



The Path To Follow

PINHAS

296

July 11th 2009

19 Tamuz 5769

Publication
HEVRAT PINTO

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Habit Becomes Second Nature

The story is told of a rabbi who was walking down the street with several of his students. They came across the carcass of a dog that was emitting a nauseating stench, and the students said: "What a revolting sight!" The rabbi replied, "Look at how white its teeth are!" After he said this, his students regretted their scornful remark. Now if it is scornful to say something negative about a dead dog, how much more does this apply to a living person! And if it is good to praise the white teeth of a dead dog, how much more should we praise a person gifted with intelligence! The rabbi's intention in rebuking them was to prevent them from saying negative things out of habit, for habit becomes second nature. Thus if they became accustomed to saying good things, this too would become second nature to them.

– Chovot HaLevavot

THE REWARD FOR A MITZVAH IS A MITZVAH

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace, and it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood'" (Numbers 25:12-13). Here the Sages say, "It is right that he should receive his reward" (Bamidbar Rabba 21:1).

We need to understand what this means, since the Gemara states that there is no reward in this world for performing a mitzvah (Kiddushin 39b).

We may explain this by saying that we do not deserve a reward in this world solely for carrying out an actual mitzvah, whose reward is reserved for the World to Come. However we are rewarded in this world for adding to the mitzvah, embellishing the mitzvah, or performing it with devotion.

Pinchas, whose father and grandfather served as High Priest, was infused with tremendous zeal for Hashem, and this zeal pushed him to emulate them. Now that he had an opportunity to kill Zimri and thereby stop an epidemic, he elevated himself and merited the level of the High Priesthood. Thus by carrying out all the laws concerning the High Priest, he could stop the epidemic and atone for the Children of Israel on Yom Kippur. He could also atone for the sin of Lashon Harah by means of his garments. Even after Pinchas decided to kill Zimri, he saw two reasons for doing so. The first was that he could thereby grow and inherit the High Priesthood of his father. The second was to stop the epidemic that was raging among the Children of Israel. From here we see the greatness of Pinchas, for although these two reasons were for the sake of Heaven, and despite the difficulty of calculating pros and cons at such a difficult and critical time (especially since it related to himself and his own honor), he nevertheless only had the welfare of others in mind. He preferred to kill Zimri only in order to stop the epidemic that was raging among the Children of Israel, not for any other reason, since stopping the epidemic was so important. Thus we read, "The epidemic was stopped" (Numbers 25:8) – it was the only reason why Pinchas killed Zimri. Hence it was fitting for Pinchas to be rewarded.

We may explain the situation in another way: Pinchas did not, in fact, receive a reward for his deed. However since he carried out a spiritual action, he received a spiritual reward, namely the High Priesthood and a long life of helping and defending the Children of Israel. This does not mean that he was rewarded for his deed, but that one mitzvah leads to another.

We must also say that a person does not receive a reward in this world for performing a mitzvah by his own merit. Pinchas did not perform this deed by his own merit, but by relying upon the merit of his fathers. He possessed numerous merits of his own, and he also knew that this deed would earn him the High Priesthood. Nevertheless, Pinchas humbled himself and carried out this deed by the merit of his fathers, for he believed that it would help him. That is why it was fitting for Pinchas to be rewarded. It was not his own reward that he received, but that of his fathers, with Pinchas receiving the fruit of this reward.

In reality, Pinchas drew his strength from Abraham, concerning whom it is written: "The L-RD appeared to him on the plains of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day. He raised his eyes and looked, and behold: Three men were standing over him. When he saw them, he ran to meet them" (Genesis 18:1-2). In other words, once Abraham circumcised himself and became complete, he also merited becoming a vehicle for the Shechinah. Yet Abraham still sat by his tent and waited for guests, even though Hashem appeared to him. When he saw three passers-by whom he did not know, he ran to meet them as if they were longtime friends. This is very surprising for two reasons: (1) While still standing before the Shechinah, how could Abraham leave to run after potential guests, regardless of how important they were, and especially since they appeared to be simple Arabs? (2) How did Abraham have the strength to run on the third day following his circumcision, which is the most painful day of all, as it is written: "On the third day, as they were in pain" (Genesis 34:25)? His pain was so intense that even angels noticed and wanted to leave, as the Sages state, especially since a person who is occupied with one mitzvah is exempt from another mitzvah.

