



Parshas Pinchas

July 22, 2022

A Taste of Torah Revenge!

by Rabbi Chaim Gross

This week's parsha finds us in the aftermath of Pinchas's courageous act - that of slaying Zimri and Kozbi for their sinful deed. Hashem praises him for his heroism, telling Moshe that Pinchas's action of "avenging Hashem's vengeance" is what saved the nation. While this is well understood, one word in the verse seems puzzling, almost superfluous. Hashem makes note that the vengeance took place "*besocham*," "amongst them." Of what great relevance is it that the act took place in the midst of the Jewish Nation, displayed in the public arena?

To fully appreciate the connotation of this word, we must first take a step back and understand the concept of revenge altogether.

Let's begin with a fascinating Medrash, as quoted by Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1892-1953) in his classic work, *Michtav Me'eliyahu*. The Medrash speaks of the time we long for, when the Final Redemption has arrived. "At that moment," says the Medrash, "the heavenly angels come, seeking to sing a song before Hashem - but He is nowhere to be found. They travel to the sea, and query, 'Has Hashem perhaps appeared to you?' The sea responds, 'Since the day He dried me and passed His children through me, I have not seen Him.' The angels immediately depart to the next location, Mt. Sinai, with the same request. The mountain replies, 'From the day He revealed Himself upon me and gave the Torah to His Nation, I have not seen Him.' They then journey to Zion, hoping to find Hashem there, but are told, 'Since the day G-d removed His presence and destroyed my House, I have not seen Him.' Finally, Yeshaya Hanavi (Isaiah the Prophet) notices their desperation and asks, 'Whom do you seek?' 'The Holy One Blessed is He!' they answer. Says Yeshaya, 'He has just left Edom, where He was taking revenge.'"

The story seems quite bizarre. Why is it that the angels, who are privy to hidden information, were unaware of G-d's

whereabouts? And why, in their quest to find Him, could they not deduce that He might have gone to enact the final revenge? Says Rabbi Dessler: True revenge is not simply a superficial deed of "getting back" at a guilty party. Rather, it is a means through which to salvage and rectify the besmirched honor of the offended personage. However, when it comes to an attack against the prestige of G-d Himself, and He then takes revenge, this is an absolute impossibility. For, while many may try to sully His name and honor, no mortal has the ability to truly accomplish this. G-d's honor come what may, remains perfect, pristine - and untouchable. G-d is known as the "*Melech Hakavod*," the "King of Honor (Psalms 24,)" and, inasmuch, His honor is not beholden to and dependent on the puny recognition of man. Thus, the concept of G-d avenging His Honor is completely illogical. This then begs the question: What was G-d doing taking revenge, if it has no relevance? The answer is, that while it has no meaning to Him, to us it has great significance. G-d takes revenge for our sake, so as to restore what appears in our world to be a desecration of His name - and grants us the ability to once again perceive His honor as whole and unbroken.

It is for this reason, explains Rabbi Dessler, that the angels could not fathom that G-d might have gone to Edom for the purpose of taking revenge. Angels perceive things as per their true reality, not the way they might appear to flesh and blood. As such, they cannot comprehend the need for G-d to "restore" His honor. And thus, Yeshaya knew what they could not.

This, says Rabbi Dessler, is the meaning of that which the Talmud (Brachos 33a) tells us, "Great is the attribute of revenge, which was presented between two names of Hashem, as the verse states, '*El nekamos Adonai*', 'O G-d of vengeance, Hashem! (Psalms 94:1)'" The two names of G-d

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Stories for the Soul

You Didn't Insult Me

Rabbi Dovid Biderman of Lelov (1746-1814) was once collecting for the poor along with his *mechutan* (father of a child's spouse) Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak of Pshis'cha (known as the Yid Hakadosh, the Holy Jew; 1766-1813). They arrived at the home of a wealthy but rather coarse Jew. The rich man gave Reb Dovid a contribution, but refused to give Reb Yaakov Yitzchak any money. Instead, he began to rant, accusing him of only collecting for himself, not for the poor. "You are a strong, healthy person!" he shouted at Reb Yaakov Yitzchak. "Go get yourself some work and make some money that way!!"

