

Keeping your mouth shut in the midst of sin

In this weeks reading from *Parashat Pinchas (Bamidbar / Numbers 25:10-30:1)* the Lord speaks to Moshe saying that Pinchas, the son of Eleazar, has turned away His wrath from the sons of Israel because he was zealous for the Lord. Pinchas' jealousy for the Lord is found in *Bamidbar / Numbers 25:7-9*. Pinchas saw the sin of the sons of Israel and took action against a man who was sinning in front of all the congregation of Israel. Not only this, but this man willfully brought sin into the midst of the congregation. Pinchas is rewarded for his bravery with a covenant of peace.

After the death of the idolatrous people, the Lord God told Moshe to count the entire community of the sons of Israel from 20 years old and upward, according to their father's houses. Each of the families was counted and numbered as God commanded. After the people were counted, the Lord told Moshe, *"The land shall be apportioned as an inheritance according to the number of names."* By lot the land will be divided and it will be received as a possession according to the names of the tribes of the fathers. During this counting and apportionment of land, the five daughters of Zelophehad, came near and placed themselves before Moshe, Eleazar the priest, and the entire community in the entrance of the Ohel Moed. They said, *"Our father died in the wilderness. He was not among the company that banded together against God. He was not among Korah's allies, but he died because of his own sin, and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father disappear from the midst of his family, just because he did not have a son? Please give us a possession too."* Note how they made a clarification that they were not a part of the rebellion of Korach who died before the Lord.

The Lord shows Moshe the Promised Land and He says to Moshe, *"Take Joshua, son of Nun, a man to whom there is spirit, lean your hand upon him and present him to Eleazar the priest and to the entire community, and charge him before their eyes. You will thus place some of your prestige upon him so that the entire community and the sons of Israel will obey him."* Moshe did with Joshua as God commanded. The Lord God then commanded him to have the sons of Israel bring offerings in their season according to the appointed times. Each of the major festivals is

listed, including Passover, the Shabbat, the New Moon, the Festival of Weeks (Shavuot), and the Day of Atonement are mentioned. Moshe explained the offerings to the Children of Israel according to everything that God had commanded.

This week's Torah portion speaks of being zealous for the Lord, the inheritance of God, the Lord having concern for both men and women, and establishing a new leader to lead the people into the Promised Land. Pinchas was honored by the Lord for his zealousness for righteousness, justice, and truth. Today, are we as zealous as we should be for righteousness, justice, and truth, in our devotion to God's Word and His Messiah Yeshua?

ספר במדבר פרק כח Bamidbar / Numbers 25:10-12

י וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: יא פִּינְחָס בֶּן-אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן-אֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֵן הַשֵּׁיב אֶת-חַמְתִּי מֵעַל בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְיָאוֹ אֶת-קִנְאַתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם וְלֹא-כִלִּיתִי אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְיָאתִי: יב לָכֵן אֲמַר הַנְּנִי נִתַּן לּוֹ אֶת-בְּרִיתִי שְׁלוֹם:

25:10 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 25:11 'Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. 25:12 'Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; (NASB)

While reading through the Torah portion this week, we have to pause and go back to Parashat Balak to reread what took place prior to Pinchas' actions. According to the end of Parashat Balak, a very interesting observation may be made concerning what had taken place in the congregation of Israel.

Bamidbar / Numbers 25:1-15

25:1 While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. 25:2 For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 25:3 So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry against Israel. 25:4 The Lord said to Moses, 'Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad

daylight before the Lord, so that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel.’ 25:5 So Moses said to the judges of Israel, ‘Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor.’ 25:6 Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 25:7 When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, 25:8 and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. 25:9 Those who died by the plague were 24, 000. 25:10 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 25:11 ‘Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. 25:12 ‘Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; 25:13 and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.’‘ 25:14 Now the name of the slain man of Israel who was slain with the Midianite woman, was Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of a father’s household among the Simeonites. 25:15 The name of the Midianite woman who was slain was Cozbi the daughter of Zur, who was head of the people of a father’s household in Midian. (NASB)

