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Light reading  
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Parshas Pinchas, Tammuz 5784

## When the Path to Peace is Through the Spear

### BEIS HAMIKDASH THOUGHT

While in exile after the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash, Hashem told the prophet Yechezkel to teach the Jewish people the details of the design of the Beis Hamikdash.

Yechezkel challenged Hashem, “how are they capable of making the Beis Hamikdash while they are in exile? First let them leave their exile and then I will tell them!”

Hashem responded “just because My children are in exile should the construction of My home be neglected?... Let them involve themselves in learning about the structure of the Beis Hamikdash, and I will consider it as if they are involved in building it.”

The mystics and Jewish philosophers understood that the design of the Beis Hamikdash parallels the soul and contains within it lessons on how we are to serve Hashem, so that His presence can rest within us and we become a Mishkan for His presence.

The integrity of the physical structure of the Beis Hamikdash is dependent on the integrity of the spiritual Beis Hamikdash in the souls and service of the Jewish people.

The Jewish people were in exile because of their sins and the destruction of their inner spiritual “temples”. This resulted in the destruction of the physical Temple.

Hashem instructed Yechezkel to teach the Jewish people the details of the Beis Hamikdash, so that they could reflect on the lessons hidden within its design and rebuild their own temples, paving the way for the restoration of the physical structure as well.

The Three Weeks, when we mourn for the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash is an appropriate time to study about the Beis Hamikdash and become partners in its rebuilding.

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Anyone looking at the surface of the opening of this week’s Parsha, would see Zimri as a poor innocent civilian and Pinchas as a violent aggressor. Pinchas was a zealot out for blood who took the law into his own hands; a man of war and violence. This is how the Tribe of Shimon viewed him.

But in truth it was the actions of Zimri that were evil and brought a plague upon the Jewish people. Pinchas with his zealotry ended the plague and brought peace to the Jewish people.

The Seder Hadoros writes that Pinchas was a reincarnation of our forefather Yitzchak. This is alluded to in the shared Gematria of their names **יִצְחָק** and **פִּינְחָס** (208). Zimri was a reincarnation of the soul of Esav.

Esav was the embodiment of evil. He engaged in murder, rape and idolatry, even attempting to kill his own brother Yaakov. Yitzchak should have killed Esav to put an end to his evil, like the law of the Ben Sorer Umoredh requires.

But Yitzchak’s love blinded him to Esav’s evil. His misplaced compassion, pacifism and failure to take action, allowed Esav’s evil to promulgate. Esav became the father of Edom, the nations of the world who are the source of the scourge of antisemitism, a hatred, that has caused so much innocent Jewish blood to be spilled throughout the centuries.

When Zimri as a Gilgul, failed to rectify the sins of Esav, continuing in his evil and sinful ways, Pinchas as the Gilgul of Yitzchak took action and in doing so rectified in part, the failure of Yitzchak.

Taking a different approach, the Kabbalistic texts teach that Zimri was a reincarnation of Shechem and Kozbi was a reincarnation of Dinah. When Yaakov returned to Eretz Yisrael, Shechem abducted and molested his daughter Dinah. This sin was repeated when Zimri took Kozbi for immoral purposes.

This episode too illustrates the harm caused by misplaced compassion, that would allow evil to flourish. Hearing that their sister Dinah had been violated, her brothers Shimon and Levi were enraged. They schemed to take revenge and invaded Shechem, killing not only Shechem, but all men of military age. They too were guilty for supporting Shechem’s actions and failing to bring him to justice.

But Yaakov was upset with his son’s actions, fearing that their reprisal would anger the inhabitants of the land, causing them to turn on him. Shimon and Levi responded “shall he treat our sister like a harlot?”. In the face of the horrific violation of their sister and the need to protect her, there was no place for consideration of what the surrounding nations will say or what

may result. The evil must be punished and the message heard clearly that “such a thing shall not be done”, to ensure that it never happens again.

Like Shimon and Levi before him, Pinchas acted with courage and Mesirat Nefesh to fight evil. He did not worry about reprisal or care if he were labelled a murderer. He knew that the evil embodied in Zimri must be uprooted to bring peace to his people.

