

# ONEG!

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

## Rabbi Elchanan Shoff PARSHAS BALAK

### Birds!

**And Balak, son of Zippor, saw... (Num. 22:2).** The Zohar (cited by Rabbi Chaim Palagi in *Yisamach Chaim, Maareches Tzadi*) and the Arizal (cited by the Chida in *Chomas Anach* there) write that Zippor is another name for Yisro who is called a “pure bird” (bird in Hebrew is *Zippor*), because Balak was a descendant of Yisro. We also find that Yisro’s daughter was named Zipporah, which is related to the word *Zippor*.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 107a) relates that when speaking about his sin with Batsheva, King David<sup>2</sup> said “the Satan appeared to me like a bird” and that drew attention to the lady bathing on the roof. Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (*Ben Yehoyada* there) explains the significance of a bird in this context by pointing to a Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 1:32) that says that Moshe’s wife was named Zipporah because just as a kosher bird is used to purify a leper, so did Zipporah “purify” her entire family. Based on this, Rabbi Yosef Chaim explains that the presence of the Satan in the form of a “bird” in this story serves to allude to the fact that King David would later repent his sin and serve as a precedent for all *baalei teshuvah* to teach them they too can “purify” themselves from their sins.

### Grabbing Wisdom

**And he sent messenger to Bilaam, son of Beor... (Num. 22:5).** The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 22) teaches that there were two especially wise sages in the history of the world, one Jewish and one gentile. The Jewish one was Achitophel and the

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<sup>1</sup> However, my wife’s great-grandfather Rabbi Moshe Feinstein writes that the name Zipporah is not related to the word *zippor* (“bird”) but is rather derived from *tzofeh* (“seeing”). If that is true, we can point out to the wording of this verse in which Balak the son of Zippor *sees* which shows that he is associated with the power of *seeing*. Also, if we are to connect *Zippor* to Yisro, the latter is also associated with *seeing*, as Moshe tried to cajole him into saying by telling him “You will be for us as eyes” (Num. 10:31). Interestingly, the Satmar Rebbe in *Divrei Yoel* (Behaloscha) explains that when Moshe says that Yisro will be “eyes” for the Jewish people, this refers to the fact that since Yisro ran away in lieu of advising Pharaoh to kill the Jews, he merited that his descendants will sit on the Sanhedrin and they will be the “eyes” of the Jewish People (for our sages explain that the Sanhedrin were the “eyes” of the Jewish people) who properly advise and enlighten them.

<sup>2</sup> Speaking of King David, he was a descendant of Ruth, and the letters in her name can be rearranged to spell out the word “turtledove” — a type of bird (תור = רות). In fact, we can do the same to Yisro’s name (יתרו = תורי) to produce the word “my turtledove”.

## Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

### PARSHAS BALAK

gentile one was Bilaam. In the end, both of them were annihilated from This World, because their wisdom was not a gift from Hashem, but was rather something they “grabbed” themselves. This, of course, begs the obvious question: How can somebody “grab” wisdom for himself, isn’t Hashem the source of all wisdom, and if somebody is wise that means that He give that person wisdom?

Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky (in *Taama de-Kra*) answers that Chazal (*Megillah* 6b) have assured us that if somebody claims “I toiled and I did not find”, he should not be believed. This is because if somebody truly toils in wisdom, then it is promised from God that he will find wisdom. In other words, if a person toils and study Torah, then he will always become wise. However, if a person studies Torah in a way that Hashem does not want him to do, for example if he studies inappropriate topics on Tisha B’Av or while he is in mourning, or he reads on Friday Night by candle light or by a light that he knows was created by somebody who violated Shabbos and should not be used, or if he studies or thinks about *Divrei Torah* in dirty places when it is forbidden to do so, or in the middle of prayers like during the Chazzan’s repetition<sup>3</sup>

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#### <sup>3</sup> Learning during the Chazzan’s repetition

