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שיחות מוסר על התורה

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פרשת פנחס

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נתנדב לרגל יומא דהילולא
של האור החיים הקדוש זצוק"ל
ביום ט"ו תמוז
זכותו יגן עלינו

פרשת פנחס

**פִּינְחָס בֶּן אֱלֹעָזָר בֶּן אֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֵן הַשֵּׁיב אֶת חַמְתִּי מֵעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאוֹ אֶת קִנְאָתִי בְּתוֹכָם
וְלֹא כִלִּיתִי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאָתִי (במדבר כ"ה י"א)**

*Pinchos, the son of Elozor, the son of Ahron HaKohein, turned back My anger from upon Bnei Yisroel,
when he avenged My jealousy among them, and I did not destroy Bnei Yisroel in My jealousy.*

וְשַׁעִיר עִזִּים אֶחָד לְחַטָּאת לֵה' (במדבר כ"ה ט"ו)

And one goat [on Rosh Chodesh] as a Chatas to Hashem

The Kana'us of Pinchos

In this Parsha, Hashem informs Moshe about the greatness of Pinchos's accomplishment in killing Zimri and Kozbi. This act of zealotry saved the Jewish people from destruction at the hands of Hashem's anger. When referring to Pinchos, Hashem identified him as "Pinchos, the son of Elozor, the son of Ahron". Why was it necessary to mention Pinchos's descentance from Ahron; would it not have been sufficient to simply refer to him as the son of Elozor? Chazal explain that many people in Klal Yisroel, particularly of Shevet Shimon, were angered by Pinchos's deed. They began ridiculing him, saying, "Look at this descendant of Putiel [Yisro]!¹ Yisro, his ancestor, used to fatten calves to be used for avodah zarah, and now he has the audacity to be killing a Nasi of a Shevet? He is so full of himself! Who does he think he is?" In response to these attacks, Hashem traced Pinchos's lineage to his father's father, Ahron Hakohein. Through this, Hashem was showing that the action did not stem from a flaw in his background, but rather from the honorable background that he had, coming from Ahron HaKohein. Pinchos's act was beloved and praiseworthy as befitting a descendant of Ahron Hakohein.

Rav Chaim Shumlevitz z"l points out, that if we look in Parshas Balak where the Torah recounts the actual deed of Pinchos, we see that there too, the pasuk (פסוק ז) identifies Pinchos as son of Elozor, son of Ahron. In that Parsha though, we do not find Chazal explaining the need for the extra detailing of his lineage. Should we not question there as well why the pasuk does this? Rav Chaim z"l explains that the reason for the pasuk to trace Pinchos's lineage to Ahron must be so obvious and self-understood, that Chazal did not even deem it necessary to take note of it.

Why in fact did the pasuk in the previous Parshah trace Pinchos's lineage to Ahron? Rav Chaim z"l would answer this question by clarifying the concept in halacha practiced by Pinchos over here, of *Kana'im Pogim Bo*, - "Those who are zealous may strike him". This means as follows: If a Jew marries a goyishe woman, the punishment is not the death penalty under any circumstances. However, if an act is committed publicly in a manner which constitutes a *chilul Hashem*, those who are zealous may strike against him, i.e. killing him. This is not an obligation upon the bystander, nor is it the punishment incurred by the offender. But if one who witnesses the chilul Hashem is overcome by zealousness for the Honor of Hashem's Name, he is given permission to kill the offender, thus

¹ "Putiel" is a reference to Yisro, who is called Putiel in Parshas Va'era, where the Torah tells us that Elozor, Pinchos's father, took a wife from the daughters of Putiel.

restoring honor to Hashem's Name. The action is considered a *Kiddush Hashem* and commended, as seen in the case of Pinchos.

However, says Rav Chaim z"l, there is a condition attached. The action must take place completely and solely for the cause of zealousness for Hashem's Honor. If there is any ulterior motive interwoven in the roots of his action - i.e. any old score to settle - then the action is absolutely forbidden.

Yoni had been running a successful grocery for many years, when another grocery opened across the street from his. Ever since then, he lost a large percentage of his customers. The other store ran attractive sales, had great customer service etc., and many of Yoni's customers were lured into switching their place of shopping. In short, ever since the new grocery had opened, Yoni's life had become miserable.

