

PARADIGM OF PEACE

by Rabbi Label Lam

"Therefore say, 'Behold! I give him My covenant of peace!' (Bamidbar 25:12)

It's a strange thing that the "peace prize" should be offered to one who just carried out such a brutal act as Pinchas had done. Sure it was a surgical strike and it stopped the scourge of destruction that was sweeping the Jewish camp but the "peace prize"?

It is reported that a student of the sainted Chofetz Chaim came to him with a seemingly mundane question. This young man was considering a banking position. He wanted to know whether or not he should accept a seat at the window that cashed checks or the one that accepted deposits. The Chofetz Chaim had a definite opinion on the matter. He advised him strongly to plant himself in the place that was cashing the checks, reasoning that if he would be receiving money daily over decades it would misshape his personality into a taker but if he would be handing out money he would be more inclined to become a giver.

There is a principle stated by the Sefer HaChinuch that "a person is impacted by the action of what he does." The Mesilas Yesharim says a similar idea in a slightly different way, "Outer movements awaken our internality." For this reason so much emphasis is placed on "doing" on "performing" deeds even if the heart is not "in it" initially. We can be made to care and love by performing acts of caring and acting in a loving fashion. A hardened criminal can actually be softened by doing constant acts of kindness, and a sweet kindly Candy Striper can be made mean and callous over time by being made to perform continuous actions of cruelty.

For this reason a Doctor is advised to do some extra acts of kindness each day. Every profession has its peculiar occupational hazards, but why should a Doctor need to do "make nice" after a full day of healing? The answer is that we are impacted by the experience of what we actually do. Even though the good Doctor is helping people when administering a shot or feeling around for the point of soreness to determine whether it's a break or a strain, still, the experience is an experience of afflicting pain, all day, sometimes. "This won't hurt a bit...or only for a moment..." and then the torture begins.

The same applies to the fellow at the bank teller's window. In theory the one who takes money for deposit is helping people save and the money he handles is clearly not his own, still, his experience is training him to be a taker. The one who is handing money out, although it is certainly not his own to be generous or stingy with, he is being made into a giver. Over the course of time a difference in

character would be manifest.

Pinchas perhaps needed to receive a "covenant of peace" as a kind of protection from the impact of the deed that he had performed. He had just carried out an act that in any other context would be considered cruel and criminal. Regardless of his noble intentions and the ultimate good that resulted from his deed there remains a stain of bloodshed and a residue of cruelty in his system. The extra reward that Pinchas received in this instance was that he would be spared the internal consequences of the terribleness of the action he carried out. He and his children would become Cohanim, the students of and heirs to Aaron's legacy, "Pursue peace and love peace, love people and bring them close to Torah."

It's reputed that the pilots that dropped bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki later went insane, even though it can be argued that their actions actually spared further deaths. We can appreciate how haunting life might be after such an episode. Pinchas was no less sensitive to the life of a single individual. For some lofty reason, perhaps due to the extreme purity of his intentions, he was granted the ability to transcend any trace of the tragic and even with a single act become the paradigm of peace. Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.