

JULY 2, 2007

Parashat Pinchas

Rules of Readiness

Hin'ni notein lo et briti shalom “Behold, I give him my covenant of peace” (Numbers 25:12)

In what can only be described as the most paradoxical reward of the Torah, HaShem grants Pinchas, a man who inscribed himself in infamy with a violent double murder, the reward of a covenant of peace. How do we explain this seemingly inexplicable *pasuk*?

The episode of Pinchas' violent action teaches an important lesson: sometimes, conflict is the only means to bring about peace. It is vital to note that the *halacha* demands that, in any war, Israel must first beseech the enemy for peace (see Yad Hilchot Melachim 6:1-4). As we know from the examples in our exodus from Egypt, sometimes the enemy is prepared for peace and sometimes not. Either way, we are required to attempt to seek out non-violent solutions while being prepared to defend ourselves.

We can be proud that the modern State of Israel has always lived out this value. Since before her independence, the leaders of the Jewish state have extended a hand to neighboring countries in an effort to live peacefully. Israel has also maintained an ongoing state of readiness for conflict should it be necessary. In this regard, the help of the United States has been and will continue to be invaluable.

Last week, Congress passed the annual foreign aid bill which included \$2.4 billion in military aid for Israel to help maintain a qualitative military edge in the region. As the Israeli and American governments negotiate a new ten-year aid agreement, we must let our elected representatives know the importance of aid to Israel, thank those Members who voted for the most recent aid package, and express hope that Members who voted against it will consider supporting foreign aid in the future.

Israel does her part by seeking every alternative to conflict while being ever-prepared to defend herself. The United States, in serving our own national interests, has always stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Israel in war and peace. ■

Do the Right Thing

B'kano et kinati b'tocham “when he was zealous for my sake among them” (Numbers 25:12)

In his commentary on this *pasuk*, the Alshich seizes on the word *b'tocham*. The net result of Pinchas' actions is that God's anger is turned aside and *B'nei Yisrael* are spared. Why, then, does the Torah say *b'tocham* instead of *l'chem*? According to the Alshich, what Pinchas did was extremely unpopular and some in the community even wanted to kill him. Since so many people were angered by his actions, he was said to have acted “among them” rather than “for them.”

Doing the right thing isn't always easy and the case of Pinchas is an especially difficult example because of our aversion to violence. The lesson, however, is a perfectly relevant one: we must always try to do what we know to be right even when it is unpopular.

Last week marked the one-year anniversary of the kidnapping of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Since being grabbed in an unprovoked, illegal cross-border raid by Hamas-linked terrorists, Gilad has had one birthday and is coming up on another. The terrorists released an audio tape of their captive last week; the script of which was specifically designed to torture Gilad's family and, indeed, all of Israel.

There is only one right thing to do: allow Gilad to return home to his family and friends. If Hamas' thugs are ever to be treated as a legitimate organization, they must first begin to act like one. A good first step would be to free Gilad. We pray for Gilad's well-being and strength and those of his family. We pray that Hamas will recognize that there are benefits to acting rightly. ■

Just Do It

Yifkod HaShem...ish al ha'eidah "Let HaShem appoint a man over the community" (Numbers 27:16)

As Moshe Rabbenu begins to contemplate the end of his life, he asks God to appoint the leader who will come after him. As the next *pasuk* tells us, Moshe asked that the new leader of *B'nei Yisrael* be someone who would "go out before them and come in before, who will take them out and bring them in." Clearly, Moshe was concerned about the qualities that would make for the best possible leader of the people he so loved. The Yalkut Shimoni (Bamidbar 228) teaches us that when Moshe asked God to appoint his successor, God answered, "Before you command Me concerning My children, command My children concerning Me."

This midrash essentially teaches us to keep our eye on the ball. God reminds Moshe that the political intrigue of who will come after him is not his business – rather, he should focus on doing his job and teaching Torah to *B'nei Yisrael*. It can be difficult to remember – especially in difficult circumstances – to do the job that's in front of us.

It is a lesson Palestinian Authority (P.A.) President Mahmoud Abbas would do well to learn.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert pledged last week during a summit with Arab leaders to work closely with the new government of Palestinian Authority (P.A.) President Mahmoud Abbas. Olmert offered both to help prepare the groundwork for future negotiations on the creation of a Palestinian state and to help improve Palestinian living conditions. In turn, the new P.A. government must continue to reject rapprochement with Hamas and demonstrate its commitment to peace with Israel.

The Palestinian President is taking positive steps to become a true partner for peace: he has fired Hamas from the government, referred to the Islamist group as "murderous terrorists," appointed a new government, outlawed militias in the West Bank, demonstrated a willingness to meet and negotiate with Israel and affirmed his commitment to the principles of the international community. The new P.A. government must still take steps to combat terrorism, fight corruption and establish the rule of law in the West Bank. But his actions so far indicate positive progress.

Mahmoud Abbas has a chance to lead his people to a better, brighter future. He can only do so by seizing the opportunity in front of him. ■