



July 27, 2024



Parshas Pinchos

21st of Tammuz 5784

History's Most Mysterious Man

One of the most mysterious characters in all of Tanach is Pinchos. A seemingly unassuming grandchild of Aharon who goes ahead and kills Zimri, the leader of the tribe of Shimon, amidst his adulterous act, is then rewarded with the enigmatic "*Brisi shalom*". Rabbeinu Bachya writes that this means **SheLo Mes** – he won't die. Pinchos then goes on to become the navi Eliyahu, who has surfaced and resurfaced throughout the duration of Jewish history and continues to do so until this very day.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (82b) states that when the Torah writes the word "*Vayechaper*" (and he will atone) in Hashem's blessing of Pinchos (25, 13), it does so in the future tense, hinting to the fact that he will forever be the savior of the Jewish people. Pinchos/Eliyahu seems to show up wherever we go. At every bris we set up a chair for him. At every Pesach seder we set up a cup of wine for him. We even go so far as to open the door, waiting for him to come in. Every time we bentch, we ask Hashem to send Eliyahu to bring us good news. Every motzei Shabbos we sing songs, hoping for his arrival. The list can go on.

What was it about Pinchos that gave him this honor? What did Pinchos do that granted him the status of being the perpetual savior of the Jewish people in every generation? Just because he got up and killed Zimri? We find many people in the Torah who did great things, and yet they were not rewarded with anything remotely as dramatic as Pinchos. Leaders like Shlomo and Dovid and Shmuel and Moshe and Aharon and Amram and Yosef and Yehuda. What was it about Pinchos that made him so remarkably great that he became the immortal savior of Jews for eternity?

Mr. Mystique

There is virtually no way to explain the mystique of Pinchos without entering, albeit cautiously, into the dazzling world of Torah secrets – the proverbial “deep end” of the Torah’s endless ocean. There we learn that Pinchos was not as unassuming as we may have thought. We learn that his spiritual energy was bottled up inside of him for years. In fact, it actually preceded him. The Ramah MiPano (an Italian sage who lived in Fano, Italy, 1548-1620), in his work Gilgulei Neshamos (pg. 155), and the Arizal in his work Sefer Geulah, both write that Pinchos was actually the gilgul, the spiritual reincarnation, of our forefather Yitzchok. The Zohar on parshas Pinchos points out that the gematrios, numerical values, of the word Pinchos and the word Yitzchok are the exact same – 208 – which tells us that they share the same soul. The Tikunei Zohar says that the name Yitzchok can be read ketz chai, alluding to the fact that the soul of Yitzchok will be around until the end of days.

The question is, why? Why, of all the many holy souls that graced our planet, is the one that lives in this world forever, the soul of Yitzchok?

They explain that Yitzchok was the ultimate paradigm of spiritual strength. Our forefather Yitzchok willingly allowed himself to be bound up and burnt as an offering to Hashem. Yitzchok would live his life completely enveloped in God and his Torah. He was about as perfect as a human mortal could be. Perfect, except one flaw: he was blind. On that fateful day when Yitzchok was lying on the altar, waiting for his father Avraham to sacrifice him, the angels in heaven were looking down and crying. Those tears dropped into Yitzchok’s eyes and blinded him. Hence, writes the Arizal, there was one function he could not accomplish, and that was observing the world around him and lending kindness to it. Spiritual perceptiveness. He could not detect spiritual or physical detriments around him to the same extent a man with sight could, and this he needed to achieve before his soul’s mission could be complete.

Since Yitzchok’s soul was left a tad incomplete when it left this world, it needed to re-enter this world and achieve what it previously could not. It needed someone upon whom it could rely to accomplish its mission. Pinchos was the perfect candidate. He was the grandson of Aharon – the Kohen Gadol and spiritual leader, the ultimate lover of peace and practical “guidance counselor” to the Jews at the time. Conversely, he was also the grandson of Yisro, a former idol-worshiper and priest who converted to Judaism. Pinchos saw it all. Absorbed it all. The love of Jews. The titanic spiritual abilities of any man. The ludicrousness of idol worship. Additionally, Pinchos demonstrated great humility when all his

cousins became kohanim and he didn't. Unlike his cousin Korach, who made a big fuss about his status, Pinchos accepted his with a smile. He did what needed to be done. Koheles Rabba (3, 15) says that never in his life did Pinchos sin.

When the Torah focuses the story on Pinchos, it begins with the words (25, 7) "*Vayar*" – he saw – which means, explains the Rama MiPano, that he saw what Yitzchok could not. He picked up where Yitzchok left off. When Pinchos was standing there in the back of the crowd watching as Zimri, the leader of Shevet Shimon, committed his horrible act with a Midianite woman, a wave of spiritual energy suffused him. The soul of Yitzchok discovered its perfect landing spot and Pinchos realized that he was on this earth to defend the Jewish people. Presently, that meant to rid the world of sinners. So, he grabbed a spear and killed them both in one blow.

