

G-D'S PARTNER

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Pinchas's zealous yet brutal act of courage was rewarded with G-d's covenant of peace. "Therefore, I am granting him My Covenant of Peace." (25:12) Generally, the Torah does not state the reward for individual acts of devotion and heroism. When the Torah makes the exception it is intended that we glean from the reward a greater understanding of the initiating good-deed. Just as Punishments are "a measure for a measure," so too rewards are a measure for a measure. Reward must fit the deed just as punishment must fit the crime.

The beginning of this week's Parsha is among the few places in the Torah where G-d immediately stated the reward for an individual act of self-sacrifice and devotion. 1. Avraham after the binding of Yitzchak; 2. Kalev after the Spies; 3. and the end of last week's Parsha with Pinchas's act of zealousness at Baal Peor. However, with Pinchas the reward was different than the others. His reward was a Covenant. Pinchas's reward was G-d's Covenant of Peace.

Avraham was progenitor of the nation; therefore, his reward reflected the future of his children and their development into a nation. "Because you did not withhold your son from Me... I will bless you, increase your children as the stars in the heaven..." (Bereishis 22:17)

Kalev was given the city of Hebron as reward for his act of devotion and courage. It was a magnificent statement of G-d's personal pleasure in Kalev's personal devotion and it was a reward that was unique to Kalev and his children.

However, Pinchas was given G-d's Covenant of Peace. A covenant is a deal between two parties. G-d made a covenant with the Forefathers when He promised that their children would inherit Eretz Yisroel and receive His Torah. He made a covenant with the Jews when He gave them the Torah and commanded them to be His Chosen People. However, in this instance G-d made a covenant with an individual. It suggests a partnership between G-d, Pinchas, and Pinchas's children in accomplishing G-d's intentions for creating the universe and appointing the Jews as His kingdom of priests and holy nation.

Why was Pinchas's zealousness so important that G-d rewarded him with a covenant?

I would like to suggest that the sin of Baal Peor, Pinchas's zealousness, and G-d rewarding him with the Covenant of Peace are interrelated. The sin motivated the zealousness and the Covenant of Peace was both a reward for Pinchas as well as a Tikun - corrective measure for Baal Peor.

As the Jews neared the end of their time in the desert they were understandably focused on the future. The changes they would encounter would be profound and far-reaching. There would be warfare and the need for diplomacy. The nation would decentralize and spread throughout the land. Homes would have to be built and the infrastructure of a nation would have to be developed. Miriam and Aharon had died and Moshe would not live to take them into the Promised Land. A new leader and administration would take over and G-d's overt caring would be curtailed and hidden within the workings of nature. At best they were a loose confederacy of families united by familial ties yet primarily devoted to their own individual tribes. At worse they were twelve independent mini-nations who could easily fall into a power struggle for control of the country and the nation.

The only guarantee for a successful transition into the Promised Land was their personal and collective commitment to the covenant at Mt. Sinai and the history of the Forefathers. The Torah was their deed of purchase as well as their code of laws. However, enforcement was left up to G-d. That is why the period of the Shoftim (Judges) following Yehoshua's reign up until Shmuel the Prophet and the establishment of the monarchy is presented as, "The time when the judges were judged." (Ruth 1:1) It was a time when "each person did as he saw fit." The difficulties were predictable and the end of the 40 years had to have generated as much concern and anxiety as it did excitement and anticipation.

As the Jews contemplated the future they began to emotionally and psychologically seek independence from G-d. It was inevitable. As it was, their dependency upon Moshe and G-d was (and is) their greatest challenge. With the death of Miriam and Aharon, with the removal of the well and the cloud cover, with Moshe's impending death, the Jews felt they had to take charge of their own destiny. The fact that the daily miracles were beginning to stop proved to them that their relationship with G-d was undergoing changes. Of course, they were wrong. Just the opposite! The lesson of the desert was that G-d's presence is everywhere and whether bread falls from heaven or is the product of planting, harvesting, milling, and baking, it is all G-d's doing. However, because the fundamental human challenge is to recognize G-d's primacy and humble our own, the Jews failed and began to "take charge."

The Jews had already tasted battle and victory. Sichon, Og, and Amalek had all fallen. At the same time, Moshe had made overtures to Edom and Moab. All the nations encountered in last week's two Parshios Chukas and Balak were not from the seven nations occupying the land of Israel. They were neighboring nations who had a choice to either support the Jews as allies or align themselves against the Jews as enemies. Unfortunately for them, they chose the later, and as Billam prophesized, eventually disappeared within the pages of history.