At the beginning of Parashat Balak, the people of Moab were afraid of Israel and sought the leadership to do something about their presence nearby. According to the end of Parashat Balak, we are told that Israel remained at Shittim and began to interact with the people of Moab. What is interesting based on this text is that we frequently think of Israel in the wilderness not having contact with anyone and spending all their time

eating the manna and the quail in the presence of the Lord. What we see here is the people are coming and going from the congregation into the neighboring nations and interacting with them. It could be they are seeking out food and commerce from their own sinful desires. Remember the rabbinic homiletic discussions on the manna describe the manna as having any taste desired by the person eating it. (*Sifrei Bamidbar 89, Shney Luchot HaBrit, Bamidbar, Torah Ohr 60*) The idea was the Lord produced this manna miraculously, and by wishing, one could taste in the manna anything desired, whether fowl or fruit. This is interpreted from the statement that the people ground it, or pounded it, and then baked it (*Bamidbar / Numbers 11:8*), suggesting that this is only figurative, for if one so wished it tasted like food made of flour ground or pounded, baked or cooked. According to another interpretation, the wicked were compelled to grind it and prepare it until it was fit for food, while for the righteous it was ground by angels before it fell from heaven. The point is that the people did not desire the gifts of God, but sought after other things amongst the neighboring nations.

In the Torah, we do not find any commands forbidding the people from interacting with the surrounding nations, but we do find commands to not become so familiar with the nations to being doing as they do. This is what the Apostle Paul was describing to Titus (3:3) saying that formerly we were foolish living in sin (*disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another*). These are the things the nations do without regard for truth, justice, and righteousness. According to the Torah, the people were not only buying and selling with their neighbors, they were also interacting with the Moabite gods and participating in worship by way of their women in sexual sin (fornication). The Scriptures say that the Moabite women invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods and they ate and bowed down to their gods (*Bamidbar / Numbers 25:2*).

The Lord told Moshe because of this sin, they are to take the leaders and kill all of those who had joined themselves with Baal-Peor. As a result, they were weeping at the Ohel Moed. It is at this time one of the men brought a Midianite woman into the congregation in the sight of all the people who were weeping at the Ohel Moed (*in the sight of Moshe and the priests, etc*). Notice how the Scriptures say this was done “*in the sight of all the people.*” (לְעֵינֵי מֹשֶׁה וְלְעֵינֵי כָּל-עֵדֹת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל) The way this

is described, “it appears as if the people, who were before the Lord at the Ohel Moed, were watching and not doing anything about the man and the Midianite woman?” They appear to just sit there, watch, and weep. Pinchas however got up and did something, he took action.

The Targum Pseudo Jonathan renders the Scriptures in an attempt to explain what was going on, in the following way:

Targum Pseudo Jonathan Bamidbar 25

And Israel dwelt in the place which is called Shittim, on account of the (Shetutha) foolishness and depravity which were among them. And the people began to profane their holiness, and to strip their bodies to the image of Peor, and commit fornication with the daughters of the Moabites, who brought out the image of Peor, concealed under their bundles. And they invited the people to the sacrifices of their idols; and the people ate in their feasts, and bowed themselves to their idols. And the people of the house of Israel joined themselves to Baala-Peor, like the nail in the wood, which is not separated but by breaking up the wood (or, with the splinters). And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said to Mosheh, Take all the chiefs of the people, and appoint them for judges, and let them give judgment to put to death the people who have gone astray after Peor, and hang them before the word of the Lord upon the wood over against the morning sun, and at the departure of the sun take them down and bury them and turn away the strong anger of the Lord from Israel. And Mosheh said to the judges of Israel, Slay every one a man of his tribe of those who have joined themselves to the idol of Peor. [JERUSALEM. And Israel abode in Shittim; and the people began to commit fornication with the daughters of the Moabites. And they invited the people to the sacrifices of their idols. And Israel were united with the worshippers of the idol of Peor; and the anger of the Lord was strong against Israel. And the Word of the Lord said to Mosheh, Take all the chiefs of the people and set them for a Sanhedrin before the Lord, and let them bang all who are