The *Magen Avraham* (*Orach Chaim* 124:8, as explained by *Machatzis HaShekel* and *Pri Megadim* there) writes that if a person studies during the Chazzan’s repetition of *Shemonah Esrei*, but he pays attention to the end of each *bracha* to properly answer “amen”, then there is no need to protest such behavior. Nonetheless, he concludes that one should not do this because ignorant people may see him learning during the Chazzan’s repetition and will not realize that he is still careful to answer “amen”, and they too will not take the Chazzan’s repetition seriously and will not pay attention to answer “amen”. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein in *Iggros Moshe* (vol. 6, *Orach Chaim* 19) writes that one may only be lenient in accordance with the *Magen Avraham* if without oneself, there are still ten people who are otherwise listening to the Chazzan’s repetition, however, if there are not ten such people, then it is forbidden for anybody to study during the Chazzan’s repetition, and he concludes that therefore practically, one should never be studying in the middle of the Chazzan’s repetition. A similar sentiment is expressed by the *Mishna Brura* (*Orach Chaim* 124:17) who wrote about those who study during the Chazzan’s repetition “they are not acting nicely, for if the ‘learners’ turn to their studies, then the ignoramuses will learn from them and also not listen to the Chazzan’s repetition, but they will engage in idle chatter, thus those who study during the Chazzan’s repetition are causing the masses to sin.” See also responsa *Rivevos Efrayim* (vol. 5, p. 41) who cites many sources which forbid this as well. *Orchos Rabbeinu* (vol. 4, p. 154) reports that during the Chazzan’s repetition of *Shachris*, the Steipler Gaon would review Mishnayos by heart because he was hard of hearing and could not hear the Chazzan. See also *Orchos*

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**Rabbi Elchanan Shoff**  
**PARSHAS BALAK**

or during Kaddish then although he has violated Halacha, he will still find wisdom due to his efforts. Nonetheless, this sort of wisdom is not considered a present of from Hashem, it is considered as though he “grabbed” the wisdom without Hashem’s permission. About this, the *Kaf HaChaim* (*Orach Chaim* 124:16) writes that this is the meaning of the Talmudic expression: “Fortunate is he whose toiling is in Torah, and he gives *nachas* for his Creator” (*Brachos* 17a). In order to reach this stage in which one is considered “fortunate”, the Torah Scholar must not only toil in Torah, but must do so in a way which brings Hashem *nachas*, i.e. without studying at inappropriate times or in inappropriate venues. And if he does study in the wrong time or place, then he would have been better off had he not studied Torah altogether.

*The Bigger anti-Semite*

***And he [Balak] sent messengers to Bilaam... saying... ‘maybe I can smite them and I will chase them from the Land’... and Bilaam said to God... ‘maybe I can battle against them and chase them out’ (Num. 22:5–11).*** Rashi cites the Midrash that says that Balak only wanted to chase the Jews away from the Holy Land, but Bilaam wanted to chase them out of the world entirely. From here, Rashi sees that that Bilaam actually hated the Jews more than Balak did.

Rabbi Chaim Palagi in *Tenufah Chaim* (*Parshas Balak*, 2) discusses this passage by way of an analogy to the laws of *meilah*—the illegal misuse of consecrated property. In the Laws of *Meilah*, unlike in the rest of the Torah, one *can* sin by sending a proxy or agent to derive benefit from consecrated property, such that the sender has violated the prohibition and the agent has not. This is different from all other Halachos in which the person who actually does the illegal action has violated the sin, even if he did so as a *shaliach* for somebody else.<sup>4</sup> However, the Mishnah teaches that if a *shaliach*

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*Rabbeinu* (vol. 5 , p. 244) which reports that during the Chazzan’s repetition, the Steipler Gaon would recite Psalms, but said that others should not follow his lead because he only did so because he could not hear the Chazzan.

<sup>4</sup> The Chida (*Pnei David*, *Balak* 3) cites the *Masas Binyamin* (94) who writes that even though a Jew cannot appoint a gentile as a *shaliach*, but a gentile can appoint another gentile as a *shaliach*. Accordingly, if a gentile sends another gentile to perform an action, this should mean that if the *shaliach* performs said action, that action is ultimately ascribed to the one who sent him. Accordingly, when Balak said to Bilaam “And now please go curse this nation for me ...” (*Num.* 22:6), should Bilaam have done so, the act of cursing the Jews would have been ascribed to Balak, not

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**Rabbi Elchanan Shoff**  
**PARSHAS BALAK**

adds to his illegal mission, then both the sender and the *shaliach* have violated the laws of *meilab*. For example, if somebody tells his *shaliach* to illegally take one item that belongs to the Temple, and the *shaliach* takes two such items, then both the sender and the *shaliach* are liable for violating the laws of *meilab*. That said, Rabbi Palagi explains that the Jewish People are called “consecrated” such that anybody who mistreats them is considered like one who violates the laws of *meilab*. Accordingly even though Bilaam was acting as Balak’s agent, since he added to what Balak told him to do (as Balak only said to chase them from the Holy Land, while Bilaam attempted to chase from the world altogether), Bilaam is also personally liable, which is why ultimately Bilaam himself was also killed (in the war with Midian).

