to look at these days over history and not think of a passage like Isaiah 59, where we read about God hiding His face, turning away from us: "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or His ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness" (Isaiah 59:1-3).

More than commemorating these specific events, though, the Three Weeks is a time to mourn the brokenness of the WHOLE world. In a certain way, in the Jewish mind, that brokenness of the world is symbolized by the destruction of the Temple. When the world is squarely on the path to healing and peace, this will be reflected by the rebuilding of the Temple. The status of the Temple is like a barometer for the world, then. As long as the Temple mount remains desolate, or worse, as long as that golden dome exists there, squatting on that holy ground and sheltering bloody hatred of the Jewish people in their own Land, the Jewish people know that this long, bitter Roman exile continues. And so in mourning the loss of the Temples, the deeper groaning of the heart is for ALL the pain and agony and loss that humanity has experienced throughout time. In reference to the Three Weeks, R'Trugman writes, "Each person needs to hear not only the personal challenge being issued but also, and even more importantly, each person must nurture the ability to scream aicha ['How could this have happened?' and 'How can we bear this?'] from his or her innermost soul, in response to the brokenness of the world around us" (<https://thetrugmans.com/how-could-it-have-come-to-pass/>).

But in the interest of balancing all this sadness with the idea of nascent life, life just beginning to form again in a dark and hidden place, let's look at the Three Weeks from another angle now. Certainly we need to mourn at this time. I think our world would be much better off if we all stopped at least once a year to mourn together the sadnesses of humanity. But our portion here, Pinchas, which is always read during the Three Weeks, does not begin in sadness, though the atmosphere of death is here. Instead, though, the focus at the beginning of parsha Pinchas is God reaching out to a man to make a covenant of peace. It's a portion that begins in the new life that comes AFTER the death that Pinchas brings. God has not made many covenants with mankind. This is a truly momentous event, the covenant of peace with Pinchas.

We know that eventually these days of mourning will be turned into days of rejoicing. We are told this specifically regarding the Three Weeks in Zechariah 8:19. R'Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, emphasized that because the hour is late in world history, and because these days of mourning will eventually be changed, we should lean toward being optimistic on the fast days. And I think this is why the story of Pinchas is split in the strange way that it is. These few verses describing God's covenant with Pinchas could have easily been attached to the previous portion. Why split this story

in the middle? Dividing it in half means that this portion that is read during the Three Weeks begins not with the second census but with this optimistic, uplifting covenant with God, the life that follows death and is the whole point of death.

R' Raskin tells the story of how the Rebbe went to visit one of the children's camps in the Catskills (https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/1902423/jewish/Pinchas-and-the-Covenant-of-Peace.htm 20m). Before his visit, the counselors who ran the arts and crafts room were concerned about how the art room was covered in paint and glitter and glue, as well-used art rooms tend to be. So before his visit, they painted on the ceiling the words "zecher l'korban," meaning "a remembrance of the destruction of the Temple." When the Rebbe saw it, he said, "Zecher l'korban? Zecher l'michdash." The Rebbe's change means "remembrance of the REBUILDING of the Temple." The process of building also requires making a mess first. He chose to see the messiness of the art room not as the destruction of the Temple but as the rebuilding of the Temple.

All new life first requires death. So we need to be able to look at the serpent as not just the bringer of death, as was so clearly pictured with the bronze serpent in last week's portion. Not all death is bad. When we experience death to the old life for the sake of receiving a new and better life from God, that kind of death is good. The death that Pinchas, the mouth of the serpent, brings, is good. This is the positive side of the snake. In the end, God created the serpent, too. What we have gained from his existence and the temporary death we experience on earth is the chance at a whole new life with God. The next time you see a snake, don't just think of negativity and death. Think about new life, too. In the calendar, we will come soon enough to the point that we will be able to see the new life that is forming now in a mostly hidden way.

So, this mixture of death and new life is our first connection between the calendar and parsha Pinchas.

On Proper Use of the Emotions

I want to make a second connection now to the calendar and this portion. We have been touching now and then on this idea that this section of the calendar is a favorable one for working on our emotions. This portion of Pinchas prominently features the idea of "zeal." What is zeal? We might describe it as a great energy powered especially by the emotions. Pinchas' act to protect God and Israel is powered by zeal. And God says this specifically in 25:11: "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in My zealously" (Numbers 25:11). The Hebrew word translated "zeal" here, "qinah," can also be translated "jealous" or "jealousy," and Grant explains that it's really a combination of both these ideas, both "zealous" and "jealous."