One day, Yoni suddenly witnesses the owner of the second store committing a sin with a non-Jewish woman in a public setting. A spirit of fiery zealousness overcomes Yoni. "I must stand up for Hashem's Honor which is being disgraced!" he announces fervently. "I must kill this wicked sinner immediately, to restore glory to Hashem's Name!"

"No," says Rav Chaim z"l, "R' Yoni, you are out! Disqualified! Your action is tainted by your own feeling of anger at having been wronged by this man, and your resultant desire to 'get even'. You must leave him, and let the Bais Din come and administer the appropriate measures against the person."

In order for the act to be considered mitzva of zealousness, it must be exactly that – pure, righteous zealotry. When there is any ulterior motive in the zealous act, it loses its status as a zealous act. Instead, it descends to the level of a selfish act of revenge, and of hurting another Jew. It is transformed from a great mitzvah to a terrible aveirah of murder. Even if there is *some* spirit of zealousness involved, if there is an ulterior motive intertwined into his drive to commit his action, that ulterior motive invalidates the act.

When a surgeon performs a surgery, he may not have any germs on his hands. He must thoroughly disinfect himself, until he is completely germ-free. If a surgeon wishes to perform a surgery with soiled, unwashed hands, he will be forcefully chased away. He may try to protest, "But I have such skillful, deft fingers, and I can perform the delicate surgery so expertly. What does it matter that my hands are dirty? I was cleaning my drainpipe, so my hands have some soot on them. Now though, I am ready to begin surgery!" His pleas, of course, will fall on completely deaf ears. The benefit he will impart by his expertly done surgery is far outweighed by the harm he will generate by bringing germs in the patient's internal bodily systems.

Similarly, a zealous act having ulterior motives along with the motive of zealotry, carries more harm than goodness.

Pinchos had the Midos of Ahron Hakohein

With this, says R' Chaim Shmulevitz z"l, we can answer our original question, as to why when recounting the act of zealotry committed by Pinchos, the pasuk establishes his lineage to Ahron Hakohein. Ahron was a man of love, who loved peace and actively sought it, as the Mishna in Avos teaches us.

The Avos D'R' Nosson (ג' כ"י) tells of his practice in bringing peace between two men involved in an argument: He would approach one of them and tell him, "You know, I met your friend yesterday and he is absolutely beside himself. He knows you're a good

person, and he cannot understand what caused himself to start up with you and wrong you. He cannot eat; he is tearing his clothing; he is devastated. He would love to make up with you. He'll do anything for it." Ahron would then approach the other individual and tell him the identical story. When the two opponents would later meet in the street, they would embrace with tears in their eyes, and restore peace between themselves.

Ahron would similarly involve himself in restoring peace between many husbands and wives. The Beraisa tells how many thousands of children named Ahron were at the levayah of Ahron Hakohein, following his aron. These were children born from the marriages restored as a result of Ahron's efforts, who were named Ahron in his honor. For this reason, the pasuk (במדבר כ כ"ט) says, ויבכו את אהרן שלשים יום כל בית ישראל, "The entire house of Yisroel wept over Ahron's death", - men and women alike.

The pasuk is telling us that Pinchos followed Ahron in this *middah*; he was a man seeking peace. He did not have any hateful, violent motive as he committed his *kana'us*, he was only interested in peace. He knew that this was the course of action that was proper in Hashem's Eyes and that was his reason for doing it. In fact, Pinchos's motive was so completely pure, not stemming from hatred in even one iota, that he was granted from Hashem a *Bris* of *Shalom* – peace. His action was 'peaceful', not motivated by a drive for war and violence.

Even when the *Shevatim* were ridiculing Pinchos for his *kana'us*, the motive of Pinchos was so plainly clear that they did not even attempt to accuse him of acting selfishly. The fact was that this act was committed by a person with the midos of his grandfather Ahron, and this was undisputable. That is why in the actual story of Pinchos killing Zimri, we are not informed by *Chazal* of any suspicions raised regarding the act. Only in the next Parshah, where Hashem is describing the overall character of Pinchos, there we are told of those who cast aspersions on his character. "True," they said, "he meant well, but he was descended from one who was heavily engaged in *avodah zarah*. His entire outlook was therefore wrong. He thought and meant well – but what does he know about who really should be killed through *kana'us*?"

