

He turned back My wrath from upon Bnei Yisrael. (25:11)

The *Gaon*, *zl*, *m'Vilna*, observes that the word *machatzis* (*ha'shekel*, the half-*shekel* coin which all Jews were obligated to give to the *Mishkan*) is spelled: *mem*, *ches*, *tzadik*, *yud*, *saf*. The middle of the five letters is the *tzadik*. The two letters closest to the *tzadik* (on its right and left) are the *ches* and *yud* – *chai*. The two outside letters are the *mem* and *saf*, spelling the word, *meis*. The *tzadik* is the first letter (*rosh teivah*) of the word *tzedakah*, charity. This, explains the *Gaon*, alludes to the maxim *tzedakah tatzeil mimaves*, charity saves one from death. (The letters *mem* and *saf* are on the outside, the letters most distant from the *tzadik*.) Charity begets life; therefore, the letters *ches* and *yud*, which spell *chai*, are next to the *tzadik*.

Pinchas manifested the epitome of *tzedakah*, when *heishiv*, he returned *chamasi*, My wrath, *mei'al Bnei Yisrael*, from *Bnei Yisrael*. What did he “return”? *Chamasi*. In the word *chamasi*, the letters *ches* and *yud*, which spell *chai*, are on the outside, while the *mem* and *saf*, spelling *meis*, are in the center. This alludes to the idea that the nation was destined to die by the plague. Pinchas “returned” *chamasi*, with his act of *tzedakah*, transforming – *chamasi* to *machatzis* – life.