

Using the Ineffable Name Pinchos Snatched the Letter "Mem" from the Angel of Death and Saved Yisroel from Extinction

In this week's parsha, parshas Pinchos, we read: **“וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר, פינחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן השיב את חמתי מעל בני ישראל, בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם ולא כליתי את בני ישראל בקנאתי, לכן אמור הנני נותן לו את בריתי שלום”** Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: **Pinchos the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon HaKohen, turned back My wrath from upon Bnei Yisroel, when he zealously avenged Me among them; so, I did not consume Bnei Yisroel in My vengeance. Therefore, say: Behold! I give him My covenant of peace.** Concerning this text, we have learned in the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni):

“לכן אמור הנני נותן לו את בריתי שלום - אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש, פנחס הוא אליהו, אמר לו הקב"ה, אתה נתת שלום בין ישראל ובניו בעולם הזה, אף לעתיד לבוא אתה הוא שעתיד ליתן שלום ביני לבין בני, שנאמר (מלאכי ג כג) הנה אנכי שולח לכם את אליהו הנביא לפני בוא יום ה' וגו' והשיב לב אבות על בנים.”

As a reward for his act of self-sacrifice Pinchos becomes Eliyahu. Just as he brought peace between HKB"H and Bnei Yisroel in this world, he will have the privilege of fulfilling this same function in the Future to Come.

This coincides with the commentary of the Targum Yonatan: **“את בריתי שלום, האנא גזר ליה ית קימי שלם, ואעבדיניה מלאך קיים ויחי לעלמא, למבשרא גאולתא — I am establishing a peace covenant with him and will transform him into an angel that will live forever, to herald the redemption at the end of days. In other words, he merited becoming Eliyahu, who will announce the future redemption, "geulah," to Yisroel.**

In reality, for saving Yisroel from extermination, Pinchos was rewarded, measure for measure, with eternal life. What is the connection and measure for

measure, however, between his act of self-sacrifice — killing Zimri and Kozbi in order to spare Yisroel — and the reward of heralding the "geulah"?

“When He Zealously Avenged Me among Them (בתוכם)” — Handling the Letter “Mem”

Let us begin our path to enlightenment with the fascinating words of the holy Zohar (Pinchos 237.) regarding the difficult battle Pinchos waged with the angel of death, the Malach HaMaves, in order to save Yisroel from annihilation. We will present the words of the Zohar in excerpts, providing additional clarification.

At the end of parshas Bolok, it is written (Bamidbor 25, 7): **“וירא פינחס בן אלעזר . . . ויקם מתוך העדה”** — **Pinchos the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon HaKohen saw, and he rose from the midst of the assembly.** This possuk suggests that he saw something that prompted him to act zealously to avenge Hashem. The Zohar explains that while Yisroel were engaged in their transgression — which came as a consequence of Bilam's counsel and was led by Zimri ben Saloo — Pinchos saw the letter "mem," full of blood, suspended above the heads of Yisroel. He perceived, wisely, that this was the sign of the Malach HaMaves — attempting to unite the letter "mem" with the letters "vov-tov" to form the Hebrew word **מו"ת** (death), in order to bring widespread death to the people of Yisroel.

Pinchos reacted by uttering the ineffable Name and capturing the letter "mem." Upon realizing that Pinchos had snatched the letter "mem" away from him, he immediately backed away. Pinchos joined the "mem" with the numerical value of his own name **פינחס** (208) — represented by the letters **ר"ח** ("reish" equals 200; "ches" equals 8) — to form the word **רמ"ח**. Describing this event, the possuk states (Bamidbor 25, 7): **“ויקח”**

“**רמח בידו — and he took a רמח (a spear) in his hand** — in other words, he used the letter “mem” which he snatched away from the Malach HaMoves to kill those involved in the transgression. As a result: **ותעצר** — the plague was halted.