To perform surgery, it is not enough for one to be completely clean and disinfect his hands. He must also have years of study and practice, to gain the skills of a surgeon.

To this argument, Hashem responded that here as well, Pinchos's lineage was to be traced to his grandfather, Ahron. He had the character and Torah understanding of Ahron Hakohein, and he was wholly suitable for his action.

'Good' mitzvos and 'dangerous' mitzvos

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz z"l strongly emphasized the concept that there are some mitzvos which are inherently good acts: helping another Yid, saying a nice word, returning his lost property etc., while other mitzvos require one to step out of the normal framework of 'goodness', and to hurt another person. When one is performing 'good' mitzvos, he is on 'safe' ground. He can grow with these mitzvos, perfecting them and perfecting himself; and moreover, even before he has reached any madreigos of significance, he can be assured that the very action of helping another Jew, will be pleasing to Hashem. When performing the hurtful mitzvos, on the other hand, a person is treading on dangerous territory. True, in this specific situation he may be doing what is required, and his action is 'good' under the circumstances, but how careful he must be of the dangers involved:

He must be so careful not to do more than what is necessary.

When the dayanim in a Bais Din are administering the penalty of malkus/lashes, they have a mitzva to give 39 lashes. If they give even one extra lash, they transgress the aveirah of (דברים כ"ה ג) "לא יוסיף (דברים כ"ה ג)", "He should not add on lashes".

He must be so careful that his motive be completely pure, untainted by his personal feelings toward the person.

The Chofetz Chaim writes (הלכות לשון הרע, מקור חיים, כלל י', דין י"א) that although it is permitted to speak loshon when the intent of the speaker is for the to'eles of preventing other people from imitating the behavior of the wrongdoer, still, if the loshon hara is about how the speaker himself was wronged by another, he should not make use of this heter, because it is certain that his real intent is to get even with the one who wronged him.

It is so easy to fall into the trap of committing the act for personal motives, and a person must be so watchful against this.

Not to Become a Negative Person

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a person must see to it that the action he is doing does not affect his general character, causing himself to become a harmful person. He must remind himself and internalize the fact that what is required of him now is an exception, and it is not 'lechatchilah'. In general, he must be a man of kindness who spreads love for others. As Hillel teaches us in the Mishnah in Avos (א' י"ב), we must be from the *talmidim* of Ahron, who love peace and pursue it. We must certainly not be the opposite type of person, one who spreads negativity and hurt.

There are some people who carry the midah of machlokes within themselves. They derive special pleasure when there is a fire of anger, of argument. They will always say that one offensive comment, disguised as an innocent remark, which will go just the right way to bother the other person or offend him. The person was in a good mood, but this individual burst his spirit, with his negative hurtful remark. When this individual comes into the room, everyone tenses up, because he knows how to say just the right comment to cause hurt and tension to flare up.

There are other individuals who carry a midah of good feeling within themselves. They will have that pleasant remark, the compliment, lifting the spirits of even the most depressed person. When they come into a room, any tension in the air is dispelled. They fill the room with light and with cheer.

We all have the potential to be either one of the above types of people. Certainly, we may slip; sometimes even the nicest of people will inadvertently say a hurtful line. But afterwards, a truly good person is consumed with regret. His overall makeup is a person of goodness. He is a *talmid* of Ahron Hakohein.

A *talmid* of Ahron Hakohein knows how to approach a situation which he is required to do something hurtful to someone. He does not rejoice at his opportunity to hurt; on the contrary, it bothers him, and he will be so careful not to overstep the line, and, not to be personally affected by it. If he can avoid the act, he is so relieved that he did not to put himself through that danger.