worthy of death; and at sunset take down their bodies and bury them, that so may be averted the strong anger of the Lord from Israel. And Mosheh said to the princes of Israel, Slay each one a man of his house of them who have joined themselves to the idol of Peor.] And behold, a man of the sons of Israel came, holding a Midianitess, and brought her to his brethren, in the sight of Mosheh and all the congregation of the children of Israel. He answered and said to Mosheh, What is it (that is wrong) to have company with her? If thou sayest, It is forbidden, didst thou not thyself take a Midianitess, the daughter of Jethro? When Mosheh heard, he trembled and swooned. But they wept, and cried, Listen! And they stood at the door of the tabernacle of ordinance. And Phinehas bar Elazar-bar Aharon, the priest, saw, and, remembering the ordination, answered, and said: He who ought to kill, let him kill! Where are the lions of the tribe of Jehudah? When they saw, they were quiet. And he arose from among his Sanhedrin, and took a lance in his hand. [JERUSALEM. And, behold, a man of the sons of Israel came and brought to his brethren a Midianitha, before Mosheh and all the congregation of the children of Israel; and, behold, they were weeping at the door of the tabernacle. And Phinehas bar Elazar bar Aharon, the high priest, saw, and arose from among the assembly, and took a lance.]

The Aramaic Targum states that Israel remained in the place (Shittim) on account of foolishness (Shetuta) and depravity which was in their midst. The Targum says “*And the people began to profane their holiness, and to strip their bodies to the image of Peor, and commit fornication with the daughters of the Moabites, who brought out the image of Peor, concealed under their bundles.*” The description of “*strip their bodies to the image of Peor*” sounds as if the people were trying “*to become like the moabite god.*” Something similar to how the Lord God calls us “*to be like Him walking in His ways,*” or in the NT sense, “*being conformed unto the image of His Son.*” (Romans 8:29) The concealing the image suggests either that the women of Moab always had the idol god with

them, or that they had taken or purchased the idol gods from Moab and concealed them under their bundles, and they brought them into to the congregation of Israel. We know due to archeological findings, that the idols of Baal were small enough to fit in one's hand and be concealed, so the rabbinic interpretation in the Targum is an accurate portrayal of what may have been going on. The rabbis translate the MT to say that Israel joined itself to Baal-Peor like a nail in wood, they were fixed, hammered in, and there was no removing them except by the breaking of the wood. This suggests how deeply sin finds its way into our lives.

The MT states, *25:4 The Lord said to Moses, 'Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the Lord, so that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel.'* (NASB) Again we find a problem with the leadership in the midst of the congregation of Israel. The Targum translates saying the leaders are to be appointed as judges to put to death those who had gone astray, those who joined themselves to Baal-Peor. The narrative seems to describe of those who were missed, the Lord took care of the rest and 24,000 people died by the plague.

We are then told, according to the Targum, just prior to these things, a man brought the Midianite woman into the congregation. The rabbis have the man arguing with Moshe using the argument that Moshe married a Midianite wife. Moshe heard this and wept and cried and thus was the reason the people remained at the entrance to the Ohel Moed and *"watched"* as the man brought the midianite woman into the congregation and into his tent. The problem with the people sitting, watching, and doing nothing is that by their silence, were they approving of what the man was doing? (see *Tehillim / Psalm 32*) Is it a sin to not say anything when seeing someone else sin? The prophet Ezekiel has the following to say concerning this question.

Ezekiel 3:17-21

3:17 'Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. 3:18 'When I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die', and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. 3:19 'Yet if you have warned the wick-

ed and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself. 3:20 'Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. 3:21 'However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself.'

Notice how Ezekiel states that if we do nothing, if we do not warn the wicked of their sins, their blood will be required at our hands. There is a certain amount of responsibility that we have on our part as the salt of the earth to speak out against sin.