Right then and there, Hashem took a look at Pinchos and took a look at Yitzchok sitting high up in heaven, and He knew. This is what the Jewish people need. A man with the spiritual dynamite of Yitzchok and the love, perception and determination of Pinchos rolled into one. He was perfect. He would be the one to ride the train alongside the Jewish people down history's long tracks. He would be there to correct the wrongs, love the oppressed, steer the Jews when their path goes awry, and give them hope when all seems lost.

Hence, Pinchos became Eliyahu Hanavi. Eliyahu, who would defend and protect the Jewish people time and time again. He would weed out the sinners. He would inspire repentance. He would encourage the blind, poor and needy. He was the only person in the history of the world to have an openly chronicled story of going to Heaven alive. He lived in both worlds. Much like Yitzchok, who, at the time of his akeidah, went up to Heaven and came back down. Eliyahu, says the Alshich, went up to heaven specifically from the east bank of the Jordan River, for that is the precise location that Pinchos killed Zimri. They are one and the same.

Forever and Beyond

When it says in Moed Katan (26a) that Eliyahu is still alive, it means that Eliyahu and Pinchos, carrying the soul of Yitzchok, exist in this world in a literal sense. He is here watching, listening and nurturing. Showing up when we need it the most. Defending us and empowering us.

The very last navi to prophesize for us was the prophet Malachi. He was the last person to have received nevuah. The very last thing he heard Hashem say was the following (Malachi 3, 23): "*Hinei ... Sholei'ach Lachem*" – Behold,

I will send you Eliyahu before the end of days and he will restore peace within the land. Eliyahu will be the one to herald in Moshiach, for he has been with us throughout our journey.

That is why we mention Eliyahu on many different occasions. We give him a seat at a bris, we give him a seat at our Pesach table. We sing about him at weddings, mention his name while bentching and hear stories of people who are sure they've met him.

So indebted are we to his kindness and protection that we attach the words "*Zachur Latov*" – he is remembered for good – to his actual name. The goodness and blessing he gave and continues to give the Jewish people makes him so synonymous with goodness that we attach that title to his name. Eliyahu is referred to as Eliyahu Zachur Latov in more than sixty instances in Midrash and Gemara. Even the one time the phrase *Zachur Latov* is tagged onto someone else in Tanach (Charvona Zachur Latov, Talmud Yerushalmi 3, 7), the Ibn Ezra is quick to point out the Midrash in Esther Rabba, which says that Charvona (which is spelled differently than the first evil Charvona mentioned in the Megillah 1, 10) was in fact Eliyahu, saving the day yet again.

Rain or Shine

No person or book can possibly recount all the kindnesses and favors Eliyahu has contributed towards the Jewish people. His benevolence is incalculable. He is the one who taught our teachers Torah. Men such as Reb Beroka, Ben Chozei, Abuha, Minyamin, Reb Muri, Reb Pinchos, Reb Anan, Rabbeinu Hakadosh (Midrash Tanchuma Haazinu 8). He saved Rebbi from agonizing toothaches (Bereishis Rabba 33, 3). He appeared as a Roman soldier to save the life of Nachum Ish Gam Zu (Taanis, 21). He showed up as a horseman to save Reb Simi bar Ashi who was being attacked by a snake (Shabbos 109b). He disguised himself as an Arab to save a poor couple (Midrash Rus Zuta 1,20), and he dressed up as a woman to save Reb Meir from a band of barbaric Romans (Avodah Zara 18a). He was the man who informed Reb Shimon Bar Yochai of the Caesar's death, and he was the one who showed up to Reb Akiva's door and enabled him to go to yeshiva, facilitating his becoming one of the most important sages in the last 2000 years (Nedarim 50a). And these are just the instances we know about!

When Eliyahu is not traversing the world saving Jews in their times of peril, or teaching our teachers Torah, writes the sefer, Seder Olam 17, he sits and writes down each and every mitzvah every one of us performs, signs his name

on the bottom and puts it in a safe place, storing it for the day it will be read in Heaven. Aside from helping us in This World, he is the one ensuring our experience in the Next World will be the absolute fullest.

Of course, there were great men before Pinchos and great men after him, but few harbored as deep a love and as burning a desire to defend and help the Jewish people as did Yitzchok/Pinchos/Eliyahu. The Abarbanel (Malachim 2, 2, 12) writes that Moshe was on such a high level that upon his death he ascended directly to Gods throne in Heaven where he now sits beside. Not that he was rewarded with anything less than Pinchos. Not less, just different. Reb Yehuda Leib Kalisher adds that had Moshe not gone through the process of a “regular” death, the Jewish populace would have wrongly thought he was an angel and would have given up aspiring to be spiritually great, mistakenly thinking that spiritual greatness is reserved for angels and not mortal men. Pinchos on the other hand, posed no such threat.

Pinchos, with a burning desire to save the Jews threatened by a devastating plague that was brought about due to the adulterous acts they were performing, rose up and became the timeless defender of the Jewish people. He took the soul entrusted within him and showed up at the doorstep of Jews in distress for the duration of our history. With passion in his heart and a fire in his soul, he wants nothing more than to stand up for us when we are down, and lift us up when we lose hope. Be it physically, be it spiritually.

