

Parshat Pinchas

Wonders and Miracles

The Talmud states that if an individual sees Pinchas in a dream, "a wonder will be wrought for him." This Sichra analyses this statement and doing so expresses the awesome character of Pinchas and the lesson for our lives.

This week's parsha discusses the story of Pinchas. Concerning Pinchas the Talmud makes the following statement:

Text 1

If one sees Pinchas in a dream, wonder [pela] will be wrought for him. If one sees an elephant [pil] in a dream, wonders [pela'oth] will be wrought for him; if several elephants, wonders of wonders will be wrought for him.

Talmud, Berachos 56b

Rashi comments on the above and states:

Text 2

A wonder will be wrought for him: as was done for Pinchas...

Rashi, ibid

From a simple understanding of the Talmud it seems that the difference between seeing Pinchas in a dream or seeing an elephant in a dream is that when one sees Pinchas in a dream only one wonder will occur for him, while if one

sees an elephant in a dream many wonders will occur.

Rashi stated that the reason that one merits to a wonder when one sees a dream of Pinchas is because many miracles were done for him. What is not understood though, is why when seeing Pinchas does one merit to only one wonder when the Talmud states that Pinchas merited many miracles?

Text 3

R. Yochanan said: Six miracles were wrought for Pinchas: — [i] Zimri should have withdrawn - [from the woman] but did not; [ii] he should have cried out [for help], but did not; [iii] he [Pinchas] succeeded [in driving his spear] exactly through the sexual organs of the man and woman; [iv] they did not slip off the spear; [v] an angel came and lifted up the lintel; [vi] an angel came and wrought destruction amongst the people.

Talmud, Sanhedrin 82b

Many "nuns"

Were it not for Rashi's explanation that the reason why one experiences many wonders when they see Pinchas in a dream is because

many miracles transpired with Pinchas one would have been able to explain the difference as to whether one sees Pinchas in a dream or an elephant in a dream similar to what the Talmud explains concerning other visions that one may have while they are dreaming:

Text 4

If one sees the name Chanina, Chananiah or Yonasan, miracles will be wrought for him.

Talmud, Berachos 57a

The reason that when one sees these names in a dream they merit to miracles is because the word for miracle in Hebrew is *nes* which begins with the letter *nun* and the above names each have multiple *nuns*. Therefore when one sees these names spelled in a dream one merits many miracles.

One could have similarly explained concerning seeing Pinchas or Pil (elephant) in a dream, that the reason for the difference is because the way that each is spelled. Pinchas is spelled with one letter of the word *pele* which means wonder and therefore one sees Pinchas in a dream they merit to only one wonder, while *pil* incorporates two letters of the word *pele* and therefore merits to numerous wonders.

However Rashi negates this explanation by saying that the reason that one merits to a wonder when they see Pinchas in a dream is not because it contains the letter “pei” but because just as Pinchas merited to a wonder, so too, the

one who sees him in a dream merits to a wonder as well¹.

Therefore one remains with the question: why is it that when one sees Pinchas in a dream they only merit to one wonder, when many wonders were wrought for Pinchas?

Pinchas’s name

To understand the reason why when one sees Pinchas in a dream they merit to one wonder although many miracles happened to Pinchas we preface with another question.

The Talmud stated if someone sees Pinchas in a dream a *wonder (pela)* will happen to him, while when the Talmud states what happened to Pinchas it says that six *miracles (nissim)* happened to him. Why does the the Talmud say that a *wonder* will happen to an individual who has a dream where he sees Pinchas while elsewhere the Talmud says that *miracles* happened to Pinchas?

One may attempt to resolve this question: saying that although the reason that one who sees Pinchas in a dream miracles occur for him “similar to pinchas,” it is nonetheless connected to the letters of the name. Therefore, because the word Pinchas contains the letter *Pei* of *Pela*, a wonder (*pela*) will therefore occur to him and not a miracle (*nes*).

This though is completely incorrect, for the name Pinchas (פנחס) is more closely related to the word for miracle (נס) as the entire word for miracle, *nes*, is contained in Pinchas’s name. It is therefore clear that one cannot explain that the reason why the Talmud chose to express that one who sees Pinchas in a dream has a wonder

seeing Pinchas or an elephant the Talmud states “The elephants are of good omen if saddled, of bad omen if not saddled.” It is therefore understood that one actually saw Pinchas, and the reason that one merits to a wonder is similar to what occurred to Pinchas.

¹ Rashi’s reasoning for differentiating between seeing Pinchas is understood from the Talmud. Concerning seeing Chanina etc. in a dream the Talmud there states “This is only if he sees the word in writing.” It is therefore understood that it is connected with the letters. However concerning

occur to him is because it is any way connected to the letters that he saw.