This, then, is the interpretation of the possuk: **פינחס: בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן השיב את חמתי מעל בני ישראל -- Pinchos the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon HaKohen, turned back My wrath from upon Bnei Yisroel, when he zealously avenged Me among them** — he deflected the wrath of the letter “mem,” which hung, full of blood, above the heads of Yisroel; **“בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם”** — he zealously avenged Hashem **“בתוך מ”**, by capturing the letter “mem,” thus, sparing the lives of the people of Yisroel: **ולא בליתי: את בני ישראל בקנאתי**. This is the gist of the holy Zohar’s elucidation.

In the Future, at the time of the geulah, HKB”H Will Extract the Letter “Mem” from the Yetzer Hara

Let us now examine the explanation of the divine kabbalist Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac of Kamarna, zy”a, in his commentary on the Zohar, Zohar Chai, to better understand this passage in the Zohar. We will expand on his sacred words based on the writings of the Tolds Yaakov Yosef (Kedoshim 2) citing his teacher and master, the Baal Shem Tov, addressing the Gemoreh’s statement (Succah 52.): **“לעתיד לבוא מביאו הקב”ה: ליצר הרע ושוחטו בפני הצדיקים ובפני הרשעים”** — **in the future, HKB”H will bring the yetzer hara and slaughter him in front of the tzaddikim and in front of the wicked.**

From the holy Zohar and from Midrashim, it is known that the yetzer hara’s name is **סמא”ל**. The Baal Shem Tov reveals to us that the letter “mem” in his name, embodies the evil of the yetzer. In the future, at the time of the geulah, when HKB”H slaughters the yetzer hara, He will extract the “mem” from his name. The remaining letters, **סא”ל**, constitute one of the seventy-two holy names derived from the three pesukim in parshas Beshalach (14, 19-21); his good portion will transform into an angel of kedushah.

Still, we must address the allusion and significance of the letter “mem” — representing the evil portion of the yetzer hara. The sefer Kehillas Yaakov states that the letter “mem” from the name **סמא”ל**, alludes to the word **מו”ת**, meaning death — signifying the fact that he uses it to kill his victims, for the yetzer hara is the Malach HaMoves. This is taught in the Gemoreh (Bava Basra 16.): **“הוא שטן, הוא יצר הרע, הוא מלאך המות”** — the “soton,” the “yetzer hara,” and the “Malach HaMoves” are all one and the same. This is the significance of the fact that HKB”H will extract the letter “mem” — representing death — from the yetzer’s name. At that time in the future, death will be eliminated from creation and all of the dead will be resurrected, as it is written (Yeshayah 25, 8): **“בלע המות לנצח”** — **He will eliminate death forever.**

Pinchos Extracted the Letter “Mem” in a Manner Similar to the Future Redemption

Let us now address the words of the great Rabbi from Kamarna, zy”a. He provides the following wonderful explanation of the Zohar hakadosh on our parsha: Pinchos battled with the Malach HaMoves, whose name is **סמא”ל**, to extract the letter “mem,” signifying death, **מו”ת**, from his name. The Malach HaMoves intended to annihilate Yisroel, chas v’chalilah, in the aftermath of their awful transgression in Shitim, utilizing the evil portion of his name, the letter “mem”--his instrument of death. As a result of Pinchos’ action, the three letters of his name **סא”ל** remained, transforming him into a good malach.

Having achieved this illuminating insight, we can now understand why Pinchos was rewarded, measure for measure, so substantially: (a) he was transformed into an angel that would live on forever and (b) he became Eliyahu HaNavi who would herald the arrival of the geulah in the end of days. In essence, his actions mirrored the anticipated actions of HKB”H in the future, when He will slaughter the yetzer hara. He waged a battle of kedushah under dire circumstances and prevailed; he extracted the “mem” representing death from the Malach HaMoves and transformed him into a good malach, corresponding to the name **סא”ל**.

Accordingly, it was fitting that: (a) the Malach HaMoves would have no power over him, allowing him to live forever and (b) he would merit being the one to herald the final geulah at the end of days, when the time will finally come to extract the letter "mem" from the Malach HaMoves, once and for all.

