

A DOVE AMONGST EAGLES

by Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

"Attack the Midianites and kill them" (25:17)

Rashi points out that Hashem commanded Moshe to decimate the Midianites and not the Moabites, although they were more instrumental than the Midianites in enticing Bnei Yisroel to sin[1]. The Midrash explains that since Ruth, the great grandmother of King David, was destined to descend from Moav, Hashem refrained from destroying them. If, in fact, Moav deserved to be destroyed, why could Hashem not have orchestrated a scenario by which the majority of the nation is killed, but Ruth's existence is assured from the few who survive?

Since Ruth was the progenitor of the Davidic dynasty, it was imperative that she herself descend from aristocracy and nobility; Ruth was the daughter of Eglon, King of Moav[2]. In order for this to occur, the nation had to be preserved. If the nation had been decimated, Ruth would have stemmed from surviving refugees, making it impossible for her to be born into a family of nobility.

The benefits gained by Ruth stemming from aristocracy are twofold: From the perspective of the Jewish nation, the genetic base of monarchy has already been established through her own personal standing. From a universal perspective, the Moshiach who will stem from the Davidic dynasty, will influence and teach all of mankind; having the infusion of a non-Jewish monarchy into the Davidic dynasty will allow for a greater universal impact.

1.25:17

2.Rashi Megillas Rus 1:2

All's Well That Ends Well

"...so I did not consume the Children of Israel..." (25:11)

The final verse in last week's parsha records that twenty-four thousand Jews perished from the plague that was wrought upon Bnei Yisroel[1]. Recording the verse at this juncture would appear to violate a requirement in the laws of "reading from the Torah" which states that an aliya should not begin nor end with a verse containing tragedy that befell Bnei Yisroel[2].

The solution to this problem is found in this week's parsha. The Torah states that due to the actions of Pinchas, Hashem did not destroy the entire nation of Israel - "velo chilisi es Bnei Yisroel". The implication is that were it not for Pinchas' actions, all of Bnei Yisroel would have been destroyed by

the plague. Therefore, stating that only twenty-four thousand were killed is, in essence, proclaiming that the decree to kill all of Bnei Yisroel had been rescinded. Consequently, this too can be viewed as a positive statement.

1.24:9

2. *Shulchan Aruch 38:1, See the glosses of the Rama*

In Search Of Motive

"Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon the Kohein..."(25:11)

Although Pinchas' genealogy was mentioned at the end of last week's parsha, the Torah repeats the fact that he was a descendant of Aharon the Kohein. Rashi explains that after Pinchas had killed Zimri ben Salu, a prince from the tribe of Shimon, Bnei Yisroel scorned him, accusing him of murder. They protested that Pinchas, the grandson of Yisro (Pinchas' father married Yisro's daughter) who fattened livestock for idol worshipping purposes, had no right to wantonly kill a prince of Israel. Regarding this accusation, the Torah responds that on the contrary, Pinchas' zealous act saved Bnei Yisroel, and although he was descended from an idol worshipper on his mother's side, he descended on his father's side from Aharon Hakohein, an exemplary lover and pursuer of harmony[1]. What does the fact that Pinchas descended from idol worshippers have to do with his actions, and if, in fact, his actions were impacted by his genealogy, how were they counteracted by the fact that he descended from Aharon Hakohein?

The rationale for Bnei Yisroel's criticism of Pinchas is based upon what is known as the "reformed smoker syndrome"; very often, the most rabid anti-smoker is a reformed smoker. In an attempt to rid himself of some negative habit or trait, a person may react very negatively to others who exhibit the same trait. This person's reaction is fueled by the fear that seeing others exhibiting the same negative trait which he once exhibited, will rekindle his own connection to it.

In order to kill Zimri without due process, Pinchas had to invoke the law known as "kana'im pogim bo" - "the zealous may kill him". This law allows for a person who witnesses Hashem's name being desecrated by certain public transgressions to kill the perpetrator without due process[2]. Invoking this law requires that a person's motivations be completely for the sake of heaven. If a person has any bias or proclivity which spurs his action, it is considered murder.

The Talmud states that the most intimate form of idol worship is cohabiting with a gentile, the transgression for which Pinchas killed Zimri[3]. Since Pinchas was connected to idol worship through his grandfather, Bnei Yisroel maintained that it was this sensitivity which brought on his outrage and prompted him to kill Zimri. However, the Torah is attesting to the fact that Pinchas' motives were pure; he had within him the outstanding trait of Aharon Hakohein, "ohev verodeif shalom" - "lover and pursuer of harmony". True harmony can only be achieved by a person who has no agenda of his own, but sees everything from the other person's perspective. Similarly, Pinchas' action was not

prompted by his own need to eradicate negative feelings within himself, rather his complete, unabashed sensitivity to the desecration of Hashem's honor.

1.Rashi 25:11

2.Sanhedrin 81b

3.ibid 82a