

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

Before Bilaam, the wicked gentile prophet, left King Balak he gave him some advice as to how to bring destruction upon the Jewish people. "It's true your plan to have me curse them has failed," he said, "But I can tell you how to beat them. The G-d of these people hates promiscuity-- and they love the finer things of life. Set up a market on the outskirts of their camp with older women selling fine linen, silks etc. When they start to get involved in buying the merchandise, offer them the "better goods" inside the tents. There you should station beautiful young Midianite girls to seduce the Jews into serving your Idols. The wrath of G-d will be kindled by their lewd behavior and you will be done with them forever."

The plan was set in motion and the anger of G-d was kindled. A plague started to spread throughout the camp of the Children of Israel. To make matters worse, the leader of the tribe of Shimon brought the beautiful young princess of Midian into the camp and mocked Moshe before taking her into his private quarters. Pinhas bravely and miraculously entered the camp of the tribe of Shimon, killed the pair with a spear and carried them around the camp as a display of the punishment due anyone who should desecrate the name of G-d.

The great reward showered on Pinhas was G-d's covenant of peace--eternal life. G-d exclaimed, "He has zealously avenged my vengeance!" Rashi explains the magnitude of his deed -- "He expressed the rage with which I should have been enraged." Rabbi Moshe Feinstein Zt"l explains that the great reward received by Pinhas was due him because he acted in a way That G-d himself would have and should have acted under the circumstances. From here Rabbi Feinstein Zt"l concludes we learn that other misvot where a person acts "in place of Hashem" [so to speak] earn abundant reward.

The Talmud tells of the wicked Turnus Rufus who confronted Rabbi Akiva, "If G-d loves the Jews why did he make poor ones?" Rabbi Akiva answered, "So that we by helping them could earn a place in the world to come." In other words, although G-d certainly can take care of everything and everyone on his own, He graciously gives us opportunities to act on His behalf so that we can earn eternal rewards. It is comparable to a mother and child walking home from the store with packages. The child is eager to help mom who can get along very well without the child's assistance. She gives the child some small items to carry to give the little one the sense that she is helping mommy and a big smile shines from the little one's proud face. The child's insistence on helping demonstrates love for her mother--and that gives great pleasure to mom. That is what we are doing when we do Misvot, like charity, whereby we "help" G-d do his job of taking care of everyone.

The almighty is quite capable of doing everything by Himself. It is only due to his great kindness that he allows us--the human being --the opportunity to demonstrate our love for him by helping His needy ones. Shabbat Shalom.

TABLE TALK QUESTION FOR THE SHABBAT TABLE

"May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly, who shall go out before them..." [Bemidbar:27:16/7]

Question:

Why does the verse specify that the leader "shall go out before them"? What quality did Moshe ask that his successor have and why?

Answer:

The Talmud predicts that the generation of Mashiah will have a "face similar to the face of a dog"[Sanhedrin 97a]. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, zt'l, explains that when a dog is walking with its master it runs up ahead of its owner BUT constantly stops to look back for direction. Although the dog appears to the casual observer to be leading the owner the dog is actually following the master's wishes.

Our history is full of leaders who ruled and decided issues of public concern based on the Torah not based on popularity. Our religious leaders were not concerned with whether their decisions would be popular or whether they would be accepted by the masses. They studied the Torah to find the proper course and ruled accordingly. In the times preceding the coming of Mashiah [speedily in our days] weak leaders will arise. Their decisions will be subject to the will of the people. Their wisdom will be blinded by a desire to be popular. They will in effect resemble the dog in that they will appear to be leading but in fact will be following.

Moshe Rabenu realized the danger of such a society. He prayed to Hashem that his successor will be one "who will out before them" - who will lead by principle not by popular opinion polls. Yehoshua was truly the one who fit the bill and so he was chosen to lead.

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