This, then, is the meaning of the possuk: **פִּינְחָס בֶּן-בִּינָחָס אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן-אֶהֱרֹן הִכְהֵן הָשִׁיב אֶת חַמְתֵּי מַעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** — he defused the wrath and devastation of the letter "mem," which was suspended in the air, full of blood, above the heads of Yisroel, bringing it down by means of the ineffable Name; **בְּקִנְאוֹ אֶת קִנְאֹתַי בְּתוֹכְכֶם** — when he zealously avenged Hashem by extracting the "mem" from the Malach HaMoves, indicated by the word **בְּתוֹכְכֶם** — which breaks down to **בְּתוֹךְ ס**, he accomplished this feat by controlling the "mem."

All in all, the effect of Pinchos' actions were similar to the anticipated events at the time of the future geulah — when HKB"H will extract the letter "mem" from the name of the yetzer hara. **לִכֵּן אֲמַר הַנְּנִי נוֹתֵן** — **Therefore, say: Behold! I give him My covenant of peace.** This should be understood as per the Midrash: **אֲמַר לוֹ הַקֵּב־הָ, אֵתְּהָ נָתַתְּ שְׁלוֹם בֵּינֵינוּ: בְּיָמֵינוּ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה** — HKB"H indicated to Pinchos that just as he established peace between Yisroel and HKB"H in this world by nullifying the decree of death from the people of Yisroel -- **הוּא** — **אֵתְּהָ לְעֵתִיד לְבוֹא אֵתְּהָ הוּא** — **he will have the privilege of doing so once again in the future, when he comes to announce the geulah to Yisroel at the end of days.**

The א"ל's Benefit from the Letters מ"ס Will Be Terminated in the Future

Seeing as it is the nature of Torah to be elucidated in seventy different aspects, let us suggest another aspect concerning Pinchos' struggle with the Malach HaMoves over the letter "mem" — which hung over the heads of the people of Yisroel. First, let us recall what we have learned in the Gemoreh (Sanhedrin 82.). When Zimri the son of Saloo sinned with Kozbi the daughter of Tzur, the halocheh concerning one who has intimate relations with a non-Jewess momentarily escaped

Moshe. Until Pinchos came along, recalled the halocheh and said to Moshe: **לֹא כִךָ לִימַדְתָּנִי בְּרִדְתָּךְ מֵהָר סִינַי**, "did you not teach me, when you descended from Har Sinai, that one who has intimate relations with a non-Jewish woman should be struck dead by zealots?" Moshe replied to Pinchos that since he was the one that recalled the halocheh, it was only fitting that he should carry out the prescribed punishment. The commentaries labor over Pinchos' statement to Moshe; why did he specifically emphasize the fact that he heard this halocheh from Moshe when he descended from Har Sinai?

Let us introduce an idea found in our holy sources which originates with the Shla hakadosh (Chayei Sarah). The yetzer hara, known as **סַמַּא**, is sustained by the letters **א** at the end of his name. In the Future to Come, HKB"H will terminate its sustenance from the letters **א** and it will cease to exist. Seemingly, this contradicts what we have learned from the Baal Shem Tov — that in the future, HKB"H will remove the letter "mem" from the name **סַמַּא**, leaving in its stead the holy name **סַא**. If so, why does the "samech-mem," during periods of exile, only derive sustenance from the two letters **א** and not from all three letters **סַא**?

Let us suggest a plausible explanation. HKB"H specifically chose the name **סַמַּא** for the yetzer hara, so that the letter "mem" would separate the letters of the name **סַא**. This prevents it from deriving sustenance from this sacred and very powerful name. In the meantime, however, it is able to receive sustenance from the two letters **א**, which appear uninterrupted in its name, until such time as that sustenance will be terminated as well.

The Orach LaTzaddik Suggests a Method of Depriving the מ"ס of Its Sustenance

Let us present an extraordinary idea from the Orach LaTzaddik (Vayishlach), authored by the great Rabbi Eliezer Lipa, the son of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, zy" a. He suggests that the way to deprive the "samech-mem" from drawing sustenance from the letters **א** is by transforming the open "mem" into a closed "mem."

