

This week's cited commentary offers at least two highly creative readings. The first can perhaps best be understood as applying a Midrash Halakhah sensibility to a narrative. "bekan'o et kin'ati betokham" is analyzed as follows:

It should simply have said "bekan'o betokham"; why does it add "et kin'ati"? To add another act of kana'ut.

While the question is valid within the framework of midrash aggadah, and indeed within any close-reading interpretive framework, there is no ordinary-language grammatical justification for the answer; like Midrash Halakhah, it must assume that the text is written in code, with the means of decryption given in advance. But such a claim must show that the decrypting method can produce plausible meaning consistently.

The second, bemekhilat kevodo, really can't be justified textually, and I won't bother trying, although the retranslation of "vehoytah lo" as "and there will (also) be for him", rather than as "and it will be for him" is certainly useful, and the derivative conclusion that the berit kehunah is earned, whereas the berit shalom is given, deserves consideration.

But there are interpretive failures, or errors, that nonetheless yield extremely valuable thoughts – my favorite example of this is the Kotzker's Amud HaEmet, which when I last had the courage to read it seemed to me full of coruscating insights generated by typographical errors in Rashi. And the Keli Yakar's retelling of the Pinchas episode is a very useful framework for addressing the question of how one can acknowledge personal involvement, and personal risk, in an issue without letting those acknowledgements generate paralysis. More sharply, how one can prevent unscrupulous opponents from marginalizing one by making personal attacks and then claiming that you must disqualify yourself because "it's become personal".

In Keli Yakar's narrative, Mosheh may be prevented from acting against Zimri/Kazbi by the fear that he will be accused of overcompensating, or of hypocrisy, because of his own marriage to the daughter of a (former) idolatrous priest. We don't actually know that this is why Mosheh fails to act – but Pinchas uses the possibility to legitimate acting without Mosheh's authorization.

Pinchas himself, moreover, faced the same and worse accusations. Why does he trust his judgment when his teacher Mosheh, in the same circumstances, apparently would not have? Is that not a more serious gesture of disrespect than stating a legal opinion?

Shabbat Shalom!

Aryeh Klapper

www.torahleadership.org

פינחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן וגומר –
הכל לרבותא נקט -

- כי אף על פי שהיה בן אלעזר אשר לקח לו מבנות פוטיאל מזרע יתרו שפיטם עגלים לע"ג, והיה לו למנוע את עצמו ממעשה זה פן יאמרו לו ליצני הדור "בן יתרו מי התיר לאביך, ואיך אתה מקנא על המדינית? וכן "אבי אביך פיטם עגלים לע"ג, ואיך אתה מקנא על הע"ג?"
- והיה בן אהרן הכהן, ויאמרו לו: "אבי אביך זה פיטם עגלים לע"ג, וזה עשה העגל", ואע"פ כן לא היה מקפיד על כבודו.

ורש"י פי' "שהיו שבטים מבזין אותו כו", ויכול להיות שזה כוונתו, כי ע"י שהיו השבטים מבזין אותו, בא הכתוב ויחסו, לומר 'ראה כי איש חסיד הוא, אע"פ שע"י שהוא בן אלעזר בן אהרן היה להם מקום לבזותו, מכל מקום נכנס בעובי הקורה ולא היה חושש לכבודו".
ועוד הגיד לנו הכתוב שהיה משיב חמה בן משיב חמה, ע"כ אחז מעשה אבותיו בידו.

בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם –

"קנאתי בהם" לא נאמר, אלא "בתוכם" – לימד על כל קידוש השם שצריך להיות בתוך בני ישראל דווקא, וכמ"ש "ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל", ולכך נאמר "ויקם מתוך העדה", והודיע לנו שבחו של פינחס שהיה מוסר נפשו על קידוש השם, ואע"פ שהיה בתוך העדה, מקום מסוכן מפני קרובי זמרי, מ"מ שם נפשו בכפו. ועל צד הרמז "לקח רמח בידו" כי במעשה הזה שם כל רמ"ח איבריו בכפו. והיה מקנא ב' קנאות, א' על ע"ג, וא' על הזנות –
לכך נאמר "בקנאו את קנאתי" –
או:

א' לכבוד הש"י וא' לכבוד משה –

כי כל המחלל השם אינו חולק כבוד לרבו בק"ו, שאם אין השכינה חשובה כנגדו, רבו לא כל שכן?! וכן העיז פניו כנגדו ואמר לו "בת יתרו מי התיר לך",

וע"ז סמך פינחס שהורה הלכה למעשה בפני משה רבו כי אמר שרבו נוגע בדבר פן יאמרו לו "בת יתרו מי התיר לך".