Balak's attempt at destroying the Jews was a last desperate try. Frightened by the defeat of Og and Sichon, Balak turned to the occult and hired Billam. Billam failed to curse the Jews but offered Balak a parting freebee. "You will not be able to destroy them physically. G-d's promise to protect them is absolute. However, G-d never promised to protect them from themselves. Send out your daughters

to seduce the Jewish men and you will see how quickly G-d's wrath is awakened!"

Balak listened to Bilam's advice resulting in the incident of Baal Peor. Baal Peor was not a momentary lapse in judgment on the part of the Jews. It was predicated on their search for independence in the face of the change in leadership and the uncertainties associated with the transition into the land. The Jews were on a mission. They were to model for the rest of the world what G-d intended for the universe and humanity. They realized that their position as a "light unto the nations," would require ongoing interaction with the other nations. Nations would visit them and they would visit other nations. Yet, they were intended to remain apart from all the other nations ("a nation that dwells alone") in thought and action. From their perspective, with the death of Moshe the job of interacting with the other nations would be up to them. Therefore, when Balak heeded Bilam's advice and extended to the Jews an open welcome, the Jews saw this as further confirmation of their approach. What better way to establish positive diplomatic ties with the other nations than socializing with them?

In the minds of the nation, they were to be the generation of Mashiach. Led by Yehoshua, they would enter the land, appoint a king, build the Bais Hamikdash, establish diplomatic and social ties with the other nations, and bring the world into united recognition and service of G-d. "And they will make a single gathering to do Your will with a full heart." Therefore, the Jews, seeking to assume greater responsibility and independence embraced the Midianite overtures and their women. Their motives were "For the sake of heaven." In fact, their rationalization was so enticing that even the great prince Zimri, Leader of Shevet Shimon, succumbed to their logic to such an extent that he was willing to personally participate by publicly consorting with the Midianite Princes! What better way to quiet the critics and advance the national mission?

Later in history we find Shlomo Hamelech (Solomon) falling into the very same trap. The wisest of all men failed to see the fallacy of this logic. Shlomo was the first of the potential Messiahs. He was the son of King David. He was the chosen and anointed king. He built the first Temple. During his reign all the Jews lived in Eretz Yisroel. He used his prodigious wisdom to influence the nations of the world and bring world peace. (Fulfilling the mandate, "And the nations of the world will proclaim, 'The Jews are such a wise and understanding nation.')

Shlomo had every reason to believe that he was Mashiach. Therefore, he extended himself to the other nations by seeking alliances with them through marriage and family. The reputed 1000 wives of Shlomo were not emotional conquests. They were the basis for Solomon's foreign policy in building intimate ties with the other nations and positioning himself to guide them closer to G-d. However, Shlomo was wrong. Shlomo did not accept the simple directive, "He should not have too many wives." Shlomo's own brilliance and success blinded him to the simplicity of G-d's commandments. He rationalized that the prohibition did not apply to him.

The Jews were just like Shlomo. They saw themselves as the architects of the messianic era and moved to make it happen. They embraced their destiny as G-d's kingdom of priests and holy nation.

They formulated a strategy for interacting with the other nations that rationalized or justified their underlying prurient interest. In the end they succumbed to Bilam's advice and paid the price of G-d's wrath.

Pinchas saw all this unfolding. The priest who was not to be priest recognized the fallacy of their logic and the truth of their motives. They were going against the commandments of G-d and that could not be the way to bring the Messianic era. He understood that he would have to pierce the veil of their rational in a shocking and dangerous manner. His attack would have to be swift, decisive, and public. Otherwise, others would be influenced to join and G-d would destroy the Jews.

Pinchas's act of zealousness is defined as "being jealous for the sake of G-d." Pinchas learned the hard way how to accept the decree of G-d. Pinchas was the only one of Aharon's children and grandchildren not to be granted the priesthood 40 years earlier. Yet, he accepted his omission from the priesthood and subjugated himself to the decree of G-d. Pinchas understood self-sacrifice and the need to accept divine imperative; therefore, he was in the best position to recognize the simple truth. Zimri and the others were not driven by their desire to establish the messianic era and bring world peace. They were motivated by their physical cravings and their desire for independence from G-d's commandments.

Pinchas raised his spear, ignored the danger to himself, and killed Zimri and the Midianite Princess. The act was so shocking that it forced the Jews to see the fallacy of their rationalization and recognize their continued dependency upon Moshe and G-d. Pinchas presented the Jews with the most fundamental example of how to be G-d's kingdom of priests and holy nation. He showed them that the direct word of G-d couldn't be rationalized or modified beyond Moshe's teachings. He showed that the only way to fulfill the messianic dream and bring world peace was listen to the word of G-d. Therefore, G-d made Pinchas a partner in His purpose and intentions for the universe and humanity. Therefore, G-d gave Pinchas His Covenant of Peace. Therefore, Pinchas became one of the preeminent "priests" within G-d's kingdom.

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