Summary

Hashem tells Moshe to inform Pinchas that he will receive Hashem’s “covenant of peace” as reward for his bold action — executing Zimri and the Midianite princess Kozbi. Hashem commands Moshe that the people must maintain a state of enmity with the Midianim because they allured the Jewish People to sin. Moshe and Elazar are told to count the Jewish People. The Torah lists the names of the families in each of the Tribes. The total number of males eligible to serve in the army is 601,730. Hashem instructs Moshe how to allot the Land of Israel to the Bnei Yisrael. The number of the families of the Levites is recorded. The number of males eligible to serve in the army is 601,730. Hashem instructs Moshe to determine the order of an inheritance.

Commentaries

War and Peace

“...a covenant of peace.” (25:12)

It may seem ironic that the reward for a violent killing should be “a covenant of peace.”

The word in Hebrew “Shalom” not only means peace, but also connotes completeness and perfection — any peace which lacks completeness and perfection is not really peace. And just as there can only be One Completeness and One Perfection, so too there can only be one real peace — Hashem’s peace, for only “He who makes peace in His exalted realms, He will make peace for us and for all of Israel....”

If something is immoral, then appeasement is not peace and doesn’t lead to peace. On the other hand, an act of zealotry divorced of pure intentions can be a crime in itself. For this reason the Torah points out that Pinchas acted “for his G-d” — i.e., he had no motivation whatsoever other than to do the will of the Almighty. Only when intentions are entirely pure can zealotry lead to “a covenant of peace.”

(Based on the Or HaYOel)

Helping Daddy

“By avenging My vengeance...” (25:11)

‘He expressed the anger that was Mine to show.’ — Rashi

When you ask your three-year old son to help you set the table for Shabbos, and he manfully steers the kiddush cup up onto the Shabbos table, you get a tremendous feeling of nachas. You certainly don’t gain anything from his help, except of course, enormous pleasure. You could have just as easily done what he did at the same time as you brought in the rest of the plates and the cutlery. But you gave him a job all of his own!

Rashi explains the meaning of the expression “he avenged My vengeance” to mean: “He expressed the anger that was Mine to show.” It was specifically because Pinchas did something that was really Hashem’s to do that he merited such a great reward. The same idea applies to tzedaka, charity. Turnus Rufus once asked Rabbi Akiva how it was that “If Hashem loves the poor why doesn’t He feed them?” Rabbi Akiva answered that the poor give us more than we give them — for through giving them tzedaka, they save us from gehinnom (purgatory).

Rabbi Akiva was saying that, of course, it’s Hashem’s ‘job’ to feed the poor, but He allows us to feed them instead. And by doing ‘Hashem’s job for Him,’ we earn a far greater reward. We are like the little boy setting the table for Shabbos. Of course, Hashem can feed the poor Himself, but He gives us the job to do, even though, we’re really not ‘helping’ Him at all.

(Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt”l)
Curtain Call

“By avenging My Vengeance” (25:11)

When Zimri, prince of the tribe of Shimon, committed an act of gross indecency with Cozbi, princess of Moav, everyone including Moshe was frozen in disbelief. Everyone, that is, except Pinchas. Pinchas didn’t hesitate to avenge Hashem’s honor and execute the pair.

The Midrash tells “that because of Moshe’s hesitation, no man knows the place of his burial.”

What can one thing possibly have to do with the other? Why did Moshe’s hesitation mean that his burial place is unknown?

The reason is as follows: Skeptics claim that Moshe couldn’t have been as great as the Torah’s description of him. For if he had been so great, if he had really gone up to Heaven and spoken face-to-face with the Divine Presence, he should have merited eternal life. Instead of dying a human death, he should have ascended alive to Heaven like Chanoch and Eliyahu. So, claim the skeptics, the Torah of Moshe must be nothing more than a panegyric of self-glorification.

This claim, however, is laughable. For if Moshe had wanted to write himself a fictitious final scene, he could certainly have written something like “And Moshe ascended to Heaven alive in a fiery chariot.” That would have been a real curtain-closer!

But what does it say in the Torah? “And Moshe died....”

Can there be a stronger proof of the Torah’s truth than those few prosaic words: “And Moshe died...”? How easy it would have been for Moshe to write himself a glorious supernatural exit to rival the biggest Hollywood blockbuster — and add immeasurably to the luster of his memory!

However, the strength of this proof relies on one other factor — no one knows Moshe’s burial place! Because, if it were known, then Moshe could never have claimed that he ascended to Heaven alive — his grave would be there for all to see.

Now we can understand the words of the Midrash: “Because of Moshe’s hesitation, no man knows his burial place.” If Moshe had stepped in and executed Zimri, had he “avenged the vengeance of Hashem,” necessarily he would have merited the reward that Pinchas in fact received — an eternal life without death.

But if Moshe had lived forever, he would never have been able to confound the skeptics and prove the truth of the Torah by those few words “And Moshe died....”

(Bircas Hashir)

Haftorah: Yirmiyahu 1:1-2:3

“Thus says Hashem: ‘I remember for your sake the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days, your following after Me in the wilderness in a land not sown. Israel is sacred to Hashem, the first of His grain; all who devour him shall bear his guilt, evil shall come upon them’ — the word of Hashem.” (2:2-3)

Once there was a sensitive lad, who spent all his days in study and refining his character. While still at a tender age, he was captured by bandits and forced to live amongst them. At first, he was repulsed by their coarseness, and clung to his original demeanor. However, as the weeks lengthened into years and no sign of rescue came, slowly but surely he began to degenerate to the level of his captors, and eventually he was indistinguishable from them.

When the Jewish People are finally redeemed from exile, the nations that have oppressed them will be held to account, not just for their own misdeeds against Israel, but also for Israel’s transgressions, for had it not been for the company the Jewish People kept in exile, they would still be on the same spiritual level that they were on when they were in the desert.

That is the meaning of these verses: ‘I remember for your sake the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days, your following after Me in the wilderness in a land not sown.’ — the word of Hashem.” (2:2-3)

Bar Parshas Pinchas

We shall inherit the estate of Yaakov An estate without limits

One who honors the Sabbath by properly enjoying it, says Rabbi Yochanan in the name of Rabbi Yossi (Shabbos 118) will be granted an estate without limits like the one which Hashem promised to Yaakov Avinu. Rabbi Yehuda in the name of the Sage Rav says that his reward will be the fulfillment of all his desires.

At first glance these two rewards may seem to differ. But they are actually complementary. A man who has a hundred dollars, says the Talmud, wants two hundred. Fulfillment of one’s desire only gives birth to another. In order for the Sabbath celebrator to be rewarded with the fulfillment of all his desires, he must be given an estate with no limits at all.

Parshas Pinchas For the week ending 19 Tammuz 5756, 5 & 6 July 1996

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