The concepts that appear to be brought out here from this week's Torah Portion are related to what Sforno has to say concerning what Pinchas did.

Sforno on Bamidbar / Numbers 25:11

בקנאו את קנאתו בתוכם, for having taken G-d's vengeance in the presence of all the people, so that by their watching what he did and not protesting his deed they would qualify for atonement of their sin for not having protested the sinners at the time when they were about to commit their evil deeds. [compare author on verse 4 in this chapter where he made a similar point explaining the unusual command by G-d to Moses. Ed.]

Notice how Sforno states that Pinchas took vengeance upon the man and the midianite woman in the presence of all the people, and their watching and not protesting, they were agreeing with what Pinchas did. This caused the people to qualify for atonement for their sin of not saying anything when seeing the people commit their evil deeds. We are told there were 24,000 people who were committing sin with Baal-Peor and nobody was protesting until the matter was brought up to Moshe by the Lord God

in heaven. That is no small number of people, their sins had to be obvious, and everyone was guilty of the sin of not saying anything. So we are presented with the question again, *“Is it a sin to not say anything when seeing someone else sin?”*

Another interesting commentary on Parashat Balak, on *Bamidbar / Numbers 25:1* by Ein Yaakov states the following:

Ein Yaakov (Glick Edition)

(Num. 25:1) And Israel abode in Shittim. R. Jochanan said: “Wherever such an expression is to be found it brings infliction. And Israel dwelt in Shittim and the people began to commit incest; (Gen. 37:1) And Jacob dwelt in the land of his fathers’ sojournings, and Joseph brought evil reports of them unto their father. (Ib. 47, 27) And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen; and (Ib. 29) And the days of Israel drew near that he was to die. (I Kings 4:5) And every man dwelt in safety, and (Ib. 11, 14) And the Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite.”

Note the concepts here that are being brought together in the rabbinic commentary.

Israel abode in Shittim, in this place, they began to engage in sexual sin. This is paralleled to Shechem, remember the Story of Dina and Shechem’s sexual sin, and the following murder and destruction of the entire town. The children of Jacob were tending their flock in Shechem, the place of sexual sin and murder. Joseph brought back a bad report of his brothers. Were his brothers engaging in sexual sin? Note also on the map of Israel, Shittim and Shechem are simply on the opposite sides of the same place along the Jordan river. So we have a contrast between sin that occurs inside as opposed to outside of the Promised Land. There is a parallel then to Israel dwelling in Egypt in the land of Goshen. Israel draws near to death, is this a reference to the nation of Israel because of having lived in

Egypt and acquiring their ways and sinful lives, thus Israel was drawing near to death? Because of Israel's comfort in their sins, the Lord stirs up an adversary for the purpose of drawing Israel back to repentance (e.g. a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph).

Notice how the rabbis are drawing in all of these concepts in parallel to Israel's sin at Shittim and the people remaining silent at the Ohel Moed.

