

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's portion Pinchas, we read about the zealous actions of Pinchas who took action to protect Hashem's honor and to prevent the Bnai Yisroel (Children of Yisroel) from sinning. Pinchas was rewarded for his righteousness by being granted membership in the kehunah - the priesthood.

The essence of Pinchas' act was a "Kidush Hashem," which means sanctifying Hashem's name. Whenever a Jew acts according to the Torah, especially in public, he causes Hashem's name to be sanctified. Why is that? Because when an onlooker sees a Jew acting properly according to the beautiful ways of the Torah, then the onlooker is himself encouraged to follow in the ways of the Torah. The following true story illustrates the power to influence others with our actions. As the principal of Yesodei HaTorah School in Manchester, England, Rabbi Yonason Yodaiken has extensive experience in the field of children's education. A Jewish organization in Melbourne, Australia once invited him to give a series of lectures on the familiar topic of the Jewish concept of education. Rabbi Yodaiken set out from Manchester, England one fine Sunday morning. But the first leg of his long journey, from England to Brussels, was miserable. The plane fought to stay on course as the wind buffeted the jumbo jet whichever way it pleased. Even the pilot admitted that it had been the most uncomfortable, turbulent flight he had ever experienced. Not only that, but Rabbi Yodaiken discovered that the kosher meals he had ordered were nowhere to be seen. Rabbi Yodaiken and his fellow passengers were relieved when the plane finally landed safely in Brussels. But because of the dangerously high winds, they were forced to stay cooped up on the plane indefinitely, unable to taxi to the gate. Passengers indulged in the drinks and snacks provided by the airline, but Rabbi Yodaiken abstained. None of the refreshments were kosher. Instead, he ate the sandwich and fruit that he had prudently brought along for the trip. After eight long hours of waiting on the tarmac, the passengers were finally allowed their first glimpse of the Brussels airport. Rabbi Yodaiken stretched his legs gratefully as he walked down the corridor. He crossed the threshold into the airport and joined the hordes of stranded travelers. People had made themselves comfortable among piles of luggage on waiting area benches, on the floor and in the restaurants. Rabbi Yodaiken approached the flight attendant at the desk to inquire about his next flight to Singapore, where he would continue on to Melbourne. The attendant tapped a few keys on her computer and looked up at the harried passenger. "I'm sorry, sir. That flight has been delayed until two o'clock tomorrow afternoon." "Two o'clock? But that's in twenty hours!" Rabbi Yodaiken exclaimed. Apparently, he was unable to leave the airport to go buy kosher food. Rabbi Yodaiken leaned over the desk and said. "Listen, I'm Jewish and I maintain a strictly kosher diet. Is there any way to get some kosher food on the [next leg of the] flight?"

"Well, with this weather, there's no food coming in from outside the airport. But there is an El Al flight stuck here as well. We'll do our best to get you something to eat," the attendant reassured him. But the airport's best wasn't good enough. When Rabbi Yodaiken boarded his next flight to Singapore on Monday afternoon, he was still hungry. Torah learning and some small talk with the pleasant doctor sitting next to him served as a minor distraction. Then the dinner cart came rolling down the aisle. "A meal, sir?" The flight attendant extended a steaming tray. The smell filled the cabin. Rabbi Yodaiken lifted his eyes from his sefer. "Thank you, but I ordered a kosher meal." "Oh, of course!" the flight attendant said. "Wait just a moment, sir. I'll see what we have."

Ten minutes later, the flight attendant was back. "I'm sorry, we don't have any kosher meals on board. Can I offer you anything else?" Rabbi Yodaiken's neighbor was watching the exchange quietly. He looked at Rabbi Yodaiken to hear his response. "No, thank you," Rabbi Yodaiken politely declined. "I only eat kosher." And he turned his attention back to the open page on his lap. But the flight from Brussels to Singapore was long. The flight attendant returned time and again. "How about a vegetarian meal? Can I get you some peanuts?" "Thank you," Rabbi Yodaiken replied with a smile, "but I really can't eat any of that. I appreciate your concern. I'll be fine." The hunger pangs subsided with some fresh fruit and a few drinks, but they surfaced again during the final leg of the journey to Melbourne. The doctor observed silently as Rabbi Yodaiken refused the meals offered to him again and again. "Sir, you haven't eaten anything the entire flight!" the flight attendant admonished her passenger. There was just one hour remaining until estimated arrival time. "Will you at least take this meal?" Despite his hunger, it did not even occur to Rabbi Yodaiken to accept the non-kosher food.

"Thanks for your concern," he reiterated. "It won't be too long now. I'll be able to get kosher food in Melbourne." "I'm sorry," the stewardess apologized. "I wish we could have given you something!" And with a regretful smile, she whisked the rejected meal back to the cabin. Rabbi Yodaiken and the doctor watched her retreat. "I've been wanting to tell you something this whole flight," the doctor began suddenly, turning toward his seatmate. "I had to build up the nerve, but it's now or never. You see—I'm Jewish." Rabbi Yodaiken raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Really?" he asked, encouraging the doctor to continue. "After the war, my father gave me strict instructions never to tell anyone about my religion. And I didn't. You are the first person I've shared this with in over fifty years. I've never been to a synagogue or affiliated with anything even remotely Jewish. But I've been watching you this whole time. You must be starving! And still you refuse every bit of food that's offered to you. Where do you get such tremendous self-control? What motivates you? It must be your religion." Pulling out a pen and paper, the Jewish doctor scribbled his address and phone number and handed it to Rabbi Yodaiken. "I live here in Melbourne, and I would like to learn more about Judaism from you. Let's keep in touch." And they did. Rabbi Yodaiken later heard about the doctor's first Rosh Hashanah in a shul. And he also heard about how the doctor experienced the beauty of a real Shabbos. "It's a long journey," the doctor wrote, "but I'm on my way back to my roots." (Visions of Greatness Volume 7, p.189) Let us take advantage of the tremendous opportunity we have to influence others through our observance of Torah in public. Let us learn from the example of Pinchas, who acted to sanctify Hashem's name by "doing the right thing" in public. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**