SELF-WORSHIP

by Rabbi Dovid Green

Pinchas Son of Elazar, Son of Aharon The Kohein turned My anger away from the Children of Israel (Numbers 25:11).

This week's parsha begins with the reward Pinchas receives for a deed he did in last week's parsha. He took responsibility to avenge G-d's honor from a couple who were involved in immoral behavior and idol worship.

The Torah calls the idol Ba'al Pe'or. It was served by the Moabites, and a large group from the tribe of Shimon got involved in immoral behavior with the Moabite women, and then began to worship Ba'al Pe'or. The sages explain that the Moabite women made their consent conditional on the men serving Ba'al Pe'or.

The Sages tell us that Ba'al Pe'or was served by defecating on the idol, a most unusual way of serving a deity.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, of blessed memory, asks how it is possible to pay homage to a god in such a disrespectful fashion. In addition to that, how did the Children of Israel sink so far? The answer he gives is extremely relevant to us today.

The depth of this form of worship is that everything goes. One can even defecate on one's god. The Talmud relates that a certain fellow actually wiped himself on the idol's nose, and the priests lauded him for his excellence and originality! In other words, there is no accountability! This is the highest level of service of Ba'al Pe'or. One can do anything he wishes, and never need to regret it. Now we can understand what the draw was to join the growing membership of these particular congregations of idol worshipers.

This is how the Children of Israel got involved with this idol worship. Once they went over the line of immorality in regard to the Moabite women, it snowballed quickly to manifest itself in the most lewd form of behavior.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz also explains that the view of these idol worshippers is really a slight perversion of a proper world view. That is, that mankind is very great and superior. The attitude that we have greatness can bring a person to a lack of accountability - that he has no one to answer to. In direct contrast - the Torah perspective - is also that we are above all other aspects of the creation. Even angels, come from a lower spiritual source than does the human soul. Consequently, it is an

immense responsibility to be on that lofty plain. The accountability is manifold times more when so much more can be expected, and accomplished.

We see from here how easily a person lacking objectivity can err. Only with intellectual integrity and objectivity will a person be willing to draw correct conclusions from facts available to him. If a person is not interested in doing the right thing, and he wishes to follow his eyes and his heart - about him the prophet writes "For the ways of G-d are straight; the righteous go with them, and the negligent will trip over them."

Good Shabbos!

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