Wonders and miracles

Now, when analyzing the difference between wonders and miracles there are generally two manners of explaining the matter. Clearly the definition of a miracle (*nes*) is something that transcends nature. This is seen in the following verse:

Text 5

Moshe made a copper snake and put it on a pole (*nes*), and whenever a snake bit a man, he would gaze upon the copper snake and live.

Bamidbar 21:9

This that a person became healthy through gazing at a copper snake is something that is beyond nature and is therefore classified as a miracle.

However, when understanding the word *pela*, which means wonder, it is possible to understand that the matter under discussion is not an actual miracle, but is merely a wondrous occurrence that causes its viewer to be in a state of amazement.

Possibly, one can explain that this is the reason why if an individual who sees Pinchas in a dream has a wonder occur to him, as opposed to a miracle. For, when one reading the various wondrous occurrences that happened with Pinchas of “Zimri should have withdrawn but did not; he should have cried out, but did not; succeeded [in driving his spear] exactly through the sexual organs of the man and woman; they did not slip off the spear,” that while all these occurrences are wondrous, they are not

miracles. Therefore if an individual sees Pinchas in a dream, they merit a wonder but not a miracle.

However, this explanation is somewhat difficult, as the last two happenings enumerated in the Talmud of “an angel came and lifted up the lintel and an angel came and wrought destruction amongst the people,” are miraculous and not merely wondrous.

Therefore, it is implausible to explain that when someone sees Pinchas in a dream that they will only merit to a wonder that is by no means beyond nature.

It is therefore probable that the reverse is the explanation here. When the Talmud expresses that one who sees Pinchas in a dream, “wonder [*pela*] will be wrought for him,” it is not to limit what will happen to *merely* a wonder but not a miracle, but the opposite—a wonder that is greater than a mere miracle.

That a wonder (*pela*) is greater than a miracle (*nes*) is expressed in the verse concerning Moshiach:

Text 6

As in the days of your exodus from the land of Egypt, I will show him wonders (*nifla-ot*).

Micha 7:15

The intent of this is, as explained in chassidic thought² that the miracles that will occur during the redemption will be wondrous even in comparison to the miracles that happened during the exodus.

² Ohr HaTorah, *ad loc.*

This then is Rashi's intent in saying that when someone sees Pinchas in a dream a wonder will occur for him "as was done for Pinchas."

The intent of this is explain that what was important about Pinchas was not the *amount* of miracles that G-d wrought for him, but that the *entire* manner that G-d dealt with him was wondrous—as it completely transcended that normal way that G-d deals with an individual.

From the fact that it once scenario G-d did for him six miracles, is expressive that the manner that G-d dealt with him, was from the onset, completely wondrous.

To explain this concept in more detail:

The general concept of a miracle is to break nature. However, from the very fact that this is the definition of a miracle, it is understood that there is a nature that must be ignored for the miracle to transpire. Each event where there is a miracle is another proactive action where G-d specifically breaks the laws of nature, causing the miracle to transpire.

However, concerning the definition of the word wonder (*pela*) rashi comments concerning the verse (Devarim 17:8) about the judges which states: "If a matter eludes (*Yipale*) you in judgment". There Rashi defines the word *pele*:

Text 7

[The term] *haphla'a* always denotes detachment and separation; [here it means] that the matter is detached and hidden from you.

Rashi, Devarim 17:8

³ It is therefore understood that seeing Pinchas in a dream is greater than "If one sees an elephant [pil] in a dream," where "wonders [pela'oth] will be wrought for him." For from the fact that the

The word *pele* which "denotes detachment and separation" is expressive that there need not be another proactive action for each miracle to occur, as the individual is completely removed from the confines of nature from the get-go.

It is for the reason that one who sees Pinchas in a dream has "wonder wrought for him." The statement is expressed in the singular—though many miracles may occur for the individual—to express that all the many miracles that may occur are a result of the singular wonder of transcending nature.³

The essence of Pinchas

From the fact that one sees Pinchas in a dream has a miracle wrought for him "as was done for Pinchas," it is understood that the concept of "wonder" was Pinchas's primary trait.

For, if it would only to have been a one-time occurrence, it would make no sense to assume that because there was one instance that a wonder happened to Pinchas that seeing him in a dream would mean that G-d will act to the individual in a wondrous manner.

Rather, Pinchas's whole manner of service to the Almighty was wondrous and *therefore*—tit for tat—G-d responded in kind and acted towards him in a wondrous manner.

To explain:

The concept of a miracle in one's personal service to G-d is the idea of self-sacrifice. Similarly that the concept of a miracle is expressive that nothing stands in G-d's way, and that he will break natural law, in order for his wish to be fulfilled, the same is with self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice expresses the tenacity of man that he will not let anything stand in the

statement is said in the plural is a proof that what is occurring is not the singular action of transcending nature, but many miracles.

way of fulfilling G-d's wishes—no matter the odds.