It seems that we may explain this as follows: Abraham, in realizing just how hot it was outside (since Hashem had taken the sun out of its sheath), was afraid that people would not want to venture out as a result. He therefore thought that now he had to overcome his weakness and pain, which were trials. Since this depended solely on him, especially now that he had become a vehicle for the Shechinah and was complete, he had to run after every passer-by and bring him into his tent. This was despite the fact that Abraham knew that for every moment he stayed with Hashem, he could elevate himself and reach unparalleled heights. Therefore each instant was more precious than gold, and by taking the action that he did, Abraham was damaging his service of Hashem. Nevertheless he decided to put aside his personal interests and the spiritual levels that he could have reached by staying close to the Shechinah. Instead of serving Hashem and receiving a reward, he preferred to use his strength to help others, so they too could recognize Hashem with perfect faith. They too could therefore benefit from the World to Come, just as he was now benefiting from the Shechinah. Abraham's great spiritual level would make itself known by this deed, which is why the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: "Your reward is very great" (Genesis 15:1). Likewise Pinchas, who put all his personal interests aside and redeemed the Children of Israel solely because of his love for Hashem, merited a reward. By this merit, all his descendants after him would be priests. Pinchas also followed this path, and because he was concerned for others and not for himself, he merited the High Priesthood for himself and his descendants after him, as we have explained.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Long Life

It is written, “Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give him My covenant of peace, and it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood’ ” (Numbers 25:12-13). Rashi states, “My covenant of peace – that it should be a covenant of peace for him. ... It shall be – this covenant of Mine shall be for him.”

According to Rashi’s explanation, the covenant of peace is not a reward per se. The eternal priesthood itself is a covenant of peace. However Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that the covenant of peace is a reward per se: He would experience longevity and not die, for Pinchas is Eliyahu HaNavi. Just as the expression “covenant of peace” is used with regards to Pinchas, it is also used with regards to Eliyahu HaNavi: “My covenant was with him, life and peace” (Malachi 2:5). Therefore the covenant of peace is the same as life and peace. Commenting on Judges 20:28, Radak states: “Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest...lived a very long time, for G-d had promised him this because he had demonstrated his zeal at Shittim. He said, ‘I give him My covenant of peace,’ and it is written, ‘My covenant was with him, life and peace.’ ”

Now the Sages have said, “In all the responses taken by the Holy One, blessed be He, the Divine act is measure for measure” (Sanhedrin 90a). Where exactly is the measure of measure response here? Since Pinchas demonstrated zeal for Hashem and turned His anger away, he was like an angel of G-d, which does not die. Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that the reward of long life corresponds to the fact that Pinchas saved the lives of the Children of Israel by stopping the epidemic. Since he caused the lives of the Children of Israel to be prolonged, from that day on until the end of the world – years without end – he merited life without end, measure for measure. Thus Pinchas is Eliyahu, for as the prophet Malachi said, “My covenant was with him, life and peace,” and here we read: “My covenant of peace.”

A Pearl From the Rav: He Spoke Properly and Acted Properly

It is written, “Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw and stood up from amid the assembly” (Numbers 25:7).

Our Sages raised an objection here, for did nobody other than Pinchas see what he saw? After all, the text states: “In the sight of Moses and in the sight of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel” (Number 25:6). We must say that Pinchas saw that he was born for this moment; he saw that he was weak compared to his ancestors, as if he did not exist. Hence the verse states, “the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest.” That is why he stood up, and he spoke properly and acted properly in doing what he did. He also saw that on one hand, he was not worthy of carrying out this act, but on the other hand the merit of his fathers would help him. Therefore the verse states, “the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest.” Pinchas saw and sensed a marvelous awakening. It would be unfortunate not to use the forces that were hidden in him to serve Hashem, especially since his father and grandfather were High Priests and that a zeal for Hashem to emulate them burned in him. Now he could act; he could kill Zimri and end the epidemic. It depended on him, not on Moses or the elders of Israel. If he hesitated, the epidemic would spread. He therefore stood up and acted entirely for the sake of Heaven with all of his 248 limbs and 365 sinews.

The Merit of the Fathers

It is written, “Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest” (Numbers 25:11).

The Ohr HaChaim asks why the ancestry of Pinchas is given here, with his father and grandfather being mentioned. He writes, “Perhaps the intention is to mention his ancestors for the good.” A person who performs a mitzvah garners merit for himself and others, and his ancestors are remembered for the good as well. In fact the Gemara tells us that when a person walks in the right path, people say: “Happy is the father who taught him Torah” (Yoma 86a). From here we learn that it is not only people who speak about him, and it is not only his father who is mentioned, but in Heaven his living father and departed grandfather are also mentioned! Thus for every good deed, and for every mitzvah, fathers and grandfathers are mentioned for the good!

Being Rewarded in this World As Well

It is written, “Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest, turned back My anger” (Numbers 25:11).