The lesson from the above is so relevant to the war that Israel is waging against Hamas. On Shemini Atzeres, the barbaric Hamas terrorists murdered our brothers and sisters and violated them in the most horrific manner, embracing and glorifying the evil ways of Esav and Shechem.

There are those like Yaakov, who fear that the nations of the world will turn against us and Israel will become a pariah if we fight back with strength against those who attack us. They fear that a strong response will lose us the support of our allies or bring international condemnation or broadening of the conflict. In the name of peace and love of humanity, they call for restraint, proportionality and ceasefire.

But far from bringing peace, their pacifism and misplaced compassion for evildoers of the worst kind, would only reward terror, encourage and embolden the enemies of Israel and allow Hamas to regroup and continue to be a threat to our sisters and brothers.

As a people, we desire peace more than anything. We do not want and did not ask for this war. But when we have a murderous, evil population committing such atrocities against our people, the words of Shimon and Levi ring in our ears and pulse in our veins, “should they treat our sister like a harlot?”

Like Levi and Shimon, we are fighting a just war, to eradicate terrorists; murderers and rapists and those who aided and supported them in their heinous crimes against humanity. And just as Yaakov’s fears of what the other nations will do was just a perceived fear that never materialised, we will see that the threats of delegitimisation are just a bluff and should not be given credibility by allowing it to blind our decisions.

Far from bringing war and being labelled as a man of violence, Pinchas was rewarded with a covenant of peace - because fighting to eradicate evil is the only path to real and lasting peace and security.

**שְׁלוֹם** has the same Gematria as **זֶהוּ מְשִׁיחַ**, “this is Moshiach”. Moshiach will bring peace to world through the final and ultimate eradication of evil. Then “nation will not lift up sword against nation, nor will they learn war anymore”.

# Mechitzas at Weddings and other Gatherings

Rabbi Yonason Johnson

The beginning of Parshas Pinchas is a continuation from the end of Parshas Balak, where the Jewish men engaged in forbidden relations with the Bnos Moav. The Midrash describes how they were lured into this sin through fraternising with the Bnos Moav and by not keeping proper boundaries in the interactions between men and women.

One of the boundaries that we have to protect our purity is the Mechitza. All Shules will have a Mechitza for Davening, but what about at other gatherings such as weddings and Shiurim?

## Background

The source of having a Mechitza to separate between men and women is found in a Baraisa in Meseches Sukkah<sup>1</sup>, describing the Simchas Beis Hashoeva on Sukkos in the Beis Hamikdosh.

“Originally they would have the women standing on the inside (the Ezras Noshim) and the men on the outside (on the Temple Mount), but this led to Kalus Rosh (inappropriate frivolous behaviour)... So they enacted that the women should sit above and the men down below”. The Tosefta elaborates; they would make elevated galleries for the women to stand on.

The Gemara questions how these galleries could be added, since every aspect of the Temple’s design had to be according to the instruction of Hashem through the Neviim?

The Gemara answers that the sages found a Posuk which teaches that a separation between men and women is required. Zechariah<sup>2</sup> prophesies about the future Hespel for Moshiach ben Yosef, that the “The land will eulogise in families. The house of Dovid on their own and their wives on their own...”

The Maharsha adds that it would also be permissible to add these structures simply in order to prevent people coming to an issuer.

## A Mechitza for Davening

This Gemara is the basis for having a Mechitza in Shule. The need to have a Mechitza in a holy place at the time of davening is held unanimously. Igros Moshe<sup>3</sup> even rules that this requirement in Mideoraisa, hence it could be added to the design of the Beis Hamikdosh. Other Poskim view the Mechitza as a Rabbinic requirement.

## At Other Gatherings

What about having a Mechitza at other gatherings such as a Simcha, shiur, speech or concert?

Concerning shiurim, the Mordechai<sup>4</sup> refers to “the Mechitza at the time of the Drosha”. Halachic authorities including; the Maharil, the Taz<sup>5</sup>, the Alter Rebbe<sup>6</sup>, Mishna Berurah<sup>7</sup> and Aruch Hashulchan all refer to this Mechitza in the Laws of Shabbos. This type of temporary wall may be erected on Shabbos because it is put up purely for reasons of Tznius.