What does the story of Pinchas teach us about zeal and managing our emotions in general? Let me bring out a few quick points. First, God designed our emotions to be helps for us, so they are good and are meant to aid us in doing what is good and right. And so if the emotions are good, then A STRONG EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION CAN BE A WONDERFUL GIFT if it's properly controlled, as we see here in the story of Pinchas. Some of us, especially women, are sometimes accused of being overly

emotional. But let's remember that the emotions are valuable tools given to humanity for processing our experiences, so having strong emotions can be a very positive trait, as long as the emotions are not ultimately running the show. If I were given the choice of either having to wrestle with very deeply-felt emotions or having almost no emotions at all, I would choose the first. Here in this story, Pinchas manages to act from his strong emotions in such a way that God stops a plague and extends a covenant to him. Emotions are a powerful gift, and we should seek to cultivate the gift of the emotions.

Secondly, we can see here that our emotions can provide a vast amount of ENERGY FOR ACTION, adrenaline for action, even; however, before we act, our emotions need to be examined so that we can properly channel that adrenaline. We can't just feel and act. We have to pause and give the mind a chance to examine; only after we have done that do we act, or maybe we choose to NOT act.

Zeal is like charging up a battery, charging it with energy. Because our emotions only partly derive from our head, we are not fully conscious of them and what their basis is, what their root is, and so they can't always be trusted. We must learn to be suspicious of our emotional reactions. In order to determine whether the energy suddenly filling the battery is kosher, we need to pause to examine the root of the emotions before we act.

Well, what are we looking for? One key here is to check for self-interest, interests related to protecting our ego, for example. Grant and R'Schneerson, when discussing this portion, both talk about how Pinchas is not criticized for what he did because his act had nothing of himself in it; it was all for the sake of God, for God's reputation, for the protection of God's agenda in the world, for the protection of his people. If we check and find that our emotional reaction is coming from a place of self-interest – merely wanting to protect our reputation, for example – we should be suspicious that our emotions are not well-founded.

Besides self-interest, we should check whether or not the emotions we're experiencing are rooted in an outright lie. One of the most insidious lies that can subconsciously manipulate our emotions is the lie that if you don't act right now, a chain of events will start that end in you ultimately not be provided for. You will end up on the street, or you will even die. This is a lie. God takes care of His sheep. This is a lie that comes from such a deeper place within us, though, that it evades detection until we get into the habit of probing for it and exposing it.

Emotions rooted in a lot of self-interest or rooted in lies should be rejected, denied, shut down. This will short circuit the battery and let the energy out of the system without causing harm. If, on the other hand, we find that our emotions are coming from a place of jealousy for God and God's Name and reputation in the world or the desire to protect God's agenda in the world, or if our emotions are coming from a place of protecting the vulnerable, for example, and if our emotions align with truth, we can be pretty sure that we should act on those emotions with that fullness of energy. Rather than allowing that energy to fade away, we can let that adrenaline power what we do. In that case, our emotions are working as they should be, and God has given an energy for accomplishing something powerful for good in the world.

It should almost go without saying that along with pausing even briefly to examine the root of our emotions before we act, we also need to check that what is in our head to do is in line with Torah and with our spiritual authority. Would those in authority over us approve of what we have in mind to do? It's not clear here in the text, but the Sages say that Pinchas did, in fact, check with the authorities before acting. They bring this out of the phrasing of Numbers 25:7, which reads, "When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and LEFT THE CONGREGATION and took a spear in his hand..." It's possible that Pinchas was sitting with the congregation of the leaders before he acted and that he acted with their permission.

What all this checking of our emotions amounts to is the mind taking full control over the situation so that we act from a place of truth and wisdom; and this is what Pinchas did. Yeshua, too, is filled with zeal for His Father's house and acts in a powerful and righteous way to clean out the money changers and others doing business there. We read about that in the Brit Chadashah reading for this portion.

Yeshua

Pinchas as Eliyahu

Speaking of Yeshua, let's finish now with a couple more connections to our Rabbi, Yeshua. First though, let's go back to last week for a minute. In the last teaching, I suggested that one way to read the Pinchas story is that Zimri and Cosbi, together, actually picture the Messiah's death. "Zimri," the Israelite man, means "my song," and the Midianite woman is "Cozbi," which means "my lie." Yeshua is God's song through Whom He creates everything. On the cross, Yeshua put on the lie of this world with its sin and death, and in that state, He was pierced through, like the two were in this story.

One might object to this reading by saying that Zimri acted sinfully. How could Zimri be a picture of Yeshua? The answer is that God's intentions are always at work at a higher level than man's intentions. What man meant for evil, God used for good. God can use even man's sin, and especially man's sin, to speak out the message of salvation. Zimri and Cosbi had free will and paid the price for their sin. And yet, our all-powerful God used them to speak out the message of salvation.

