

HASHEM'S WORDS THROUGH THE PROPHET

PARSHAS PINCHAS

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

New headlines this week: Sirens, worrisome news in Israel, Gaza missiles fly across the country. Thousands, including a choson kala under the chupa, run to shelters. Still the overriding image of the three yeshiva boys murdered in cold blood lingers in the mind. Happy youth with bright futures ahead of them shot by barbaric human snakes. The Torah says of the first snake (serpent) enticing Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit, "She", the woman "will pound your head" (Beraishis 3:15). Can anyone blame a mother of the sweet slain victims for having a wish to pound the heads of the human snakes?

The "head" of the human snakes include the planners, the managers of the brutal murder. All these deserve severe penalty. As the Targum Jonoson teaches in the Ten Commandments "You shall not kill" refers to accomplices as well. It also applies, in a minor way, to parents encouraging children to become hero murderers of Jewish children.

What should the Jewish response be? Presidents advise the use of utter restraint. Do our sainted prophets agree with that position?

The Talmud (Shabos 88a) takes note of the categories constituting divine teaching: Torah (Chumosh), Prophets, Scripture, i.e. TeNaCh. To the faithful Jew these are all binding, no difference. What is the purpose of this division into three categories?

Every Shabos morning the Halacha requires us to read from a Sefer Torah a portion of Chumosh, Sidra of the week. Seven people participate, receiving aliyos, after which a portion from the Prophets is selected. This Prophetic portion, too, is given supreme esteem, in that

seven benedictions are recited with the reading, two linked to the Maftir in Chumosh itself, and five additional benedictions. Here, too, one wonders what is the significance of the classification?

The same query may apply to a Rashi in Ethics of the Fathers, Avos (chapter 3, mishna 3), requiring Torah study during a meal, a group meal. Rashi quotes authority to learn at least one item of each category, Chumosh, Prophets, and Scripture. Not only during the meal, but also in the grace following the meal, *ברכת המזון*, all three groups are quoted. [*ידך פותח את ידך*] from Scriptures (Tehilim), *ואכלת ושבעת* from Chumosh (Devorim 8:10), and *מגדול ישועות מלכו* (on Shabos) from Prophets (Shmuel II 22:51).

In the Musaf of Rosh Hashana, quotes are included in *מלכיות*, *זכרונות*, *שופרות* from all three categories. It should be intriguing to gain insight in this and the above three dimensional grouping.

A fascinating observation is accorded in our Sidra by Reb Meir Simcha in his Meshech Chochma, enlightening all the above: Hashem tells Moshe to tell Pinchas, "Behold I am giving you My covenant of peace, for him and his offspring a covenant of eternal priesthood". Now, since Pinchas was a prophet (as seen in Divrei Hayomim I, 9:20), Hashem would have given him that gift directly by Himself. However, when Hashem Himself promises someone a gift, that could change if the receiver commits a sin. This principle is found in connection with Yaakov, who was promised to come back in peace from his journey to Lovon (Beraishis 28:15), yet he was fearful to face Esau, "Yaakov became frightened and distressed" (ibid 32:8), perhaps the promise of a safe return was rescinded because of sin (Rashi ibid).

If, however, the divine promise is given through a prophet, it cannot be withheld because of sin. This is based on the rules judging whether one's claim of prophecy is really divinely authorized. If his

promises in the name of Hashem is in the negative, and not fulfilled, the prophecy may be divinely authorized and reversed because of repentance. If, however, the prophecy is in the positive, that prophecy if divinely authorized cannot be nullified. If it is unfulfilled it is a sign that the man is a false prophet, deserving the death penalty (Devorim 18:22). Here, concludes the Meshech Chochma, is where we see the word of Hashem through a prophet can never be rescinded, whereas coming from Hashem Himself it could be rescinded because of sin.

This is the case of the advantage to Pinchas his ascendancy to priesthood coming divinely authorized through a prophet, Moshe. It was an assurance against any retraction.

Referring back to the vexing situation in Israel, the nation of the בית אלף, 22, כ"ב אותיות, the twenty-two letters of the Torah, in conflict with, and being threatened by, twenty-two Arab nations. The believing Jew is certain that should the vast majority adhere to the sanctity of the twenty-two התורה, the letters and its precepts, we are assured of a blessed outcome. So we find in a prophecy recited the past Shabos in the Haftorah of פרשת בלק. It is clearly spelled out "תרם ידך על צריך" "your hand shall be raised over your adversaries and all your enemies shall be cut down" (Micha 5:8). Apparently this passage refers to these enemies of the בית אלף people. So is stated by the Daas Zekainim beginning of פרשת תשא quoting the above passage in Micha.

This is a prophet speaking. As stated in one of the seven benedictions for Haftorah: ונאמנים דבריך ודבר אחד מדבריך אחור לא ישוב "Trustworthy are your words, not one of your words is turned back unfulfilled..."