So long as the "mem" in the name סמאל is in its open form, it signifies that the name is extended — i.e. there are more letters to come — in which case, there is a connection and the ability to draw from the letters אל at the end of the name. If the "mem" can be transformed into its closed form — indicating the end of a word — then the name will effectively be limited to the first two letters סמ and the ability to draw sustenance from the last two letters will be blocked.

The question then is how is the transformation of the "mem" from its open form to its closed form accomplished? Let us explain the matter in a manner that is relevant to each and every Jew. The Torah was given to Yisroel for the purpose of safeguarding our kedushah, like a protective wall; it guides us as to what we should do and what we should not do. This protection is alluded to by the closed form of the letter "mem," ם, which resembles an enclosure walled in on all four sides.

How beautifully this fits with an idea found in the Megaleh Amukos (Terumah). He writes that Bnei Yisroel travelled through the desert wilderness surrounded by encampments on all four sides — resembling a closed "mem." As per our discussion, these encampments protected Yisroel like fortified walls, akin to the closed form of the letter "mem," ם; thus, the boundaries of kedushah were maintained.

Nevertheless, the yetzer hara entices members of Yisroel to overstep these boundaries and break through these walls of kedushah. The wisest of all men states (Koheles 10, 8): "ופורץ גדר ישכנו נחש" — **he who breaks down a wall will be bitten by a snake**; similarly, the prophet states (Yechezkel 7, 22): "ובאו — **בה פריצים וחללוה** — **and lawless people will come into it and profane it**. The result of breaking down the wall of kedushah, chas v'shalom — represented by the closed "mem" — is the open "mem." The open form of the "mem" has a break in its lower portion, signifying that the break is due to earthly desires rather than spiritual matters.

We can suggest that this is why HKB"H gave us the Torah by requiring Moshe Rabeinu to remain in the

heavens forty days and forty nights. This was meant to teach us that the reason the Torah was given to Yisroel was to serve as a fortified wall for Yisroel's protection — resembling the closed form of the letter "mem," whose numerical value is forty. This can also be interpreted as the rationale for punishing one who violates the commandments with forty lashes (Devarim 25, 2): "ארבעים יכנו" — **he shall strike him forty times** — forty lashes for violating the wall of kedushah represented by the closed "mem" (numerical value forty).

This also explains incredibly why Rabeinu hakadosh chose to begin Torah she'b'al peh with an open "mem": "מ'אימת קורין את שמע בערבין", and to conclude with a closed "mem": "לא מצא הקב"ה כלי מחזיק ברכה" לישראל אלא השלום, שנאמר ה' יברך את עמו בשלום". This illustrates once again that the Torah which was given to us over a forty day period, is designed to protect us like a fortified wall, resembling a closed "mem."

So, Rabeinu hakadosh cleverly began the Torah she'b'al peh with an open "mem," indicating that the purpose of engaging in Torah study is to repair the breach in the wall of kedushah — represented by the opening in the lower portion of the "mem." If, however, we are fortunate enough to engage in Torah study, then at the completion of our studies, we will achieve the status of the closed "mem." For, only by means of Torah study will we merit to repair the breach in the wall of kedushah.

An Open "Mem" in the Walls of Yerushalayim

I was delighted to find corroboration for this noble idea in the writings of one of our early commentaries, Rabeinu Bachayei, on parshas Vayechi (Bereishit 47, 28). He comments on the fact that we find two instances in Tanach of "mem"s that do not follow grammatical protocol. In one instance, we find a closed form of "mem" in the middle of a word (Yeshayah 9, 6): "לפרבה המשרה ולשלום אין קץ" — **upon the one with the greatness in dominion and the boundless peace** — note the closed "mem" which is the second letter of the first word of this possuk.

In contrast, we find an open form of the letter "mem" at the end of a word in the following possuk (Nechemiah 2, 13): "ואהי שבר בחומות ירושלים אשר המ פרוצים" — **I contemplated the walls of Yerushalayim which had been breached** — note the word "המ" instead of "הם". Rabeinu Bachayei provides an explanation for these two anomalous "mem"s in the name of the Midrash: "ואמרו במדרש שבא הרמז, כאשר יסתמו חומות ירושלים שהם עתה פתוחים ופרוצים בזמן הגלות, אז תפתח המשרה" — when the breach in the walls of Yerushalayim is sealed--they are currently breached during this period of exile--then the greatness and dominion of Yisroel, which is currently concealed, will become apparent to all.

