

THE RIGHT THING

by Rabbi Label Lam

Therefore say, "Behold I am giving to him My covenant of peace!" (Pinchus 25:12)

On the surface there's room for confusion. Pinchus kills a couple of violators and he's given the "peace prize". Moshe hits a rock instead of talking to it and he's denied entry to the Holy Land. Avraham almost sacrifices his own son and he's the recipient of promises galore. Yaakov deceives his father and walks away with the family blessings. The spies speak ill of the Land of Israel and a whole generation is doomed to die in the dessert. It's too hard to figure what the standard is.

It all seems so uneven and unpredictable which deeds big and small earn which degrees of punishing results light and heavy. Yet the Torah tells us and we live confidently with the notion, "The rock, His doings are perfect that all of his ways are just, He is a reliable G-d and He makes no mistakes, a Tzadik and He is straight." (Devarim 32:4) We must ask ourselves, "What are we missing?"

Years and years ago I made my first public appearance at a family wedding with a Yarmulka planted atop my head and Tzitzis peaking out from beneath my jacket. I tried to socialize and mix but for some mystical reason the reaction I was receiving was one of disgust and repulsion. I sensed that people were looking at me like I had some communicable disease. My Aunt Fanny motioned that she wanted to talk to me. I approached her and leaned over to hear what she had to say. She was one of my grandfather's nine siblings and from the crop that had lived in Europe. I was bent over low to catch her soft voice and I believe I remember her pulling my beard to get even closer. She told me, "Darling, I want to tell you something. Everybody thinks you're crazy!" I thought to myself, "This conversation is really going someplace!" Then she said, "I want to tell you something else!" With this, her voice jumped up to volume ten. "You're doing the right thing!!!!!" She shouted, as if to say, "Who's going to give names for the ones gone lost and who is going to carry on into the future?! I'll be grateful forever for her zetz of encouragement.

Avraham had only done what HASHEM had asked him to do. Yaakov was following a direct commandment from his mother Rivka. Moshe failed to speak to the rock as he was told to do. Even a slight deviation is not tolerated. The spies too violated the spirit of their mission and more. Although what Pinchus did was amazingly difficult and perhaps grossly unpopular at the time, ultimately he did what Halacha- Jewish Law required and for the right reason. Why then did Pinchus get, of all things, the 'Peace Prize'? When putting our heads on the pillow at night what allows us to sleep peacefully is the knowledge that we have done the right thing. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.