**Cursing King David through Balak**

***And now please go and curse for me this nation, for it is stronger than I (Num. 22:6).*** The great Kabbalist Rabbi Nosson Nota Shapiro writes in *Megaleh Amukos* that when Balak said “curse for me” (ארה לי), he meant “curse (to) me” (because the word לי can mean both “for me” and “to me”). This is because Balak recognized that King David was to be among his descendants (as Ruth was from royal Moab stock), and he wanted to weaken the Jews’ strength in that way. This is also alluded to the end of Balak’s request, “for it is stronger than I” (כי עצום הוא ממני), which can be read as “for its strength [comes] from me” (because the word ממני means both “than I” and “from I”). The same idea is quoted by the Chida in *Chomas Onach (Balak 2)* and *Pnei David (Balak, pgs. 139–140)*. However, ultimately, Bilaam’s curses were unable to touch King David at all, as the *Tzafnas Paneach* explains when Bilaam says, “I see him, but not now, I behold him, but am not close” (Num. 24:17) this refers to his inability to touch King David.

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to Bilaam. However, Bilaam refused this mission and responded, “I cannot violated the command of Hashem my God” (Num. 22:18). In this, Bilaam argued that even though according to Halacha a gentile can appoint another gentile as a *shaliach*, this does not apply to matters of sin. Accordingly, if a gentile sends another gentile to perform a sin, this would mean that if the *shaliach* performs said sin, it is ultimately ascribed to the one who did it, and not to the one sent him. Nonetheless, see *Machane Efrayim (Hilchos Shluchin 14)* who writes that the rule that *shlichus* does not apply to a sin does not apply to gentiles, it only applies to Jews.

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## Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

### PARSHAS BALAK

#### Sons of God

**Do not curse the nation, because it is blessed (Num. 22:12).** Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad in his work *Aderes Eliyahu* explains that in many instances, the Jews are called the “children” of Hashem (see, for example, Deut. 14:1). Accordingly, when telling Bilaam not to curse the Jews, Hashem alluded to this idea. He said not to curse them “because it is blessed”, the word “blessed” (ברוך) can be broken up into two components, it means “son” (בר means “son” in Aramaic) and it refers to Hashem (כ = יה-וה = 26), such that saying that the Jewish people are “blessed” in this context refers to the fact that they are Hashem’s children.

#### Opening the Ass’s Mouth

**And Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Bilaam, ‘What did I do to you that you have hit me these three times?’ (Num. 22:28).** Rabbi Efraim Lunshitz (*Kli Yakar* to Num. 22:23) explains that Hashem allowed to the donkey to speak in order to show everybody that Bilaam was like a donkey. Just like a donkey does not naturally speak, but Hashem allowed it to speak in honor of the Jewish People, so too is Bilaam like a donkey in that he does not really possess the requisite level to receive prophecy, but in order to honor the Jewish People, Hashem will allow him to prophesy and speak about the Jews’ exaltedness.

#### Animal Cruelty

**And an angel of Hashem said to him, ‘why did you hit your donkey?’ (Num. 22:32).** The Rambam (*Guide for the Perplexed*, 3:17) writes that this passage is the Biblical source for the prohibition of causing pain to animals, which essentially tries to rid man of any inclination for cruelty as long as those actions have no clear purpose for man. The *Pri Megadim* (*Orach Chaim* 468, *Mishbetzos Zahav*) writes that he was once asked by somebody who was raising birds in his garden if he was allowed to clip their wings so that they would not fly away. He responded by saying that for this man to clip the wings himself, it would be forbidden, because painning animals is forbidden unless there is a great need to do so. However, the *Pri Megadim* argued that there may be room for leniency for this man to ask a gentile to clip the birds’ wings. He argues that if the prohibition of causing pain to animals is only rabbinic, then telling a gentile to do it would be permitted (because the rabbis only forbid telling a gentile to violate what would otherwise be a rabbinic sin on one’s behalf when it