The Sages have said, “It is right that he should receive his reward” (Bamidbar Rabba 21:1). The gaon Rabbi Yosef Gabai Zatzal of Boujad, Morocco asks: “Have the Sages not said that there is no reward for a mitzvah in this world, but only in the World to Come, as is written: ‘That I command you to do today’ [Deuteronomy 7:11]? Today to do, and tomorrow – in the World to Come – to be rewarded. How could Pinchas, in all fairness, have received his reward in this world?” He replies according to the words of the Sages, who listed a series of mitzvot whose fruit a person eats in this world, while the principle remains for the World to Come. The Maharal of Prague said that they comprise an enormous benefit for the world and those who live in it. Now if a person, through his mitzvot, does good for himself and his soul, his reward awaits him in the future. However if he does good for other people here and now, he will also be rewarded for it here and now.

Since Pinchas stopped an epidemic and turned Hashem’s anger away from His people, he merited eating the fruit of his deeds in this world, and it is only fitting that he received the reward of the priesthood for all time!

A Reward that is Measure for Measure

It is written, “I give him My covenant of peace” (Numbers 25:12).

The author of Bina LaItim explains that Pinchas accomplished three things by his zeal: First, he made peace between Hashem and His people, against whom He had been angered. Second, he sanctified the Name of Heaven, which had been profaned. Third, he saved the lives of the Children of Israel, who were dying in an epidemic.

These three things are alluded to in the text. Aaron loved peace and pursued peace, and Pinchas also made peace between the Children of Israel and their Creator, for he “turned back My anger from upon the Children of Israel” (Numbers 25:11). Second, Pinchas sanctified the Name of Heaven “when he zealously avenged Me among them” (ibid.). Third, he did good for the Children of Israel insofar as Hashem “did not consume the Children of Israel in My vengeance” (ibid.). For these three things, Pinchas merited a triple reward, measure for measure: (1) “Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give him My covenant of peace’ ” – for the peace that he established. (2) Since he sanctified My Name, I will sanctify him through the priesthood. (3) Because he saved the lives of My children from the epidemic, I shall also protect his children and descendants after him,

and I shall sanctify them for all time: “It shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal priesthood” (v.13). Why? “Because he was zealous for his G-d” (ibid.). I will sanctify him by the priesthood, for since “he atoned for the Children of Israel” (ibid.) and prolonged their lives, I will take care of him for all time, for all the generations!

Shame and Reproach

It is written, “You shall put some of your glory upon him” (Numbers 27:20).

The Sages have said, “Not all your glory. The elders of that generation said, ‘The face of Moses was like that of the sun, the face of Joshua was like that of the moon. Alas for such shame! Alas for such reproach!’” (Bava Batra 75a). Exactly what was the shame and reproach of the elders? In the Midrash the Sages say that Joshua deserved to succeed Moses as leader because for as long as Moses lived, Joshua acted as his servant (“Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses”). He used to arrange the benches and spread out the mats in the Beit Midrash, and thus he fulfilled the verse: “Whoever guards the fig tree shall eat its fruit” (Proverbs 27:18). The elders, who at the time believed that it was not fitting for them to act like Joshua, now realized that it was precisely by doing so that he merited becoming the leader of Israel and that his face shined like the moon. Hence they exclaimed, “Alas for such shame! Alas for such reproach!” Alas for the shame that we felt, which prevented us from arranging the benches in the Beit Midrash, and which has made us the disciples of the young Joshua!

– The Chida, Commentary on Pirkei Avot

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Pinchas begins the last segment of the book of Numbers with a census of the people, who are about to enter the land of Israel. It also discusses the inheritance of the land and the leadership of the people after Moses. For the zeal that Pinchas demonstrates by turning Hashem’s anger away from the Children of Israel, he is promised an eternal priesthood, i.e., that he and his descendants shall be priests for all time, as it is written: “My covenant of peace.” The people are then told to harass the Midianites on account of Peor and Cozbi. After an epidemic that rages among the people, they are counted in the plains of Moab according to tribe and family, by which they will receive an inheritance in the land. Families from the tribe of Levi, however, are not allotted an inheritance in the land. Due to the concerns of the daughters of Zelophehad over their inheritance (since their father died without having a son), Hashem tells Moses that they should receive a portion from their father’s inheritance. Before Moses dies, Hashem tells him to look at the land from the summit of Mount Abiram. Moses then asks Hashem to name a successor who will lead the people, and Hashem tells him to appoint Joshua. The end of the parsha mentions the tamid (daily communal offering) and the mussaf (additional festival offering), the offerings of Hashem’s people that connect their life in Eretz Israel to G-d. The tamid and mussaf are the final offerings mentioned in the book of Numbers, which describes the community around its Sanctuary, whereas the book of Leviticus deals with the offerings and mitzvot of the individual.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Zeal for the Sake of Heaven

