

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Pinchas 5768

"Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon Hakohein, turned away My anger from the children of Israel, when he acted out My anger in their midst, and so I did not destroy the children of Israel in My anger." (25:11)

The Torah is telling us that had Pinchas not acted, G-d would have destroyed the entire Jewish people. Why? After all, only Zimri and a few others were committing sins.

In v. 13 the Torah says, "And he made atonement for the children of Israel," and the Sforno comments, "By doing this before the eyes of all of them, he gave them atonement for their failure to protest against the sinners." In other words, the rest of the people had deserved punishment for not speaking out against the few who were sinning. We indeed find that the Gemara (Shabbos 55a) says that one who fails to rebuke a sinner is punished along with the sinner, and that is why even the righteous were punished in the destruction of the First Temple.

However, the Sforno does not explain how Pinchas's act atoned for the people's sin of not protesting. He seems to imply that it was because he acted in public, "before the eyes of all of them". The Torah itself seems to stress

this when it says "in their midst". But even if it was in public, it was only Pinchas acting. How did this exonerate everyone else?

The Satmar Rav answered that Pinchas's heartfelt act, done in front of everyone, brought into the hearts of all the Jews great admiration and envy. Chazal say that there is a kind of envy that is constructive and good: "Envy of the Sages will increase wisdom" (Bava Basra 21a). Here too, their admiration for Pinchas caused them to regret that they had not also done what he did, and they were overcome with powerful thoughts of repentance on their sin of not protesting. It was this repentance that brought them atonement.

Now we can explain the words "in their midst" differently. Pinchas, through his action, brought into midst of the Jewish people's hearts admiration and kinah (envy), which caused their sin to be atoned. (Al Hageulah V'al Hatemurah, Chapter 116)

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