

The name of the Yisraeli man who was slain... was Zimri ben Salu, leader of a paternal house of Shimoni. (25:14)

Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 2a) teach that Zimri was the first Jew to fall prey to the sin of public debauchery. When one is first, he opens the door, releases the floodgates for those who use his example as the green-light for their immoral debasement. His real name was Shlumi'el ben Tzurishadai. When he began to sin, he was called Shaul *ben* HaCanaanis. Only after he had become completely dissolute was he called Zimri *ben* Salu. In *Bereishis* 46:10, *Rashi* explains that Shaul *ben* HaCannanis was the son of Dinah, Yaakov *Avinu's* daughter, who was violated by Shechem. When her brothers, Shimon and Levi, slew Shechem, Dinah consented to leave only after Shimon promised to marry her. Since a number of centuries had passed from Dinah's liaison with Shechem, followed by her marriage to Shimon, it is somewhat remarkable that Zimri was called Shaul *ben* HaCannanis. Hence, as explained by *Horav Eliyahu Munk, zl*, it is probably that *Chazal* want to suggest that this incident was the root cause, the original fountainhead, for Zimri's immoral behavior. For a Jew, a scion of Yaakov *Avinu*, to become so completely immersed in Canaanite depravity, it must be because the *neshamah*, soul, of his ancestor, Dinah, had been tainted when she was violated by Shechem, the Canaanite.

I think we can derive two lessons from this. Spiritual impurity does not go away. Hundreds of years later, it appears as a malignancy that has festered and finally reared its ugly head. Second, we see from *Chazal* that as Shlumi'el *ben* Tzurichadai descended into the spiritual and moral abyss to which he ultimately succumbed, his name changed. In other words, the one who committed the act of immorality was not Shlumi'el. It was Shaul and later Zimri. It can happen to someone who has been a righteous and decent person for a good part of his life. Something happens, and he changes. The "before and after" are different people. Thus, we should not ignore or forget – even denigrate the "before" because of the "after"-- unless the before was actually a coverup, a suppression of the real person. If it is discovered later on that his behavior had not suddenly appeared from nowhere, but was actually perpetrated under the guise of sham propriety, then all bets are off. The "before" no longer exists.