The source of this idea of having a Mechitza at a Drosha is based on the Gemara<sup>8</sup> which describes how the Amora Abaye would set up earthenware barrels between the men and the women. Rashi says that this was at the time that they came to hear the Drosha.

Concerning a Mechitza at other gatherings, in one Teshuvah, Igros Moshe<sup>9</sup> writes that it may be required. A proof that a Mechitza is needed at such gatherings is brought from the very Posuk used by the Gemara to derive the requirement of a Mechitza which is referring to a Hespel.

However in a subsequent Teshuvah<sup>10</sup>, Igros Moshe writes that it appears that a Mechitza is not necessarily required. He brings a proof from the fact that men and women would eat the Korban Pesach together and a Mechitza was not required. On the contrary, a Mechitza would be problematic because the Korban Pesach must be eaten as one group.

Rav Moshe’s position is clear in later Teshuvos<sup>11</sup>. All events which are open to the public require a Mechitza. A wedding however is a private (invitation only) affair and therefore a Mechitza is not required. Since a shiur is open to the public, a Mechitza is required min hadin. For Kiruv activities where there is no other option and people will not come if there was a Mechitza he is more lenient.

The Seridei Eish<sup>12</sup> rules that due to present day circumstances, at gatherings such as weddings, speeches and Drashos, a Mechitza is not required. It is sufficient that the men and women sit separately. The Mordechai is describing an extra practise of Midas Chassidus (going beyond the letter of the law).

Other Poskim who require a Mechitza at all gatherings where men and women are attending include; the Shevet Halevi<sup>13</sup>, Divrei Yoel<sup>14</sup> and Be’er Moshe<sup>15</sup>.

Interestingly, the Be’er Moshe writes that in Europe a Mechitza as not always used, but this was because the women kept to a very high level of Tznius in dress. Nowadays however a Mechitza is required.

Divrei Shalom<sup>16</sup> distinguishes between Simchas and similar gatherings where there is a concern of Kalus Rosh and a Mechitza is required min hadin, and a shiur where a Mechitza would only be a Midas Chassidus since it’s an atmosphere of Yiras Shamayim.

There is a letter of the Lubavitcher Rebbe<sup>17</sup> on this topic. The letter was in reference to a shiur that was being given in Russia before the fall of Communism. Due to the unique needs of that time and place, the Rebbe gave an allowance and permitted the shiur to take place without a Mechitza. Even still, the Rebbe stresses that the men and women should still sit separately.

The Sefer Dvar Melech<sup>18</sup> records the response of the Rebbe to a Shaliach who wished to host a mixed dinner so as not to turn away potential donors. The Rebbe replied “Why should you push away certain Yiras shamayim (affecting all of the participants) on account of a Safek in extra money (from only a few people)”.

## Conclusion

Whilst there are halachic authorities who permit separate seating at shiurim without requiring a Mechitza, there is certainly a Midas Chassidus and according to many authorities a halachic obligation to have a Mechitza. At Simchas there may even be stronger case for requiring a Mechitza due to the stronger possibility of Kalus Rosh.

For Chabad communities, especially in light of the view of the Rebbe’s letter quoted above, it is certainly appropriate to have a Mechitza at all gatherings where both men and women are present, including shiurim, Simchas, Kiddushim, events and concerts.

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|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. 51b           | 11.Y.D. 4:24 and O.C. 5:11     |
| 2. 12:12         | 12.1:77                        |
| 3. O.C. 1:39     | 13.1:29                        |
| 4. Shabbos 3:311 | 14.Vol. 1 O.C. 10              |
| 5. O.C. 315:1    | 15.4:417                       |
| 6. 315:3         | 16.O.C. 8                      |
| 7. 315:5         | 17.Shaar halocha uminhog 3:243 |
| 8. Kiddushin 81a | 18. 1999 p127                  |
| 9. O.C. 1:41     |                                |
| 10.O.C. 1:41     |                                |