In other words, the closed "mem" in the words "למרב" alludes to the greatness of Yisroel, which is currently concealed; the open "mem" in the words "המ פרוצים" alludes to the breach in the walls of Yerushalayim, which is currently open. Clearly, it is our obligation to see to it that the breach in the walls of Yerushalayim is closed, so that the dominion of Yisroel is realized once more.

Thus, we have achieved an important insight into the significance of the open "mem" in the yetzer's name "מא". The yetzer attempts to entice one to breach the wall of kedushah, creating an open "mem" out of the closed "mem." If successful, chas v'shalom, he can easily receive sustenance from the name "א". On the other hand, if we return to HKB"H by performing teshuvah, and close the breaches in our wall of sanctity, we can effectively transform the open "mem" in the yetzer's name to a closed "mem," and deny him any sustenance from the name "א".

"Did You Not Teach Me This Halocheh When You Descended from Har Sinai?"

Based on what we have learned, we can begin to comprehend why Moshe revealed the halocheh of "הבועל ארמית קנאים פוגעים בו" — **one who has intimate relations with a non-Jewish woman, zealots may kill him** — specifically when he descended from Har Sinai. It is a well-established principle that safeguarding our sanctity in matters of immorality is the foundation of

Yisroel's continued existence as the chosen people. Failure to safeguard this wall of kedushah, would lead to assimilation and intermingling, chas v'shalom, with the other nations. Our divine psalmist proclaimed (Tehillim 106): "ויתערבו בגוים וילמדו ממעשיהם" — **they mingled with the nations and learned their deeds.**

For this very reason, HKB"H warned us in the sacred Torah (Devorim 7, 3): "ולא תתחתן בם, בתך לא תתן: כי יסיר את בנך מאחרי ועבדו — אלהים אחרים וחרה אף ה' בכם והשמידך מהר" — **You shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughter to his son, and you shall not take his daughter for your son, for he will cause your child to turn away from after Me and they will worship the gods of others; then Hashem's wrath will burn against you, and He will destroy you quickly.** We see that even in Egypt, when Yisroel fell to the forty-ninth level of contamination and impurity, nevertheless, they remained strict with regards to issues of immorality; in this merit, they were redeemed from Egypt.

Accordingly, HKB"H arranged for Moshe to reveal this halocheh -- "הבועל ארמית קנאים פוגעים בו" — specifically upon his descent from Har Sinai. Moshe Rabeinu came down from Har Sinai only after he had spent forty days and forty nights on the mountain. As explained, these forty days allude to the fact that the Torah constitutes a fortified wall protecting our borders of kedushah — similar to the shape of a closed "mem," whose numerical value is forty. So, one who cohabits with a non-Jewish woman breaches this wall of kedushah and destroys the moral foundation upon which the continued existence of the people of Yisroel rests. Therefore, in the times that the Beis HaMikdosh stood, zealots were permitted to kill him in order to seal this serious breach in the wall of kedushah. This, then, is what Pinchos wisely conveyed to Moshe: "לא — **Is this not what you taught me when you descended from Har Sinai?** He was communicating the fact that Moshe's forty day stay on the mountain represented a closed "mem," emphasizing the serious nature and inherent dangers of this sort of sin of immorality — this breach in the wall of Jewish sanctity.

When Bnei Yisroel sinned in Shitim with the daughters of Moav, because of Bilam's counsel and led by Zimri the son of Saloo, this wall of kedushah was breached. As a result, a side of the closed "mem" was opened, creating an open "mem," with a breach in its side. This created an opportunity for the Malach HaMoves to arouse wrath against Yisroel; he could now take advantage of the open "mem" in his name, representing death, מ'וֹת, and initiate the plague that devastated the people of Yisroel.

