



Mindful Motivation

Our *parashah* begins noting the lineage of Pinchas as the grandson of Aharon Hakohen. Rashi wonders at the Torah's need to repeat something we already know and offers the following explanation. People taunted Pinchas that his grandfather Yitro fattened cows to serve idols, implying that Pinchas was flawed and unsuited to kill a prince of Israel. Therefore, the Torah emphasizes his holy

lineage, praising Pinchas that his character was modeled after his paternal grandfather, Aharon Hakohen. The question is obvious; *Am Yisrael* saw that the plague ceased in the merit of Pinchas's actions, why would they still doubt his legitimacy?

The Saba of Slabodka offers a powerful insight regarding human action. An act may only be judged based on the intentions of the one acting as opposed to the end result. In other words, one must examine the root cause that led to a particular action. Although Pinchas was correct in killing Zimri, it was unclear to the people what motivated him to act this way. By linking Pinchas to his grandfather Aharon Hakohen, the Torah confirms that Pinchas was solely motivated by his desire for peace, the same quality Aharon Hakohen was known for. Similarly, in *Parashat Shemot*, we are told that the Jewish midwives did not follow Paroh's directive to kill the Jewish males. The Torah clearly states their motivation, "*Vayehi ki yar'u hameyaldot et haElokim, vaya'as lahem batim* – Now the midwives **feared Hashem**, and He made houses for them." (*Shemot* 1:21) Clearly the midwives wanted to save the babies yet their act was driven by their primary desire to do the will of Hashem. The Torah is teaching us to consider and evaluate the impetus, the catalyst that drives us to do what we do. As Hashem is the true judge of what motivates each person, we cannot judge another's actions with a superficial assessment.

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We find that the Ramban highlights this idea as well at the end of *Parashat Emor*. When the Jews stoned the ‘mekallel,’ the individual that cursed, the Torah tells us, “*U’vene Yisrael asu ka’asher tzivah Hashem et Moshe* -and Bnei Yisrael **did as Hashem commanded** Moshe.” (*Vayikra 24:23*) The people only killed him because this was what they were commanded to do, not because they held a personal vendetta against this Egyptian man. In *Ohr Yechezkel*, Rav Chatzkel Levenstien points out yet another example. When Shmuel Hanavi kills Agag, King of Amalek, the *passuk* explicitly says, “***lifnei Hashem – before Hashem.***” (*Shmuel I 15:33*) He acted purely to do the will of Hashem, without allowing any personal feelings of revenge or anger to interfere.

With this background, we can appreciate a thought shared by Yeshivat Kelm, quoted in the name of Rav Asher Kalman *zt”l*. In our morning tefillah we say, “*La’asot nekama ba’goyim... ka’asot bahem mishpat hadar hu le’chol chasidav. Hallelukah!* - to execute vengeance among the nations...to execute upon them written judgement – that will be the splendor of all His devout ones. Hallelukah!” (*Tehillim 149:7,9*) It is specifically the pious ones who can take revenge because only they can act with pure intent, *l’shem Shamayim*, therefore they are ‘*hadar*,’ praised with splendor.

It is so easy to take revenge from a desire to win, for honor, for one’s own ego. One must examine his motives and drives to be sure that they are coming from a noble place, for the right reasons. As the *Chidushei Harim* would quip, “all your deeds must be for the sake of Heaven,” even one’s ‘*l’shem Shamayim*’ must be ‘*l’shem Shamayim*!’” ■




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