We need to be able to read any given narrative and any symbol in the Word on multiple levels. A snake is an instrument of death. Yet, a snake lifted on a pole represents the Messiah. A red heifer has the appearance of being covered in the uncleanness of blood, yet it also represents the Messiah. Zimri falls with all of his being into sin. Yet by God's design, He too comes to represent the Messiah.

But there's more going on. Let's pick up this story again in our hands and rotate it in the light to see another facet, another level of meaning. Interestingly, the Sages say that Pinchas is Elijah, the forerunner of the Messiah. R'Raskin states this idea like this: "As the Gemara says: 'Pinchas zeh Eliyahu,' 'Pinchas is Elijah the Prophet.'" R'Raskin continues, "Elijah the Prophet and Pinchas were two of the same...And Elijah, Eliyahu haNavi, is the one that will come and tell the world 'Moshai'ch is coming; get ready!' So Pinchas is directly connected with Eliyahu haNavi." End quote.

(https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/2637349/jewish/Parshah-Mnemonics-Pinchas.htm 14 min).

Now, connecting Pinchas to the prophet Elijah is another one of these Jewish insights that at first kind of makes you shake your head and say, “Where are they getting that from?” In the end, though, once again we see in the text an amazing connection that leads us straight to Yeshua. First, we see this picture of Yeshua as Zimri and Cozbi. But there’s another picture of Yeshua that follows this story with Pinchas. In this same Torah portion, not long after the Pinchas story, we see Joshua being elevated to the leadership of Israel. Pinchas, then, is the forerunner of the Joshua, Yehoshua. And of course we hear in the name “Yeshoshua” the origin of the name “Yeshua.” Again, we can sort of sneer at the Jewish scholarship that links Pinchas to Elijah, but here such an insight leads us to the very name of the Messiah!

How does Pinchas open the way for the Messiah? He does what the Holy Spirit does. He does what John the Baptist does. With his mouth of brass, he brings Israel to repentance. When Pinchas acted and God stopped the plague, that was clear evidence that what the people were doing was, indeed, sinful. I don’t think that many in Israel clearly understood that what they were doing was sinful. Pinchas becomes the vessel for making that clear, and that clarity is what is needed to reverse course, to repent.

Two Flocks Brought Together in Yeshua

For our last connection here, I’d like to just bring out one point from the long final section of the portion where we are given the sacrifices for each of the appointed times. Generally, the special sacrifices for each mo’ed follow a similar pattern of bulls, rams, lambs and goats: 1 or 2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs, and 1 goat. This is the pattern...until we get to Sukkot. Sukkot blows everything out of the water in numbers. The bulls offered on a mo’ed are either 1 or 2, but at Sukkot, the total is 70! We also find that for Sukkot the rams and lambs are doubled, 2 rams every day and 14 lambs every day instead of 1 ram and 7 lambs.

It’s hard to say exactly what’s going on here with this explosion on Sukkot, including a doubling of the sheep, both the rams and the male lambs. But let me give a possible reading that you are unlikely to hear coming from our Jewish brothers. Everything about Sukkot is the coming together of the WHOLE family inside the sukkah. In the four species, the rabbis have seen four different kinds of people who are bound together as one and waved as one before the Lord.

We see the picture of the whole world coming together in the seventy bulls. Even the rabbis link these bulls to the 70 nations, a bull for each nation. It’s like each nation is coming to Jerusalem and laying down its life as a living sacrifice to God at Sukkot. Each nation is here being dedicated to God.

And with the doubling of the sheep, these flock animals, we have an allusion to the coming together of the two big branches of those who follow God, those who have submitted to God as their Shepherd, the Jewish flock on the one hand, and on the other the Gentile flock composed of those Gentiles who have genuinely devoted their lives to God. Perhaps the doubling of the sheep at Sukkot means that the two flocks are gathered together for this mo’ed, and both are presented and dedicated to God as living sacrifices.

What does this have to do with Yeshua, though? Sukkot is the likely time of Yeshua's incarnation, the arrival of the Messiah, at least at His first coming. John says that He "tabernacled" among us, and that word "tabernacled" is an allusion to the Feast of Tabernacles, another name for Sukkot. Yeshua is the Jewish Messiah that many among the Gentiles have whole-heartedly embraced, and in doing so, have found life. In Him and Him alone will the two flocks be brought together.

Well, that's all for today. Thank you for listening. I will post an outline in the comments below the video. May God bless us with a great zeal for Him that empowers us to do mighty things in this world for Him and His kingdom. But may He also bless us with the ability and patience to bring that zeal under the strict scrutiny of the mind so that our emotions do not lead us into error. May God help us in this period of the Three Weeks to deeply experience the pain and suffering of this world and of the Jewish people, in particular, but to also long for the rebuilding of world. May we live to experience the full uniting of the Good Shepherd's two flocks. And may we rise up to be the people He has made us to be. Shalom.