In *Tehillim / Psalms 39:2*, David speaks of remaining silent saying, ג נְאַלְמָתִי דוּמְיָה הֶחְשִׁיתִי מְטוֹב וּכְאַבִּי נֶעְפָּר: ד חֵם-לְבָי | בְּקִרְבִּי בְּהִגִּי תְבַעַר-אֵשׁ: דְּבַרְתִּי בְּלִשׁוֹנִי: 39:2 *I was mute and silent, I refrained even from good, And my sorrow grew worse. 39:3 My heart was hot within me, While I was musing the fire burned; Then I spoke with my tongue: (NASB)* According to the Psalm, David's silence seems to have prevented him from doing what was good (מְטוֹב, correct or right). Has this ever happened to you? He says נְאַלְמָתִי דוּמְיָה הֶחְשִׁיתִי מְטוֹב וּכְאַבִּי נֶעְפָּר “*I was mute and silent, I refrained even from good, And my sorrow grew worse.*” He was “*dumb or bound*” (נְאַלְמָתִי), “*silent*” (דוּמְיָה), he was “*silent from doing good*” (הֶחְשִׁיתִי מְטוֹב), and his “*pain (mental and physical) sorrow was stirred up with troubles*” (וּכְאַבִּי נֶעְפָּר). He goes on to say that “*his heart was hot*” (חֵם-לְבָי) “*his thoughts within were on fire*” (בְּקִרְבִּי בְּהִגִּי תְבַעַר-אֵשׁ) and so “*he spoke with his mouth*” (דְּבַרְתִּי בְּלִשׁוֹנִי). Jeremiah said something similar in *Jeremiah 20:9* saying ט וְאֶמְרָתִי לֹא-אֶזְכְּרֶנּוּ וְלֹא-אֶדְבֹר עוֹד בְּשֵׁמוֹ 20:9 *But if I say, 'I will not remember Him Or speak anymore in His name,' Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; And I am weary of holding it in, And I cannot endure it. (NASB)* Have you ever had this kind of feeling on the inside for keeping your mouth shut when you should have spoken up? Could this have been what was happening to the people, in their hearts at the Ohel Moed in the midst of Israel's sin with Baal-Peor? Both David and Jeremiah describe their not saying anything as burning, pain, and sorrows being stirred up within by not responding to doing what is right in the presence of the wicked. The Spirit of the Lord that dwells within burns if we do not obey the move of the Spirit in doing what is right. The Apostle's Paul and Peter said the following with regard

to doing what is right and good in *Galatians 6* and *1 Peter 2*.

Galatians 6:6-10

6:6 The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 6:8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 6:9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. 6:10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (NASB)

ו המ" ז אל תתעו לא יתן אלהים להתל בו כי מה שזרע האדם אתו יקצר: ח הזרע בבשרו יקצר כליון משברו והזרע ברוח יקצר מן הרוח חיי עולם: ט ואנחנו בע"שות הטוב אל נחת כי נקצר בעתו אם לא נרפה: י לכן כאשר העת (בידנו נעשה נא את הטוב עם כל אדם וביותר עם בני אמונתנו)

1 Peter 2:19-25

2:19 For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. 2:20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. 2:21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 2:22 who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; 2:23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 2:24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 2:25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the

Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. (NASB)

It is interesting that the Apostle Paul states “*hazorea bivsaroyiatsor kilyon mivsaroy, v’hazorea ba’ruach yiktsor min ha’ruach chai olam.*” (הזרע בבשרו יקצר כליון משברו והזרע ברוח יקצר מן הרוח חיי עולם: 6:8 *For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (NASB)*) He equates doing what is good, to sowing in the spirit and reaping eternal life whereas if one sows to the flesh, one reaps corruption. Basically, the one who gives into the flesh will reap dishonesty and immorality. Note that this is not simply a philosophical or theological thought exercise. If one gives into the fleshly desires, one is cultivating immoral decisions, which corrupts the spirit and is worked out physically in one’s life. When remaining silent, does one cultivate immoral decisions within the heart? Moral impurity corrupts the spirit and then leads to other immoral activities such as bribery, embezzlement (contentiousness), not doing what is right, and keeping silent when one should be speaking out against sin. Paul says that if you live by the Spirit, you will do what is right, and reap eternal life. Does eternal life depend upon our doing what is right? According to Parshiot Balak and Pinchas this does appear to be so. This is connected to the evidence of the fruit of the spirit in our lives. If there are no fruits, what is going on in your relationship with God? The words of the prophet Hosea interpret what was going on when he said, they came to Baal-Peor and devoted themselves to shame (sin), and they became as detestable as that which they loved. (*Hosea 9:10*) We are called to love the Lord more than the sinful lifestyle. If we are abiding in the Messiah, which is synonymous to living according to God’s Word, we will choose to do what is right with the help of the Lord God in heaven. Peter says that we have been called to this purpose (*1 Peter 2:21*), the righteous are the salt of the earth, and if we keep our mouths shut, wickedness will continue to rise in the land unchecked until finally the Lord stands in and takes action.