**Rabbi Elchanan Shoff**  
PARSHAS BALAK

comes to violating the Shabbos, but not when it comes to violating any other commandments). And then he argues that even if causing pain to animals is a Biblical prohibition (like Maimonides in the Guide seems to understand), it is not actually a negative prohibition, but is simply the failure to fulfill a positive commandment, and again there would be nothing barring him from asking a gentile to do it for him. The *Eshel Avraham* of Butchatch similarly writes that even if causing pain to animals is a Biblical prohibition, it certainly does not apply to non-Jews as it is not included in the Seven Noahide Commandments. Nonetheless, the *Minchas Soles* (*Mitzvah* 80) derives from Maimonides (cited above) and *Sefer Chassidim* (666) that causing pain to animals is even forbidden for Noahides.

### 3 Times = 3 Holidays

***And an angel of Hashem said to him, ‘why did you hit your ass these three times?’ (Num. 22:32).*** The term “three times” (שלוש רגלים) is also the exact term used to refer to thrice-yearly pilgrimages which Jews are supposed perform on the three holidays (Pesach, Shavuos, Sukkos). The *Kasnos Obr* and the Trisker Maggid explain that the total number of days of these three holidays is 15 (7 days of Pesach + 7 days of Sukkos + 1 day of Shavuos = 15), which is a total of 360 hours (15 \* 24 = 360). Now, the number 360 is significant because the Jews sinned at the Golden Calf for six hours, and the number 360 represents sixty times that figure. In Halacha, something can become nullified if mixed into something else sixty times its quantity, so the 360 hours a year that the Jews celebrate the holidays serve to nullify the 6 hours they spent reveling in the Golden Calf. With this idea in mind, the Talmudic passage (*Pesachim* 118a) that says “Whoever disparages the holidays is as if he worshipped idolatry” (derived from the juxtaposition of idolatry to the thrice-yearly pilgrimages in Ex. 34:17–24) makes much more sense. The Chida in *Pnei David* (*Balak*, 16) adds to this that the word “three” (שלוש) is spelled with an extra letter VAV, even though usually it is spelled without that letter to allude to the six hours which the Jews spent worshipping the Golden Calf. With this in mind, he also explains an enigmatic comment of Rashi to this verse. Rashi (citing *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Balak* 9) wrote “these three times” refers to the fact that Bilaam sought to uproot the nation which celebrates the thrice-yearly pilgrimages. What does that have to do with anything? The Chida explains that Bilaam sought to downplay the Jews’ devotion to the thrice-yearly pilgrimages, and thereby stir up an accusation against them for



## Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

### PARSHAS BALAK

worshipping the Golden calf (as Targum Yonason to Num. 24:1 says that Bilaam wanted to invoke the memory of the Jews' sin at the Golden Calf to their detriment).

#### The Donkey Dies

***For now I will also kill you and allow her [i.e. the donkey] to live (Num. 22:33).***

The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 20:14) relates that the moment that Bilaam's donkey finished speaking, it died. The Midrash explains that Hashem arranged for this to happen so that others won't point to this talking donkey and deify it. Rabbeinu Bachaya also quotes this Midrash, and adds that another reason that the donkey died was that once it finished speaking, it had fulfilled its life-mission and its entire purpose for which it was created, so it no longer had any reason to live.

#### The Nation who dwells alone

***...behold, they are a nation who dwells alone, and are not counted amongst***

ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א
א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט
=10	=10	=10	=10	=10	=10	=10	=10	=10

***the gentiles... (Num. 23:9).*** Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum (*Yismach Moshe, Parshas Balak*)

writes that the proper way of explaining this verse was revealed to him in a dream. The word "nation" (*am*) is typically used to describe the Jewish people when they are acting improperly, as the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 20:23) points out, it is used in such expression as "this nation sinned" (Ex. 32:31), "your nation has become corrupt" (Ex. 32:7), and "the stiff-necked nation" (Ex. 32:9). Yet, here Bilaam reveals that even when the Jewish People are doing the wrong thing, they are still a cut above the rest, and are not counted amongst the gentiles of the world.

צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י
י	כ	ל	מ	נ	ס	ע	פ	צ
=100	=100	=100	=100	=100	=100	=100	=100	=100

Similarly, the Midrash

Tanchuma (see also *Shemos*

*Rabbah* 15:7) notes that the opening word in the passage at hand "behold" (הן) is made up of the two letters נ-ה which do not have counterparts, to allude to the fact that the Jewish People have no counterpart among the other nations. The idea that the letter ה has no counterpart means that all other letters whose *gematria* is in the ones, can join with another letter to become ten, but the letter ה only joins with itself to become ten. Similarly, the idea that the letter נ has no counterpart means that all

**Rabbi Elchanan Shoff**  
PARSHAS BALAK

other letters whose *gematria* is in the tens, can join with another letter to become one-hundred, but the letter נ only joins with itself to become one-hundred.

#### Foreskins and dust

**Who can count the dust of Yaakov... (Num. 23:10).** The *Baal HaTurim* writes that the word “dust” (עפר = 350 +1) in *gematria* equals the word “foreskin in sand” (ערלה = 351), which alludes to the custom to bury the foreskin after a bris.

#### No Regrets

**God is not a man that he might lie, [or like] a human and regret, he [i.e. man] would say and not do, speak and not fulfill (Num. 23:19).** Interestingly, the *gematria* of this entire verse (לא איש אל ויכזב וכן אדם ויתנחם ההוא אמר ולא יעשה ודבר = 2179) equals exactly the *gematria* of a verse in which Hashem seems to “regret” the punishment he originally had in store for the Jewish People after the Golden Calf: “And Hashem regretted over the bad that He spoke about doing to His nation” (Ex. 32:14) (וינחם ה' על הרעה אשר דבר לעשות לעמו = 2179). This is quite an interesting discovery!

#### Guilty Pleasures

**He has not seen iniquity within Yaakov, and did not see [sinful] toiling in Israel, Hashem his God is with him, and the friendship of the King is within him (Num. 23:21).** *Likkutei Chaver ben Chaim* explains this verse based on an explanation by the great Kabbalist, Rabbi Menachem Azaria of Fano. He asked why Hashem revealed to us the punishments of sins but not the rewards for *mitzvos* and explained that there is a special reason as to why Hashem revealed to us the punishments of sins. That reason is that once we know the punishments related to sins, any time a person would sin, he would not completely enjoy the moment of his sin, because in the back of his head he'd know about the punishment destined to befall him. Because of this, when a Jew sins, his sin is not as enjoyable, and therefore, his punishment is somewhat commuted on account of the sin not being as fun. However, when a gentile sins, since he is unaware of the punishment destined to befall him for that sin, he's not scared of anything and will enjoy the sin in the greatest possible way. Because of this, the gentile will receive the strongest form of punishment to match the enjoyment of his sin.



**Rabbi Elchanan Shoff**  
PARSHAS BALAK

**Bilaam the Rooster**

**...and the word of the man... (Num. 24:3).** In this context, the word for “man” is *gever* (גבר), which in Rabbinic Hebrew also means “rooster”. The *Baal HaTurim* explains that Bilaam was similar to a rooster, because just as a rooster philanders with whatever it can, so did Bilaam fornicate with his donkey. Moreover, just as a rooster knows the time of day (as it crows early in the morning), so did Bilaam know how to figure out exactly the moment every day that Hashem is angry. Moreover, just as a rooster tends to stand on one foot, so was Bilaam lame in one foot. R. Yitzchak Bouchavzeh in *Lechem leFi HaTaf* points out that the letters of the name Bilaam spelled out (בית + למד + עין + מם = 696) equals the word “rooster” (תרנגול = 689), plus the amount of letters in the word “rooster” (689 + 6 + 1 = 696).

