

## **Parshat Pinchas 5766-2006**

### **by Rabbi Herschel Kurzrock**

Many commentaries ask why the heroic, dramatic story of Pinchos rescuing the people of Israel from a ravaging plague by jeopardizing his life by killing Zimri was divided between Parshat Balak and Parshat Pinchos. Towards the end of Parshat Balak, we read about the brazen act of immorality perpetuated by Zimri, prince of the tribe of Shimon. It was a public act in defiance of Moshe and the Judges of Israel. Pinchos, witnessing this flagrant transgression, recalled the law pertaining to such a case: zealous adherents to HaShem and His law may inflict capital punishment on a perpetrator in midst of his act. Immediately, without regard for his personal safety, Pinchos executed revenge and gave retribution to Zimri and Cozbi, daughter of a prince of Midian through his prompt brave act inspired by righteous zeal and thereby stopped the plague. Here, Parshat Balak ends!

Parshat Pinchos briefly refers to the story by listing the names of the participants in the act, and then concentrates on detailing the reward. The Almighty made a covenant of everlasting "Kehunah" and shalom with Pinchos because of his heroic deed.

Why was the story divided between two Parshiot, One relates the occurrence and the second discusses the reward.

As mentioned above, Pinchos was "a zealot." Our Sages teach that a true zealot reacts only when driven by the emotion of the moment, manifested in his profound hatred of evil and fervent, pure love of HaShem and Torah. He is propelled by a burning indignation upon witnessing an act of immorality in progress. If a zealot comes to ask a question, this person isn't in the category of a "true zealot" , reacting from the profound emotion of the moment. The Yerushalmi states that Pinchos acted against the wishes of the Sages and they wanted to put him into "Cheyrem" , pronounce an ecclesiastical ban on him. A true zealot acting altruistically, without ulterior motives, is faced with great danger. The Talmud tells us that six miracles occurred at that moment to insure Pinchos' safety from the mob.

There is a beautiful symbolic thought presented by the sefer "Noam Elimelech" depicting the necessity for true "mesirat nefesh" on the part of the zealot. The verse states, "Vayikach Romach B'Yawdo" , and Pinchos took a javelin in his hand , to stab Zimri. The word romach is constituted of Resh (200) Mem (40) Ches (8) (all Hebrew letters have a numerical value) and can also be read as Ramach equal to 248, corresponding to the number of organs in the human body. This symbolizes that a

zealot is ready to take Ramach Ayvorav , all his organs in hand and perform an act of self-sacrifice to sanctify the Almighty's name by destroying evil.

Thus, a "kosher" zealot has no ulterior motive in mind; his act is pure and holy. The division of the story symbolically attests to the fact that Pinchos acted only L'shem Shomayim, for the sake of HaShem. He didn't seek a reward.

Therefore, only the story is related in Parshat Balak. While in Parshat Pinchos, the Almighty states, "Therefore proclaim it, give him My covenant of peace, everlasting; Kehunah. The Almighty who rewards midah keneged midah , in kind gives Pinchos his deserved reward; although he served HaShem without the express intention of receiving a reward. The reward was very appropriate since Pinchos represented the true Torah Jew who acted completely al pi halacha, according to the law, even to the extent of self-sacrifice. His being chosen for the everlasting covenant of Kehunah for himself and his descendants, to the extent that all the Kohanim Gedolim came from his descendants, was really a reward "in kind."

The kohain was always the one to judge and lead the people in halacha and service of HaShem. Pinchos, by his actions, depicted a true Kohain HaShem. His act, which led to peace and harmony, brought him also the reward of a covenant of peace forever. According to the Midrash, "Pinchas Zeh Eliyahu, Pinchos will also bring the ultimate peace on Earth as ELIYAHU the Angel who will herald the coming of Moshiach, leading to the establishment of universal peace and brotherhood of man under HaShem.

Yet, instead of showing appreciation and gratitude to Pinchos for his act of heroism, the people ridiculed, criticized and heaped insults upon him. But this couldn't deter Pinchos who realized the value of good and righteous living. As we see, when Moshe sent an army to fight Midian, Pinchos was at the head of the group. In fact, the Torah doesn't mention specifically the presence or names of the Kohain in the previous wars of Sichon, Og and the Amorites. One might say that this is to show that Pinchos remained the same "kosher" zealot despite the lack of appreciation and being subjected to ridicule by his people. Recognition or applause from fellow mortals was of no consequence to him. Finding favor in the eyes of HaShem, by complete fulfillment of Torah and Mitzvot, was his only goal. Let us not direct time, or gear our Torah study and observance of good deeds so that we may garner the greatest measure of public approval. The criteria for performance should be acceptance in the eyes of the Almighty. Our sincere continuous study of Torah leading to proper, consistent performance of mitzvot , L'Shaim Shomayim , for the sake of HaShem,

will make us worthy of witnessing the ultimate "Brisi Shalom" , my covenant of peace on Earth , promised to Pinchos , in the near future.