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MECHINAT RUACH HANEDEV, RETAMIM

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Mechinat Ruach HaNegev is a gap-year program located in the Negev that strives to cultivate a new generation of strong and inspired Religious Zionists. Our integrative program incorporates daily Beit Midrash and service learning, encouraging students to explore, clarify, and strengthen their spiritual and personal self—regardless of their religious educational background. Our highly motivated and independent students will immerse themselves in a young and budding Israeli community in the Negev, and participate in a variety of intentional and authentic experiences to help them build a strong foundation as they prepare for the next steps in their lives. For more information go to www.ruachhanegev.org



Rabbi Jon Singer
Rosh Beit Midrash
Being Moderately Zealous

There's a certain irony in the Korban Tamid's appearance in Parashat Pinchas.

The Ein Yaakov cites a midrash describing a debate among Tannaitic sages: Which verse can be considered the most inclusive verse in the Torah? Alongside several worthy options like the Shema and "Love your neighbor as yourself", the midrash concludes that the decisive winner in this competition is Shimon Ben Pazi's submission: "The first lamb you shall sacrifice in the morning and the second lamb you shall sacrifice at twilight". The prominence that this seemingly obscure verse receives

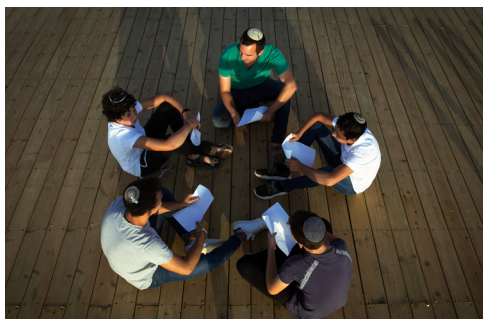
is broadly understood to represent the importance of regular consistency in our worship of Hashem. It's very ironic indeed then that the mitzvah most emblematic of our undistinguished daily responsibilities would appear in the Parsha named specifically for Pinchas, who is praised for his momentous act of religious zealotry and extremism.

Consistency makes up the core of our service to Hashem. It proves our dedication to lasting ideals that don't require extreme circumstances to keep our religious connection alive. It also shields us from the pull of dangerous forms of extreme worship. The belief that G-d can be appeased only through extreme acts is repudiated by our tradition: the highest form of dedication is the sometimes thankless act of doing the

small things one day at a time.

But Pinchas' zealotry isn't repudiated by Hashem. He's praised for "turning [Hashem] back from [his] anger against Bnei Yisrael" and is blessed with a "covenant of peace". Even more remarkable is that Pinchas' descendants are given the priesthood eternally; they'll be the very people tasked with offering up the Tamid sacrifice!

The Rambam in Hilchot Deot famously advocates for moderation in one's character, avoiding both extremes along the spectrum of any given trait. But he does make some exceptions. Regarding both anger and pride, Rambam says we must eliminate them from our personality altogether. In this way the Rambam really does take moderation to its limit: even moderation should be moderated! We cannot take the ideal of moderation to its extreme by advocating for it in all circumstances.



In truth, the concepts of consistency and zealotry can actually be mutually beneficial. When devoid of passion and spark, the day-to-day service becomes dry and feels increasingly like a burden. A desire to do something great can give the push needed to put in one more day's work, to do one more mitzvah, to live up to the lofty expectations our Halacha demands of us on a regular basis. In turn, our sense of self-capability is heightened and we reinforce a sense of commitment to the Torah's ethics day after day, providing a lasting, not ephemeral, sense of connection to Hashem.

There are moments in our lives where we're called upon to go beyond the daily duties to which we dedicate most of our time. True, we define ourselves as servants of Hashem who find Him in the "kol demama daka" - the soft silence. We content ourselves with many tasks that won't provide a rush of adrenaline. But we go forth ready to draw on our conviction, built up through a daily routine, knowing that when we must be zealous for Hashem it comes not from a place of desperation to experience something mighty and impressive but rather from a place of fortitude. Fervor and passion are the spices for the main dish that is our daily commitment: never the main focus, but necessary to add life.

Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi exclaims that there are those who acquire their place in the world-to-come over the course of many years and those who do so in a single moment. With the right blend of consistent dedication and zealous inspiration, we can have both. ■