Reb Dovid, hearing his friend criticized in such a crude fashion, promptly returned the donation to the man, and the two men turned around and went on their way.

Shortly thereafter, the wealthy man discovered just who had been at his door. Shocked and ashamed, he quickly jumped into his wagon and made haste to catch the two great men. Upon reaching them, he broke down sobbing, profusely apologizing for having insulted such great people.

Reb Yaakov Yitzchak replied, "There is nothing for me to forgive! After all, you did not know who I was, and you never intended to insult me. However, you thought I was a regular, run-of-the-mill Jew, and it was that nameless Jew you insulted. I cannot forgive you on his behalf!"

In this week's parsha, Moshe asks Hashem to name his successor as leader of the Jewish People. Rashi tells us that Moshe requested that Hashem provide an individual who had the ability to relate to every Jew, regardless of his station in life.

Kollel Happenings

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION LIVE & LEARN LEARNING PROGRAM AT THE WEST DENVER KOLLEL TORAH CENTER

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A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Tuesday nights on zoom, 8:15-9 pm, for men and women.

Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: How is it possible for one to eat bread yet not need to first wash his hands?

Answer: If one eats less than a *kezayis* (olive's-volume) of bread, there is an opinion that says he needn't wash his hands (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 158:3). The Mishna Berura (ad loc.:10)

says that one should ideally wash his hands (though no blessing should be made), implying that if this is difficult, he needn't do so.

This week's question: Why would one wash *netilas yadayim* (as before eating bread) before eating non-bread-type food?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Meir Shapiro - Part LVI

Along with the financial windfall of the insurance policy, a campaign was launched in the wake of Rabbi Shapiro's sudden and shocking death, and this raised substantial sums to support the

yeshiva.

Although Rabbi Shapiro was initially buried in Lublin, his remains were moved to Har Hamenuchos in Eretz Yisrael in 1968.

A Taste of Torah

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that surround the word "vengeance" both connote His attribute of kindness. Why is it presented as such? This is because the essence of G-d's vengeance is truly just that - a kindness done for us, to restore *our* vision of the eternal and unchangeable reality that always existed.

This is why, says Rabbi Dessler, in next week's Torah portion, which tells of the Jewish People's war of vengeance against Midian for their seducing the Jewish men to sin, Moshe refers to it as the "vengeance of Hashem," while Hashem describes it as "vengeance of the Jewish Nation." For that which we perceive to be a restoration on Hashem's behalf, is, in reality, entirely a restoration for ourselves.

With this, we can solve another little mystery: In one of the traditional songs sung Friday night, we recite the following supplication: "Extend Your kindness to those who know you, O G-d who is zealous and vengeful." Now, generally, if one wishes to ask someone for kindness, he does not remind the fellow how wrathful he is - and yet, that is exactly what we do! Once again though, we can apply Rabbi Dessler's principle. We are asking Hashem to take revenge against all those who besmirch His honor - and we ask for it, not because it is necessary for Him, but as a kindness for us.

This is also the meaning of that which we

mention in the first blessing of *Shemone Esrei* that G-d brings the Redeemer to the Patriarchs' descendants, "for His Name's sake, with love." At first glance, this seems to be a dichotomy; is G-d bringing the redeemer for personal gain, or out of love for us? The answer is that while the objective of the redemption is to restore the glory of G-d's name, it is born purely out of a deep caring for us - being that it has only been tarnished according to our limited perspective.

We can now return to the verse we began with. G-d praises the zealous Pinchas for "avenging My vengeance," adding that it was done before all of the Jewish Nation. Why was this such a vital part of the story? The answer is now obvious: Had Pinchas performed his revenge of G-d's honor, but done so privately, it would have been meaningless. For, as explained, G-d's honor is, by definition, unsullied, and so He has no personal need for revenge. The entire purpose of the revenge is for His children, so that in *their* eyes, they will see their Father's dignity restored to its full glory. As such, it was crucial that the act of revenge take place before all Jewry, so as to accomplish its goal. While we frequently see the sanctity of G-d's name profaned, perhaps this perspective will serve as a source of comfort - knowing that, while it may appear that way to us, the truth of the matter is that G-d's honor has, is, and always will be whole and untouchable.

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