Dependent on the manner in which a person sacrifices themselves to G-d, is as a response the way that G-d relates to man:

There is one individual who generally serves G-d in a rational way. However, when faced with a challenge he will rise to the occasion and have self-sacrifice. This being the case though, it is clear, that because he usually serves G-d in a logical manner that he must re-awaken the super-rational in each scenario that he is faced with a challenge.

There is another type of individual though that his entire identity is super-rational and permeated with self-sacrifice. This individual has no personal desire whatsoever. Instead, his whole personality is completely bequeathed to G-d's will. His self-sacrifice is the *natural* result of his identity and he need not awaken this trait in each instance that he is faced with a challenge.

This second level, was Pinchas. He went on self-sacrifice even in an instance that it was not demanded from him, because in his mindset, it was impossible for an individual to transgress G-d's desire.

This is expressed in the Talmud's statement concerning Pinchas's action:

Text 8

R. Chisda said: If the zealot comes to take counsel [whether to punish the transgressor who cohobates with a heathen woman], we do not instruct him to do so. It has been stated likewise: Rabbah b. Bar Chana said in R. Yochanan's name: If he comes to take counsel, we do not instruct him to do so.

Talmud, Sanhedrin 82a

Pinchas did not sacrifice because he was placed into a situation where this was the only manner to fulfill G-d's will. For were he to have asked, the sages would tell him that he is not obligated to act in the manner that he did.⁴

Rather, Pinchas did not make a calculation of how he should or shouldn't act. Instead, because his whole identity was completely dedicated to G-d, he acted in the only way that was natural for him.

Being that G-d responds in kind, the manner that G-d acted towards him, was as well complete transcendent of nature.

Pinchas's reward

Concerning the reward for Pinchas's actions, the verse states:

⁴ More so, the Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 9:7 expresses that such an act is contrary to the council of the sages.

Text 9

It shall be for him and for his descendants after him [as] an eternal covenant of *kehunah*, because he was zealous for his G-d and atoned for the children of Israel."

Bamidbar 25:13

According to the simple meaning of the verse this means (Rashi, *ibid*, Talmud, Zevachim 101b) that Pinchas was not made a kohen until he killed Zimri."

The reward that Pinchas received—that he became a kohen—correlates as well to the manner in which he served G-d. Because he was a wondrous individual, reward as well was wondrous.

The entire idea of the priesthood is something that is passed down naturally from father to child. In this instance though Pinchas—as a reward was given priesthood.

The reason is, because Pinchas's actions transcended the logic of Torah—for would he have to have asked the sages how to act they would not advise him to execute Zimri—so too his reward as well transcended the natural logic of Torah. So although, according to regular Torah logic the priesthood is not something that one receives as a reward, nevertheless, Pinchas received the priesthood as a result of his personality that transcended nature.

Just as to act in a way that transcended nature, was an expression of Pinchas's very nature, the same too is with the priesthood which naturally is inherited by one's children. Once Pinchas became a Kohen in naturally was inherited by his children, as this was Pinchas's nature—that his natural character was completely transcendent of logic.

The Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe

The previous Rebbe was redeemed from his exile on the week of Pinchas and on that Shabbos he recited the special blessing that one makes upon being released from prison.

Being that every action that happens is by Divine Providence—specifically one that occurs to a leader of the Jewish People—it is understood that there is a correlation between the manners that Pinchas served G-d and the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Indeed, we see that the manner in which the Previous Rebbe sacrificed himself for G-d and the Jewish People was in a way that completely transcended logic—similar to Pinchas.

Just as with Pinchas were he to have asked the sages whether or not to act in the way that he did they would not have advised him to execute Zimri, so too with the Previous Rebbe. In his time, there were various rabbis that expressed their opinion that one need not sacrifice one's life to fight against the Russian government in the way that the Previous Rebbe did.

However, the reason why the Previous Rebbe did indeed sacrifice his life was because this was his entire identity. Self-sacrifice was not a *detail* of his life, but his *essential* character trait. He could not consider a situation where all his actions and his entire identity was not in symbiosis with G-d and Torah.

This was as well expressed during the various periods of his life. Whether he was in Russia literally sacrificing his life to keep the embers of Torah burning, in Latvia teaching Chassidic thought to religious Jews, or in America rebelling against the zeitgeist that said that "in America it is impossible to be a Jew," he always fought with self-sacrifice.

Though all these situations demanded a different nature, he did them all with the

utmost dedication because his very nature was that he was a person of self-sacrifice. Therefore all his actions were done with self-sacrifice.

This as well is the lesson in our live that when we are completely dedicated to Torah in a way that our whole character is expressive of self-sacrifice we will merit the time when “As in the

days of your exodus from the land of Egypt, I will show him wonders!”

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