There are some sins whose punishment is not death by the Beit Din, nor death at the hands of Heaven, but that “the zealots shall strike him.” The deep meaning of this law is that there are sins for which the Torah does not need to state that the transgressor must die. The Children of Israel must themselves realize that such sins are so grave that the transgressor must die. This is the meaning of “the zealots shall strike him.” For people who are burning with zeal for Hashem, their hearts are infused with an understanding of the Torah and they realize that the actions of such of sinner run counter to all faith and the entire Torah. Hence there is no reason to ask where it is written that such a transgressor is liable to death, or where it is written that we must kill him. The faith and Torah infused in the heart signify that such a transgressor has completely denied everything and is liable to death.

The Sages have taught, “When the Israelites gave precedence to ‘we will do’ over ‘we will hear,’ a Heavenly voice went out and said to them: ‘Who revealed this secret to My children, which is employed by the ministering angels, as it is written: “Bless the L-RD, O His angels, the strong warriors who do His bidding, to hear the voice of His word” [Psalms 103:20]?’ First they do, and then they obey” (Shabbat 88a). This characteristic is unique to the angels. They are ready to do before hearing. Now an angel’s sole purpose is to fulfill Hashem’s will. Its name malach (“emissary”) indicates that it has no purpose other than the fulfillment of its mission. Since an angel’s essence is to serve Hashem, it can thereby understand Hashem’s word and do it even before hearing it.

This is why Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest – who demonstrated his zeal for Hashem and carried out the law that “the zealots shall strike him” – was among “the strong warriors who do His bidding,” having employed the secret used by the ministering angels. Without having been explicitly commanded, Pinchas understood Hashem’s will on his own, and he realized that what Zimri was doing went completely against Hashem’s will. Zimri therefore had to die. Hence the reward given to Pinchas was measure for measure: Just as he raised himself to the level of a ministering angel, he became Eliyahu HaNavi.

– Imrei Emet

EISHET CHAYIL

Israel, Have Faith in Hashem

For one who has faith in the Holy One, blessed be He, the kindness that nourishes the entire world surrounds him on all sides, as it is written: “One who trusts in the L-RD, kindness surrounds him” (Psalms 32:10). Hashem creates the circumstances by which a person obtains his food, and nothing is impossible for Him to do, as we learn from the story of Eliyahu, whose food was brought to him by ravens. It is written, “Fear the L-RD, you His holy ones, for those who fear Him suffer no want. Young lions are in need and go hungry, but those who seek the L-RD shall not lack any good” (Psalms 34:10-11). This means that He nourishes and gives food to all that is feeble, such as the fetus inside its mother’s womb, and like the chick inside the egg, where there is no place from which sustenance can come. Nevertheless He feeds the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and the feeble ant. He also prevents the lion, the most powerful of animals, from reaching its prey. Thus it is written, “Young lions are in need and go hungry, but those who seek the L-RD shall not lack any good.”

– Kad HaKemach

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

The King Before the Beit Din

The slave of King Yanai, a ruler from the Hasmonean dynasty, had killed a man. News of the incident reached the ears of Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach, the generation's greatest Sage, who decided to judge the case. The Sages sent a message to King Yanai, telling him: "Your slave has killed a man." The king therefore sent his slave to be tried. However the Sages of Israel were not content with only the slave, and they sent another message to the king: "You too must come before the Beit Din, for when a slave is being tried, the slave's owner must also present himself." The king accordingly came and sat down.

Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach then addressed the king: "Stand on your feet, King Yanai, and let the witnesses testify against you. It is not before us that you are standing, but before Him Who spoke and the world came into being, as it is written, 'The two men who have the grievance shall stand before the L-RD' [Deuteronomy 19:17]." King Yanai replied, "I shall not act according to your words, but according to the words of your colleagues."

Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach turned first to the right and then to the left. Since the Sages all feared the king, they looked towards the ground. Rabbi Simeon ben Shetach said to them, "Are you having doubts? You are differentiating between an ordinary man and the son of a king! Let the Master of thoughts, the Holy One, blessed be He, come and call you to account!"

