KINDLY JUSTICE

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of Pinchas as we begin the Three Weeks of mourning over the destruction of the two Temples.

"And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon the Kohen, turned back my wrath from Bnei Yisroel [the Children of Israel] by zealously avenging My vengeance in their midst so that I did not consume Bnei Yisroel in My vengeance. [25:10-11]"

At the end of last week's parsha, Pinchas acted courageously and zealously to stop an unabashed act of immorality from being performed publicly. By doing this, he stopped the plague that had been sent against Bnei Yisroel.

This event of Bnei Yisroel succumbing to the temptations offered by the daughters of Moav followed Bilaam's stymied attempt to place a curse on Bnei Yisroel.

The Ohr Gedalyahu illustrates how tightly these events were interwoven.

The Talmud [Brachos 7A] teaches that Bilaam had the ability to determine the moment of Hashem's anger. His plan was to curse Bnei Yisroel with a plea for their destruction at precisely that moment. Hashem showed tremendous kindness by not having that moment of anger during the time that Bilaam was attempting to curse. This prompted Bilaam to apologetically explain to Balak (who had hired him to curse Bnei Yisroel): "How can I curse? Hashem has not cursed. How can I anger? Hashem is not angry. [23:8]"

With this, a whole different understanding can be found in the passuk {verse} from last week's parsha: "And the anger of Elokim burned because he was going. [22:22]" On a simple level, Elokim {G-d's attribute of justice} was angered that Bilaam was going to attempt to curse, even though he clearly knew that it was against the will of Hashem.

On a deeper level, the Ariza"l explains that it was the anger of Elokim that was going-as we learned that Hashem didn't anger during those days. This forced exit of the attribute of anger was necessary but had its repercussions. The attribute of ahavah {love} inspires the fulfillment of the positive commandments. The attribute of yir'ah {fear} is necessary to abstain from that which is forbidden. Hashem's daily moment of anger instills this necessary yir'ah into the world, aiding us in choosing to follow the will of Hashem. The anger of The Attribute of Justice therefore burned because it was unable to have its proper influence on the world.

This actually led to Bilaam's advice to unleash the daughter's of Moav upon Bnei Yisroel. He understood that with Hashem's anger being withheld, Bnei Yisroel would more easily succumb to temptation; they would sin and bring Hashem's anger onto themselves.

With this, we now have a whole new understanding in the opening passukim {verses} of our parsha. "Pinchas... by zealously avenging My vengeancce in their midst," inspired yir'ah in the hearts of Bnei Yisroel. By doing this, he compensated for the lost effects of Hashem's daily anger that had resulted in Bnei Yisroel succumbing to temptation.

"So that I did not consume Bnei Yisroel in My vengeance." On a simple level, Hashem didn't consume them after they had succumbed to the daughters of Moav. On a deeper level, being that Pinchas would compensate for the loss of yir'ah, Hashem was able to forego that anger during the days of Bilaam. Otherwise, Hashem would have consumed Bnei Yisroel in His vengeance by getting angry during that time and enabling Bilaam to place his curse.

We are now entering the period of mourning for the destruction of the Temples. It is so important to realize that Hashem's showing anger is actually an act of loving-kindness and a withholding of that anger can actually lead to destruction.

The Amidah prayer {Shmone Esray} speaks of Hashem, in the present tense, redeeming Israel and building Jerusalem. Every event that transpires in the world, even those and perhaps especially those that seem to be tragic displays of His anger, are actually bringing us closer, step by step.

May we merit witnessing the rebuilding of the Temple, and the coming of the Messiah, speedily in our days.

Good Shabbos,
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