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Is zealousness peace? Pinchas, Numbers 25:10-30:1

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One of Jewish history's most heroic acts was carried out by Pinchas, when he arose to act solely for the will of God. He was granted the unique reward of being declared a Kohen. Why did God reward Pinchas with the gift of becoming a Kohen? What is the connection between his reward and what he did?

Let's take a look at how Pinchas acted out God's will.

The nation of Moab had been trying in vain to win the battle against the Jewish people. The only plan they came up with was to try to get the Jewish people to sin through sexual immorality because, as the foundation of Jewish holiness, God does not tolerate immorality.

The people began to consort immorally with the daughters of Moab and even prostrated themselves to their gods. A man by the name of Zimri, who was a prince of the Tribe of Simeon, came with a Midianite princess by the name Cozbi to Moses and, in the sight of the entire assembly of the Jewish people, engaged in an act of immorality.

The Jewish people didn't know what to do. They were at a loss and just began crying. Pinchas stood up, took a spear in hand and followed the couple into the tent, piercing them both and killing them.

God gave Pinchas a gift - the covenant of peace, which is to be a Kohen - because he avenged the honor of God.

What is the reason that Pinchas should become a Kohen, which represents peace and unity, for an act of zealousness, which was an apparent act of violence?

The word for "zealot" in Hebrew is "kanai." The root of this word suggests that a person acting out of zealousness is really in total control of what needs to be done at any given time. When a person can respond to an emergency with both composure and conviction, especially when it comes to preserving the integrity of God's will, that is a sign that he is a wholesome and complete person. Just imagine if we knew what to do at every moment.

A zealous person is not someone who acts without thinking, but rather acts with conviction and intent, even if it may not be the popular view, because he stands for honesty and justice.

For this reason, God gave Pinchas the covenant of peace because the Hebrew word for peace is "shalom," which means "complete" - being in unity with oneself and everyone and everything. Pinchas showed he had this character trait by his quick action for justice, showing his unity in action.

Our leaders and mentors acted this way. There is a story told of the famed Rabbi Henschel Liebowitz, of blessed memory, where we see how he personified this idea. He had been asked to eulogize at a funeral and one could see how he cried and felt the loss of the person. Shortly afterward, he had to officiate at a wedding of a student and one could see his feeling of joy as he danced. This great man knew how to feel and act at each moment of time, responding with composure as each situation required.

The story of Pinchas has a real and practical message to us all. Firstly, we have to study what the right thing to do is because otherwise there is no clarity when life's situations arise. Secondly, we have to prepare for and imagine to ourselves the different scenarios that life throws at us. Thirdly, we learn from Pinchas that if we actually step up to the situation, God will bless us.

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