There is another intriguing reference to Eliyahu Hanavi. Anytime in the Gemara there is a question so piercing that none of the brilliant sages know the answer, the Gemara writes the word *teku*. The word *teku* is really an acronym for the words *Tishbi Yetaretz Kushios Viubayos*, meaning to say that Eliyahu (who came from the city of Tishbi) will one day tell us the answer. It may be later in our lives in the form of a mysterious sage, or at the end of times when Eliyahu ushers in Moshiach.

The Question Answerer

Why is Eliyahu the one to answer all our Torah questions, if Moshe was the one who handed us the Torah? Wouldn't Moshe be the best candidate to tell us the answers to our toughest questions? Would it not be apropos for the Gemara to write *meku*, as in *Moshe Yetaretz Kushos Viubayos*? Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev explains that Eliyahu is the most fitting to answer all our questions, for not only does he live comfortably in the Next World with access to the greatest reservoirs of Torah in existence, he has additionally been here on earth with us through thick and through thin. He understands us. He comprehends our issues and our struggles. He speaks our language. That is why he will be the

one to take all our questions and answer them, for he, more than anyone, knows us intimately. He is the champion of our grandparents and the champion of our parents. He is the champion of us. Us in 600. Us in 1433. Us in 1654. Us in 1822. Us yesterday. Us today.

Similarly, Pirkei D'Reb Eliezer (15) writes that when Eliyahu is not crisscrossing the world helping Jews in need, he is sitting at the very entrance of Heaven. When a person dies and the soul ascends to Heaven, the very first person to greet it is Eliyahu. He quickly reaches for the scroll in which he diligently recorded all of the good deeds that person did, and calls out to Hashem how special and unique that soul is. Declaring how deserving that soul is of fabulous reward, Eliyahu welcomes him into Heaven.

He is the first to welcome us into Heaven, for he is the one who is forever watching us here on earth. He is guiding us and prodding us and saving us at the very last second. What better person to serve as Heaven's doorman than he?

The Twin Towers Shteeble

On September 11, 2001, at 8:07 AM, 39 minutes before Al-Qaeda terrorists Mohammed Atta and Waleed al-Shehri flew American Airlines plane number 11 into the Twin Towers, a group of nine Jewish businessmen stood at a nearby shul waiting for a minyan. Normally there would have been more than enough people filling the minyan, but that morning over one hundred people were at the shloshim (one month anniversary) of Jews killed in a Grand Canyon helicopter crash. Utterly unaware of the tragedy that was about to take place, the men began losing patience. These were serious men, professionals, and all of them had to be at their desks in the World Trade Center well before 9 AM. At 8:11, 35 minutes before the horror began, the men were sitting in the shul impatiently tapping their watches.

"Let's just daven b'yechidus (privately)," one of them said. "I have a meeting soon."

"No," another replied, "let's wait just a few more minutes."

They waited some more. At 8:15, 31 minutes before the first plane burst through the first tower, one man got up and said, "Okay, I'm leaving. I'll just daven in my office." Just as he was about to pick up his tallis bag and walk out, they heard the door of the shul creak open.

An elderly man they'd never seen before walked into the shul, marched right up to the amud and declared, "I have yahrzeit and must daven."

The man about to leave sat back down in his seat. At 8:17, 29 minutes before the plane began its slaughter of thousands of people, the old man started davening. Unlike the other members of the minyan, he was in no rush. He had yahrzeit, and he was going to make it count. Excruciatingly slowly, the man carefully uttered the words. Wanting to leave but stuck there to ensure the quota of ten was complete, the other men stayed until the very last amen.

The very minute the old man finished saying kaddish at the end of davening, at exactly 8:46, the men picked up their belongings and ran outside, only to see a sight that remains seared into their minds forever: a plane crashing into the World Trade Center, setting the entire building aflame.

They stopped in their tracks. They looked up at the smoke. They looked up at the death. They looked up at the fire. They looked up to see hundreds of people jumping from the top floors of the buildings to their horrible deaths below. They looked up and realized that that could have been them. Had that minyan finished even two minutes earlier, they would have been dead.

They then realized that the seemingly ordinary old man, who just “happened” to show up at the shul, probably wasn’t so ordinary. They ran back in to see who he was but he was gone. Gone to help the next Jew from his plight. Gone to teach the next Torah scholar, gone to help the next young widow feed her children. The men looked at the empty shul and realized that if not for that mysterious old man, they would be a pile of ash. They went back outside and ran for their lives.

Each and every week for hundreds of years, Jews after making havdalah softly sing the song “*Eliyahu Hanavi*”. We look to the upcoming week and hope that Eliyahu will be there to guide us and inspire us. We sing, hoping that the soul of Yitzchok with the love and strength of Pinchos will be with us each day. But most of all, we sing the hope and the prayer that this will be the week where Eliyahu brings the news we’ve all been waiting for, the arrival of Moshiach.