Upon seeing the open letter "mem," full of blood, suspended above the heads of Yisroel, Pinchos understood that the side of the "mem" had been compromised due to the breach in Yisroel's wall of kedushah. Therefore, he reacted zealously to avenge Hashem and to seal and secure this serious breach. He uttered the ineffable Name in order to sanctify the Name of Heaven, and succeeded in removing the "mem" from above the heads of Yisroel. With this captured "mem" in hand, he joined it to the numerical value of his name פִּינְחוֹס, which equals 208, ר"ח, creating a רמ"ח (the numerical value of his name, ר"ח, plus the letter "mem"), a spear. He used this spear to kill Zimri and Kozbi and to securely close the devastating breach in the wall of kedushah.

Pinchos Converted the Open "Mem" into a Closed "Mem"

Now, come and see how this entire interpretation of the events is alluded to in the possuk: **"פִּינְחוֹס בֶּן אֵלְעָזָר בֶּן אַהֲרֹן הֵכִיחַ אֶת חַמְתֵּי מַעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" -- Pinchos the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon HaKohen, turned back My wrath from upon Bnei Yisroel.** The word "מעל" can be broken down to read מ'על, meaning the open "mem" was above; in other words, Pinchos removed the wrath due to the open "mem" hanging above the heads of Yisroel; **"בְּקִנְאוֹ אֶת קִנְאֹתֵי בְּתוּכֵם" -- when he zealously avenged Me among them.** The word "בתוכם" can be understood as "בתוך ם", by dealing with the "mem"; he sealed the breach in the open "mem," and converted it into a closed "mem," ם. So, instead of the

name אֵל having an open "mem" allowing it to draw strength and sustenance from the name אֵל, the name changed to אֵל־ם with a closed "mem," preventing it from receiving any such benefit from the name אֵל.

According to this interpretation, it turns out that Pinchos performed the same action that HKB"H is destined to perform at the time of the future geulah — when He will slaughter the yetzer hara and terminate the "samech-mem"s benefit from the letters אֵל. Additionally, Pinchos closed the breach that been created in the wall of the closed "mem," that had allowed the Malach HaMoves to activate the open "mem," signifying מ'וֹת, death, over the heads of Yisroel.

Therefore, Pinchos was rewarded, measure for measure, to herald the arrival of the final geulah at the end of days. At that time, HKB"H will completely terminate the ability of the "samech-mem" to derive any benefit or sustenance from the name אֵל, and Eliyahu will come and announce to us that the breach in the open letter "mem" corresponding to the breach in the walls of Yerushalayim has been repaired. This is alluded to by HKB"H's declaration: **"לִכֵּן אֲמַר הַנְּנִי נוֹתֵן לּוֹ אֶת -- בְּרִיתִי שְׁלוֹם" -- Therefore, say: Behold! I give him My covenant of peace.** The last word of the possuk ends with a closed "mem," signifying that, in the Future to Come, HKB"H will seal the name of the yetzer hara forever; as a result, peace will prevail between Yisroel and their Father in Heaven.

This, too, is the meaning of the Midrash: **"לִכֵּן אֲמַר הַנְּנִי נוֹתֵן לּוֹ אֶת בְּרִיתִי שְׁלוֹם - פִּנְחוֹס הוּא אֵלֵיהוּ, אֲמַר לּוֹ -- הַקֵּב, אֵת אֶתָּה נָתַת שְׁלוֹם בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבֵינִי בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה" -- just as Pinchos, who is Eliyahu, restored peace between Yisroel and HKB"H in this world, by sealing the breach in the wall of kedushah; אֵף לְעֵתִיד לְבוֹא אֵתָּה הוּא שְׁעֵתִיד; לִיתֵן שְׁלוֹם בֵּינִי לְבֵין בְּנֵי, שְׁנֹאמַר הִנֵּה אֲנִכִּי שׁוֹלַח לְכֶם אֶת אֵלֵיהוּ הַנְּבִיא לְפָנַי בּוֹא יוֹם ה' וְגו' וְהָשִׁיב לְב אֲבוֹת -- על בְּנֵים" -- so, too, he will restore peace between Me and My children, in the Future to Come; by doing so, he will seal the breach in the open "mem" of the walls of Yerushalayim swiftly, in our times. Amen.**