**Who’s your daddy Beor?**

**And he raised his parable and he said, “The word of Bilaam—whose son is Beor—and the word of the man with the closed eye... (Num. 24:15).** Although many understand that the phrase “whose son is Beor” should be read “who is the son of Beor”, because Bilaam’s father as mentioned earlier in the Parashah was named Beor, a simple reading of this passage suggests that Bilaam’s son was named Beor. The Arizal (*Shaar HaPessukim, Ki Sisa*) points out that this is somewhat inconsistent, is Beor the name of Bilaam’s father or the name of Bilaam’s son? He answers that Beor was really the son of Lavan, and he was also the father of Bilaam. However, in a certain way, Beor is also the son of Bilaam, because the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 105a) says that Bilaam is Lavan. Now this does not literally mean that Bilaam was Lavan, rather it means that Bilaam was a reincarnation of Lavan (see *Seder HaDoros*, Year #2488 and *Megaleh Amukos*, 35, *Shelah* to Pesachim p. 19b, and *Ben Yehoyada* to *Sanhedrin* there). Accordingly, Beor was both the father and son of Bilaam, biologically he was Bilaam’s father, but in terms of Bilaam being a reincarnation of Beor’s father Lavan, Bilaam was his father.

**Cursing the End of Amalek**

**The first [among] nations is Amalek, and his end will be utter destruction (Num. 24:20).** Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad explains (in *Benayahu* to *Sanhedrin* 105a) this passage in light of the Zohar (Vol. 3 281b) that says that the evil shell of Amalek is comprised of the evil pollution of Balak and Bilaam together. He explains

**Rabbi Elchanan Shoff**  
PARSHAS BALAK

that the name Amalek (עמלק) itself is actually comprised of the last two letters of the name Bilaam (בלעם) and Balak (בלק) put together (עמ + לק = עמלק). Accordingly, since the last letters of Amalek does not come from Bilaam's own name, but comes from the name Balak, when Bilaam cursed Amalek, he only cursed the "end" of Amalek which does not come from himself, not the "beginning" of Amalek.

#### Eating to Go

***And they [i.e. the female Midianites] called the nation to the sacrifices of their gods, and the nation ate, and they bowed to their gods (Num. 25:2).*** The Chida writes in *Simchas HaRegel* that usually the god of Baal Peor was worshipped by defecating in front of the idol. However, the Jews in the desert did not eat normal foods which brought about defecation as a result of their digestion. The Jews ate only the manna which was a supernatural food that created no excremental byproducts. Accordingly, even if the Jews would want to worship Baal Peor, nothing would come out. To alleviate this issue, the Midianite women invited the Jewish men to partake in the ritual sacrifices of the Peor god so that they will eat normal foods—not just the manna—and would thus be able to defecate in order to worship their god.

#### The Zealous Murderer

***And Pinchas—son of Elazar son of Aharon the Kohen—saw and he took a spear in his hand... (Num. 25:7).*** The Talmud (*Sanbedrin* 82a) asks, "What did Pinchas see? He saw something happen, and he remembered the Halacha". This means that when he saw Zimri illicitly fornicating with Kozbi he remembered the Halacha that a zealot may kill a Jewish man who is publicly fornicating with a gentile woman while they are still in middle of the act. *Midrash Shmuel* explains that that Pinchas saw that even though he would be putting himself in grave danger by trying to kill Zimri and Kozbi, he saw that he had the merits of forefathers on his side and that afforded him extra protection. He also writes that when it says that Pinchas took a "spear" (רמח = 248), this refers to the merits of his fulfillment of the 248 positive commandments of the Torah.

*Midrash Shmuel al Hatorah* of R. Shmuel de Uzida explains that the permission for a zealot to kill a Jewish man fornicating with non-Jewish woman is only given while they are in middle of the act of fornication, such that if while Pinchas was about to kill Zimri, Zimri would have turned over (*coitus interruptus*), then Pinchas would have been

**Rabbi Elchanan Shoff**  
PARSHAS BALAK

considered a murderer for killing Zimri and he himself would be deserving the death penalty. Moreover, Pinchas realized that if while he was trying to kill Zimri, one of Zimri's supporters would have killed him, that person would have been justified according to Halacha in doing so. These two facts meant that if Pinchas tried to kill Zimri, he would be putting himself in danger, but because he saw that he has the merits of his forefathers, he decided to take the risk.

