

WHY DID PINCHAS DESERVE THE 'PEACE PRIZE'?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Pinchas

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 425, The Minhagim of the Three Weeks.
Good Shabbos!*

Why Did Pinchas Deserve The 'Peace Prize'?

After Pinchas acted with zealotry by killing Zimri and Kozbi, he was rewarded by G-d with the "Covenant of Peace". The Netziv (1817-1893) explains why - contrary to our intuitive expectation -- the "Covenant of Peace" is in fact the appropriate response for Pinchas' activities. The Netziv says that by nature, a person's actions have a profound effect on him. "You are what you do."

(In a similar vein, the Sefer HaChinuch writes that if a person is naturally a kind and compassionate person, but for whatever reason must become involved in cruel or non-compassionate activities, then eventually he will become a cruel and a non-compassionate person.)

Therefore, explains the Netziv, the Torah rewarded Pinchas with a "Covenant of Peace." In spite of the fact that what Pinchas did was violent and the antithesis of peace, the reward was that it will not have the natural effect that such actions usually have on those who carry them out. He would remain a peace-loving and kind, compassionate, person.

The law of the Ir HaNidachas [city gone astray] is that when an entire city worships idolatry, given the right conditions (which are in practice exceedingly improbable), the entire population of that city has to be wiped out. After the Torah describes the details and the punishment of this commandment, the pasuk states "and He will grant you mercy" [Devarim 13:18]. The commentaries point out that G-d is herein providing assurance to the people. Normally, executing an entire city would have an effect

on those who executed the judgement. They might become executioners by nature. The Torah therefore steps in with a blessing: He will grant you mercy -- fulfillment of this command will NOT have the natural effect on those who carry it out.

The reward that Pinchas received, was that since he acted "for the sake of Heaven," G-d promised that his action would not have a lasting spiritual effect on his soul. He would nevertheless be granted the "Covenant of Peace."

On a related matter, I saw it written in the name of Rav Aharon Kotler, zt"l, (1892-1962) that the world misunderstands the idea of "Shalom" [peace]. The popular perception is that peace consists of making up, hugging, and kissing. Likewise, the popular notion is that killing someone is the antithesis of "Shalom."

The pasuk testifies that, contrary to popular opinion, Pinchas actually performed an act of "peace". It was not war, the antithesis of peace, but it was precisely an act of peace. By putting an end to wickedness, Pinchas restored peace between Israel and their Father in Heaven.

Likewise, Rav Aharon Kotler pointed out, when the shepherds of Lot were having an argument with the shepherds of Avram, Avram proposed "Let there not be a fight between me and you -- separate please from me" [Bereishis 13:9]. The popular notion would be that the solution to a problem of strife would be "let's be friends." Avram, on the contrary suggested "let's separate." What kind of "peace-making" effort is that? Why did he not suggest "let's live together in peace"?

The answer is that sometimes we cannot live in peace together with certain people. Avram perceived that there was no possible peaceful coexistence between his shepherds and those of Lot. The only viable solution in such a situation is "Let's separate."

In the case of Pinchas as well, the solution of "peace" involved killing two people, in order to restore peace between Israel and G-d.

Defying Statistical Projections

The book of Bamidbar is known as 'The Book of Numbers' (Chumash haPekudim) because it both begins and ends with a counting of the Jewish people. This week's parsha contains another listing of the populations of the various tribes. The Chofetz Chaim points out that the Tribe of Benjamin had 45,600 people while the Tribe of Dan had 65,400 people. Thus Dan had approximately 20,000 more people than Benjamin. However, if you examine the progeny of the founders of the tribes themselves, you will see that Dan had only 1 son while Benjamin had 10 sons. And not only was Chushim the only son of Dan, but he was deaf as well.

If at the beginning of the Egyptian exile, we had tried to predict which of these two tribes would be larger a few generations forward, clearly the mathematical projection would have been that the Tribe of Benjamin would be far more populous than the Tribe of Dan. This statistical likelihood, of course, never materialized. The Chofetz Chaim (1838-1933) says that we learn from here that if G-d

wants to bless a person with many descendents, he WILL be blessed with many descendents, even if through natural factors that is unlikely. "G-d decrees and fulfills His decrees." Conversely, if G-d feels that a person should not merit many descendents, then it will not happen even if he has the best situation "on paper".

This lesson applies to everything in life, explained the Chofetz Chaim. It applies to wealth. It applies to finding a suitable marriage partner. It applies to health. It applies to everything!

Sometimes we look at a situation and ask - based on natural projections (derech haTeva) - how will this person earn a living? How will he be able to survive financially? G-d has many messengers. The Tribes of Dan and Benyamin are testimony to the fact that G-d is All Powerful. He has His own calculations. That which we think will happen, by the natural order of events is not always what happens. Everything is in the Hands of Heaven.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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