– Ma'asechem Shel Tzaddikim

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Moshe HaCohen Twill

The gaon Rabbi Moshe HaCohen Twill Zatzal was born in Syria in the year 5656. He was the Rosh Yeshiva of Dagef Torah in Aleppo, from which many great figures of the region emerged. He exerted all his strength in educating students to sanctify the Name of Heaven in all their ways, as it is written: "If someone studies Scripture and Mishnah...is honest in business and speaks pleasantly to people, what do people then say concerning him? 'Happy is the father who taught him Torah, happy is the teacher who taught him Torah.' ... Look at how fine his ways are, how righteous his deeds! Of him Scripture says, 'He said to me: You are My servant Israel, in whom I will be glorified' [Isaiah 49:3]" (Yoma 86a). A school from the Alliance française [an organization promoting French language and culture] opened in the city, and the gaon Rabbi Moshe Twill fought with all his strength against this attempt to diminish the people's faith and introduce foreign ideas to the community.

At one point, the wealthy members of the city opened a mixed-gender recreation hall, and the leaders of the community could not oppose them because they were aggressive and violent. There was a drought for about a year at the time, and the leaders of the community went to see Rabbi Moshe Twill for advice on whether to declare a public fast. Rabbi Moshe said, "Why should the entire community fast on account of the sin of a few? There is no doubt in my mind that the drought is caused by the immoral conduct that takes place in the mixed hall! Instead of declaring a public fast, instead declare that women and girls should not visit this area of immorality. If people listen, I promise you that rain will fall in abundance!" The proclamation was made, and the hall was closed because nobody frequented it any longer. Two days later, abundant rain began to fall and bestow blessing!

– Ma'ayan HaShavua

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTARAH

Seeking Good for Others

It is written, "[Eliyahu] said, 'I acted with great zeal for the L-RD, the G-d of Hosts, for the Children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant. They have razed Your altars and have killed Your prophets by the sword, so I alone have remained'" (I Kings 19:10).

In the Yalkut we read that Hashem was angry with Eliyahu because he did not defend the Children of Israel. Hashem said to him, "You always demonstrate zeal, and in Shittim also you demonstrated it," which is why He ordered Eliyahu to anoint Elisha as a prophet in his place. This is quite surprising. The zeal that Eliyahu, who is Pinchas, demonstrated in Shittim was considered to be a great thing, something that the Torah greatly praises and for which he received a tremendous reward. Therefore why is Hashem angry with him here on account of it? The Maggid of Dubno explains the situation with a parable: A father led his only son to a doctor in order to treat his illness. The doctor then operates on the sick boy, but is forced to amputate a limb in order to save him. The father wholeheartedly thanks the doctor and pays him generously. Later on, however, the boy again falls ill, and his father brings him back to the same doctor, who gives the boy some very powerful herbs, powerful enough to kill. When the father sees this, he begins to scream: "Why are you trying to kill my son? I brought him here so you could heal him! Now I know that even when I brought him to you the first time, your intentions were to harm him! That's why you amputated him. You didn't operate on him so he could get better!"

The same applies here. When Eliyahu (who is Pinchas) began to accuse the Children of Israel with such vehemence that it argued for their complete annihilation, and when he failed to defend them or seek favor on their behalf, as befits a leader of Israel, Hashem said: "It seems that even the zeal you demonstrated in Shittim, the zeal for which I gave you such a great reward, did not have the good of Israel in mind. It was only to their detriment, to bring accusations against them for their sins." Hashem was thus hinting to Eliyahu that when we speak to sinners, we must reprimand them with harsh and severe words, but when we speak about them to Hashem, we must defend them and ask for mercy on their behalf.

– Kochav MiYa'akov

A TRUE STORY

My Covenant is With Him – Life and Peace

In the year 5665, a member of the Bund [a Jewish socialist movement] was imprisoned, a youngster who was known in Brisk as being someone who had veered from the right path and completely neglected Torah. His tearful mother, who was a widow, went to find Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik Zatzal and asked him to help free her son. Members of the Neturei Karta told him that it was definitely not acceptable for him to endanger himself by mixing into politics in an emergency. Furthermore, there was good reason to fear that his efforts could harm the entire community, for there was a suspicion that the rabbis were in league with the rebels. When they realized that Rabbi Chaim was still hesitant, still deciding whether he should help the youngster or not, they told him that he was not worth the effort, for he was like a thorn to the faithful of Israel. Without hesitating, Rabbi Chaim said: "In the end, all these fears constitute a doubt. However it is a certainty that the heart of a widowed mother is bleeding, and we do not push away a certainty for a doubt." He therefore did all that he could to free her son.

Conversely, he who was so softhearted as to be weak – this man for whom there was no limit to his feelings for the pain of others – was as unyielding as a cedar when it came to defending Judaism. He was a symbol of Pinchas, who is Eliyahu, enflamed with zeal for Hashem and guided by peace. Immediately after the death of Zimri, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "I give him My covenant of peace." There is no contradiction between such a zealot and true peace.

– Midrash Shimoni