The second point raised by the *Midrash Shmuel* is actually quite novel when put in the context of the *sugya*. This is because the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 82a) merely says that if Zimri would have turned around and killed Pinchas, Zimri himself would not have been liable for doing so, because Pinchas was threatening his life, and there is a Halacha that if somebody is chasing after you to kill you, you are allowed to kill him first. Rabbi Meir HaLevi Abulafia in *Yad Ramah* (there) clarifies that this would only be true if Zimri himself would have killed Pinchas, but if somebody else would have tried to save Zimri by killing Pinchas, then that person would actually be liable for killing Pinchas. He explains that while Zimri was in the act of intercourse, any other Jew—including Pinchas and anyone else—would have permission to kill him, and therefore, the same Jew who has permission to kill him cannot also have permission to kill somebody else in order to save him. However, Zimri himself would not have permission to kill himself while engaged in the act of copulation with Kozbi, therefore, even though Pinchas has permission to kill Zimri, Zimri still has permission to kill Pinchas in order to protect himself. Accordingly, only if Zimri would kill Pinchas would Zimri be let off the hook, but not if somebody else would kill Pinchas. This Halacha is also codified by the *Piskei HaRosh* (*Sanhedrin* 9:4) and his son the *Tur* (*Choshen Mishpat* 425), and stands in stark contrast to the assumption of the *Midrash Shmuel* who wrote that if any of Zimri's *supporters* would have killed Pinchas, they would have been justified in doing so.

Returning to Talmud's assertion that if Zimri would have turned the tables and killed Pinchas, Zimri would not have been liable for doing so, again, this is because Pinchas was threatening his life, and there is a Halacha that if somebody is chasing after you to kill you, you are allowed to kill him first. However, the truth is that according to Halacha if one can save himself by attacking one of the chaser's other limbs without killing the chaser, then one is not allowed to kill the fellow chasing after him who is

to kill him, he must simply eliminate the threat in the least violent way possible. Accordingly, the Chazon Ish (17) asks why the Talmud assumes that Zimri would have been allowed to kill Pinchas, he should have only been allowed to eliminate the threat of Pinchas by doing the least violent thing possible, which in this case could have been achieved by Zimri ceasing to have intercourse with Kozbi, which would thereby take away from Pinchas any permission to kill him, and thus deescalate the situation without anyone losing a life?

The Chazon Ish answers that according to the *Mishnah LaMelech* there is a difference between the victim himself and everybody else. While it is true that if somebody is chasing after another to kill him, then the chaser must be stopped in the least violent way possible; if the would-be victim himself wants to stop the chaser, then he is even allowed to *kill* the chaser even if he could have saved himself in a less violent way. The Halacha that the chaser must be stopped in the least violent way possible only applies to a third-party who is attempting to save the would-be victim from the potential murderer chasing after him. The simple understanding is that a person who is being chased and fearing for their own life cannot be expected to have the presence of mind to aim to wound, rather than to kill.

Alternatively, Rav Shteinman (in *Ayeles HaShachar* there), Rabbi Elazar Moshe Horowitz (in his glosses to *Sanhedrin* 82b) and the author of *Chelkas Yoav* (in *Degel HaTorah* 13) answer that it was actually forbidden for Zimri to cease having intercourse with Kozbi, because doing so would be considered a pleasurable act of sexual intercourse just like “going in” is considered a pleasurable act of sexual intercourse (see *Shavuos* 18b). The halacha is that if a person, in the middle of intercourse, discovered that the woman he was with became a niddah, he would not be allowed to remove himself until his sexual organ was no longer aroused. He would have to "bury his fingernails in the ground, and wait until he was no longer physically aroused" since the act removing one's sexual organ whilst physically aroused is itself considered intercourse. Accordingly, Zimri had no easy way to save himself from Pinchas by simply ending intercourse immediately, and thus he'd have been justified in killing Pinchas who would still see him enmeshed with Kozbi and would kill him.

**24,000 Deaths**

***And it was that those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand (Num. 25:9).*** Rabbi Menachem Azaria of Fano writes in *Gilgulei Nishamos* (76) that Rabbi Akiva was a reincarnation of Zimri ben Salu. Rabbi Avraham Azulai (in *Chesed L'Avraham* 45:25) similarly writes that Rabbi Akiva was a reincarnation of Zimri, the wife of Turnusrufus who later married Rabbi AKiva was a reincarnation of Kozbi, and Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 students who died between Pesach and Shavuot were reincarnations of the 24,000 people who died in this plague.