

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Pinchas

Pinchas' Reward

פִּינְחָס בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן הֵשִׁיב אֶת חֲמָתִי מֵעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאוֹ אֶת קִנְאַתִּי בְּתוֹכָם
וְלֹא כִלִּיתִי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאַתִּי

Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the Kohen, turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when He acted zealously of My behalf among them, so that I did not destroy the Children of Israel in my vengeance (25:11)

Our Parsha opens with the reward Hashem bestowed on Pinchas for his act of zealotry, which is described at the end of the previous Parsha. Zimri, the *nasi* of the tribe of Shimon, was cohabiting with a Midianite princess, whereupon Pinchas took a spear and ran both of them through, thereby halting a plague which had broken out among the Jewish People.

THE ROOTS OF PINCHAS' ACTIONS

The pasuk's presentation of Pinchas is somewhat unusual in that it mentions not only his father, Elazar, but also his grandfather, Aharon. What is behind this double reference to his lineage?

The Meshech Chochmah explains that in referring to Pinchas' descent both from Elazar and from Aharon, the pasuk is attributing the two aspects of his act to each of those forebears, respectively. For as we will see, Pinchas' actions on this occasion were twofold:

On the one hand, Pinchas acted zealously on Hashem's behalf, executing the *nasi* of Shimon who was profaning the Divine Name through his act. In this respect, Pinchas confronted a prominent member of the Jewish people on Hashem's behalf.

On the other hand, we find that Pinchas also "confronted" Hashem on the Jewish People's behalf. Commenting on the pasuk in Tehillim,¹ "וַיַּעֲמֵד פִּינְחָס וַיִּפְלֹל" – *Pinchas arose and executed judgment,*" the Gemara² explains that "he brought a case against his Maker, saying, 'Shall twenty-four thousand from among the Bnei Yisrael fall over these?'"³ In

1 106:30.

2 Sanhedrin 82a.

3 I.e. over the actions of Zimri and Cozbi.

taking such a confrontational stance against Hashem on the people's behalf, Pinchas himself risked incurring Divine wrath, yet did so willingly in order to spare the people from greater calamity.

These two elements within Pinchas' actions are mentioned at the end of pasuk 13: "אָטָר – קָנָא לְאֵלֶיּוֹ וַיִּכַּפֵּר עַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – *He acted zealously on his God's behalf and he atoned for the Children of Israel.*" According to the Meshech Chochmah, the second phrase in that pasuk – atoning for the people – is not merely a result of the first phrase – acting zealously on Hashem's behalf; rather, it is the product of a separate element within his actions, namely, confronting Hashem on the people's behalf.

Both these aspects of Pinchas' actions have precedents in the actions of his forebears:

The Yerushalmi in the beginning of Maseches Yoma⁴ relates that when Aharon died, the Clouds of Glory departed, leaving the Jewish People in an exposed and vulnerable state. At this point, many among them began journeying back to Egypt, whereupon the tribe of Levi, headed by Elazar, took up arms against them, even to the point of inflicting casualties among them until they were subdued and brought back on course toward Eretz Yisrael.

With regards to Aharon, Chazal⁵ relate that he placed himself in the path of spiritual retribution in order to protect the Jewish People. This occurred at the time of the Chet ha'Egel, where he took upon himself to be personally involved in the making of the Egel in order to divert Divine wrath from the people.

Thus, when our pasuk introduces Pinchas as the descendent both of Elazar and of Aharon, it is in order to provide the full background to his actions in this episode. One aspect of his actions (acting zealously toward the people on Hashem's behalf) has its roots in Elazar's actions, while the other aspect (confronting Hashem on the people's behalf) had its roots in Aharon's actions.

THE FRUITS OF PINCHAS' DEEDS

The dual nature of Pinchas' actions carried forth into the effects of those actions. Commenting on pasuk 12 which mentions the reward Hashem sought to bestow on Pinchas, the Midrash⁶ states:

בְּדִין הוּא שִׁטּוֹל שְׂכָרוֹ

It is fitting and just that he receive his reward.

These words are rather perplexing. Is it not *always* just for a person who does a mitzvah to be rewarded? What is unique about Pinchas' situation that requires this to be expressly stated?

The Meshech Chochmah explains. We know that there are certain mitzvos concerning which it is said that although the principle reward is reserved for the World to Come,

4 Cited in Rashi, Devarim 10:6 s.v. *u'vnei*.

5 Vayikra Rabbah, cited in Rashi, Shemos 32:5 s.v. *la'Hashem*.

6 Bamidbar Rabbah 21:1.

nevertheless, the person “enjoys their fruits in this world.”⁷ What defines this category of mitzvah? The Gemara⁸ states that it depends on the nature of the mitzvah. If the benefit which accrues from the mitzvah is purely spiritual in nature, then its reward is likewise entirely spiritual and is thus reserved for the spiritual setting of the World to Come. However, if the mitzvah is of material benefit to people in this world, then the one who performs it likewise enjoys its fruits in this world.

In Pinchas’ case, his act consisted of killing Zimri, something which was certainly of spiritual benefit as it brought his desecration of Hashem name to an end, but of no physical benefit. As such, the reward for this act would appropriately need to be reserved for the World to Come. Yet we find that Hashem rewarded Pinchas in this world as well, granting him a covenant of peace, as well as an everlasting covenant of kehuna.⁹ How can this be understood?

The answer is in the end of pasuk 11, which states that Pinchas “*turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when He acted zealously of My behalf among them, so that I did not destroy the Children of Israel in my vengeance.*” In other words, Pinchas’ act of zealotry on Hashem’s behalf had the effect of stopping the plague which had erupted among the people, thereby granting life to those who otherwise would have perished. As such, his act can certainly be categorized as one which brought about material blessing in this world as well. Hence, the next pasuk states “*לכן – therefore, tell him that I am giving him a covenant of everlasting peace,*” upon which the Midrash comments: “*It is fitting and just that he receive his reward*” – in this world!

7 These mitzvos are listed in the paragraph that we recite after *Birchos HaTorah*, based on passages in the Mishnah (Peah 1:1) and Gemara (Shabbos 127a).

8 Kiddushin 40a.

9 Pesukim 12-13.