ולכך נאמר "לכן אמור הנני נותן לו את בריתי שלום", והיל"ל "לכן אמור לו", אלא ביאורו שהקב"ה אמר למשה 'לכן אמור לכל ישראל על עצמך "הנני נותן לו את בריתי שלום", כדי שלא יאמרו ישראל שאין אתה בשלום עם פינחס על שהורה הלכה בפניך. לכן תודיע לרבים ותאמר מצדך 'הנני נותן לו וגומר', והנני קאי על משה,

וכנגד מה שקינא לאל-היו אמר "והיתה לו ולזרעו אחריו ברית כהונת עולם תחת אשר קנא לאל-היו", וטעם זה אינו קאי על מ"ש "הנני נותן לו וגו'" לפי שזה שכרו על שקינא למשה כאמור.

ואמר "ויכפר על בני ישראל" כי הביא את הרשע הזה לכפרה על כל ישראל, ונחשב לו כהקרבת פרים וכבשים, ע"כ נשבע ה' "אתה כהן לעולם אשר התחלת בשימוש כהונה".

“Pinchas ben El’azar ben Aharon haKohen . . .” –

Each generation adds to the point –

- that even though he was the son of El’azar, who married one of the daughter of Putiyel, of the descendants of Yitro who fattened calves for idolatry, and he had a basis for withholding himself from this deed lest the mockers of the generation say to him “Who permitted a descendant of Yitro to your father, that you can be zealous about this Midianite woman?! Or “Your grandfather fattened calves for idolatry, so how can you be zealous regarding idolatry?!”
- and he was the son of Aharon haKohen, so they would say to him: “One grandfather of your fattened calves for idolatry, and this one made the Calf!”

nonetheless he did not decide based on concern for his own honor.

Rashi explained that “the tribes were denigrating him . . .”, and perhaps this is his intention as well, that because the tribes were denigrating him, Scripture came to provide his ancestry, saying “See that he is a pious man, even though because he is the son of El’azar ben Aharon there was an opening for them to denigrate him, nonetheless he ‘entered the width of the beam’ [anyone with a useful translation of this idiom is encouraged to contact me] and was not concerned for his honor.

Scripture also tells us that he was ‘a so of a’ and therefore took the deeds of his ancestors as his model.

“When his zealotry was expressed – My zealotry – in their midst” –

Scripture doesn’t write “My Zealotry upon them”, but rather “in their midst” – this teaches that all Sanctification of the Name needs to be specifically “in the midst of the Children of Israel”, as Scripture writes “and I will be sanctified in the midst of the Children of Israel”. Therefore it writes “And he arose in the midst of the community”, and told us praise of Pinchas for risking his life for the Sanctification of the Name. Even though he was in the midst of the community, a dangerous place owing to the presence of Zimri’s relatives, he put his life in his hands.

Pinchas expressed two zealotries, one regarding idolatry, and one regarding sexual sin – therefore Scripture writes “When his zealotry was expressed – My zealotry”.

Or:

One zealotry for the honor of G-d, and one zealotry for the honor of Mosheh –

because does not anyone who desecrates the Name a fortiori not give honor to his teacher (Mosheh)!? And indeed (Zimri) was brazen before Mosheh, saying to him “Who permitted the daughter of Yitro to you!”.

On this Pinchas relied when he issued a practical halakhic ruling before his teacher Mosheh, saying that his teacher was ‘personally involved in the matter’ (i.e. disqualified to rule) lest they say to him “Who permitted the daughter of Yitro to you!”, and therefore Scripture says “therefore say: ‘Behold I am giving him my covenant of peace”, when it should have said “therefore say to him”, the explanation being that The Holy One Who is Blessed said to Mosheh: ‘Therefore say to all Israel, speaking for yourself, “Behold I am giving him my covenant of peace”, so that Israel will not say that you are not at peace with Pinchas because he issued a practical halakhic ruling in your presence. Therefore you must inform the masses and Say, speaking for yourself, “Behold I am giving him etc.”, with the antecedent being Mosheh,

and in compensation for his being zealous for his G-d, Scripture says “and there will be for him and for his descendants following an eternal covenant of priesthood, in compensation for his being zealous for G-d. This rationale does not refer to “Behold I am giving him”, as this was his reward for being zealous for Mosheh, as explained above.

And Scripture writes “and he atoned for the Children of Israel”, for he brought this evil one (Zimri) as an atonement for all Israel, and it was counted for him as if it were a sacrifice of cows and sheep, therefore Hashem swore “You are a priest for ever, you who have already begun the proper service of priesthood”.