

MUCH LOUDER THAN WORDS

by Rabbi Label Lam

And behold! A man of the Children of Israel came and brought the Midianite woman near to his brothers before the eyes of Moshe and before the entire assembly of the Children of Israel; and they were weeping at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. Pinchas, son of Elazar son of Aaron the Kohen stood up from amid the assembly and he took a spear in his hand. He followed the Israelite man into the tent and pierced them both, the Israelite man and the woman into her stomach- and the plague was halted from upon the Children of Israel. Those who died in the plague were twenty- four thousand. (New Parsha- Parshas Pinchas) HASHEM spoke to Moshe saying, "Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aaron the Kohen turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when he zealously avenged My vengeance among them, so I did not consume the Children of Israel with My vengeance." (Bamidbar 2:6-11)

Why is the story of the heroism of Pinchas broken into two (Parshios) parts? Firstly we have the narrative of what happened. Secondly Pinchas is credited with having halted the plague. He is then awarded the "Peace Prize" and Kehuna. Why is the account of his action and the "award ceremony" treated separately?

The Ben Ish Chai told the following parable: A man went on a walk in the jungle. He was casually strolling along when he noticed that a lion was stalking him. The man sensed that the ferocious beast was ready to pounce on him. His heart fell into his stomach. He had no gun or other weapon. All he had was a walking stick. In desperation he raised the feeble walking stick he had in his hand and pointed it as a gun with the hope that it might scare the lion away. In the meanwhile, and unbeknownst to the man a hunter was behind him in a tree poised with a real rifle. The lion drew closer to the man with the stick. He took aim as if he was holding an authentic weapon. Seeing the situation worsening on the ground the man in the tree took real action and shot the approaching lion in his heart. When the man on the ground observed the lion lying dead before him he immediately looked at his stick, unable to explain the phenomena in any other way and began to give credit to his trustworthy loaded walking- stick.

He foolishly bragged aloud that he knew all the time that the stick was loaded and it was capable of functioning as a real gun. Just then the hunter descended from the tree and confronted him, "Silly, man do you really believe that your simple walking-stick can fire a bullet capable of stopping a charging lion? It's only a stick. Don't delude yourself any longer. It was my rifle that let fly the fatal bullet that spared your life and it happened just at that moment that you were pointing the stick!"

Here's a similar and true story. Maybe it's not nice to play a practical joke but I couldn't resist and plus the Doctor has a great sense of humor. We laugh out loud years later whenever it's mentioned. We bumped into each other at a huge wedding and briefly said hello. When it was time to leave I was walking down the darkened back streets with my son to our car which was parked a good distance away from the hall.

There was the good Doctor approaching his car too which happened to be parked right in front of my car. We were a short distance behind him and I noticed that when he pressed the mechanism on his key chain, the lock of his car flashed on. I decided to click my automatic key and so my car lights and locks flashed at the same time. I hunkered down with my son and we noticed how the Doctor looked curiously at the phenomena. He blinked his key again and so did I. He was amazed to find that his key was turning on and off the car behind him. He looked on in wonderment his head turning back and forth over and over again as his key seemed to be able to open and close both cars. We laughed together with tears when we finally revealed ourselves and our little game.

All we know from the first account is that a plague was ravaging the Children of Israel and a brazen act of impudence was on display. People were crying and discussing what to do. Only Pinchas took real action. Suddenly the plague stops. There's room then for some to be deceived into thinking that the crying, complaining, and finger pointing saved the day. Therefore the record is set straight. There can be no room for ambiguity. What Pinchas did was much louder than words. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.