Some years ago in Eretz Yisroel, there was a certain rabbi who issued a psak that was contrary to the ruling of one of the gedolei hador. This rabbi stuck to his position even after learning of the opposing psak of the gadol hador, and even went on to say degrading words about the him. All the gedolim at the time saw a need to issue a strong mach'ah/protest against this rabbi, and to remove all credibility from him in his position as rabbi. When the proclamation was brought to Rav Chaim Shmulevitz z"l, at first he would not sign it all. When he was pressed to sign, having been shown the great importance of the matter, he finally agreed to sign on condition that Rav Chatzkel Abramsky z"l would also be signing. Later, the proclamation was brought to him again, this time bearing Rav Chatzkel's signature. Rav Chaim z"l recognized that

this was the proper course of action at the time, and seeing that he had no choice, he signed as well. After he had signed, he said to the askan who had brought him the document, "This mitzvah that I just did - you may keep it and its reward. True, it was required of me to sign, so I fulfilled my requirement, but now, I don't want any more part in the deed!"

This story presents somewhat of a *chidush*. If it was indeed the correct thing to do, why did Rav Chaim still want no part of it? The answer though is, Rav Chaim understood so well the dangers of such a mitzvah, and how it can affect one's character. It was so important to him that the action would remain a lone incident, not influencing the essence of his personality, causing him to become a negative person, always critical of others. He therefore distanced himself as much as possible from it, even giving up its reward if he was able to.

We must learn this lesson on our own lives, how careful we must be when we must be on the hurting or damaging side. We must be so careful not to let this shape our personalities and character.

The Chatas of Rosh Chodesh

We find another lesson in this week's Parshah, in a similar vein to the one we have discussed. In the *karbonos* of the *Mussafin*, Hashem commanded that on each day of a *yom tov*, there is always a *Chatas* brought as well. The *Gemara* in the beginning of *Maseches Shavuot* discusses at length which sins are being atoned for by each *Chatas* that is brought. There is one day though, which the language of the Torah stands out, regarding the day's *Chatas*. On *Rosh Chodesh*, the pasuk says we must bring a *Chatas lashem*, "a *Chatas for Hashem*". This implies that the *korban* is being brought on behalf of Hashem Himself. Why would Hashem Himself bring a *Chatas* – a sin offering?

The *Gemara* in *Chullin* (ט' ב') explains that on *Rosh Chodesh* which is time of the emergence of the moon for the first time in each month, Hashem brings a *korban* to atone for His decreasing the size of the moon.

The Gemara explains further, that originally the sun and the moon were created in equal size. The moon thereupon complained, arguing that two kings cannot share the same crown.; one of the two bodies must be greater and larger than the other. To this Hashem replied, "Go and shrink yourself!" The moon became upset at this decree: "Because I said something fitting, I must [be the one to be forced to] decrease in size?" Hashem answered, "You will reign both by day and by night, [as opposed to the sun which reigns only during the day]!" The moon was not appeased. "Of what use is a torch during daylight [i.e. what benefit is there from the moon during daylight when the sun is shining]?" Hashem answered, "The Jewish people will run their calendar based on you." The moon replied, "But the sun is also used to measure the tekufah/seasons of the year [i.e. Pesach can only begin once it is already springtime]." Hashem said, "The tzadikim will be called "Katan' in your name." Hashem saw that the moon was still not happy. Finally, Hashem said, "Bring a korban on my behalf for having minimized the moon."

We learn a tremendous lesson from this Chazal. In truth, the moon's punishment was justified.² Hashem decreed that because of the moon's jealousy over its shared greatness with the sun, it had to be taught a lesson. If it cannot bear to have greatness with another heavenly body, then it will have to be the one to decrease its own size. If so, why did Hashem feel 'compelled' to bring a

² We have presented an understanding that the action taken against the moon was intended as a punishment. The Chasam Sofer in Parshas Beraishis clearly explains it that way, and see also the Daas Zekainim and the Peirush HaRosh in Parshas Beraishis which may imply this way.

korban to atone for an apparent wrongdoing? There was no wrongdoing, so why would Hashem need atonement?

From here we see, that even a situation requires of one to issue a reprimand, or otherwise set a person straight, he should let his criticizing define or dominate his further relationship with the person. It is rather the responsibility of the issuer to end off on good terms with the receiver of the criticism. He must continue to have a friendly relationship, and he must do what it takes to maintain it even after he criticized.

Hashem saw fit to punish the moon, but afterwards Hashem empathized with the moon, and acknowledged that the punishment was a hard one. Hashem still did not offer to rescind the punishment, but, Hashem did try to appease the moon in whatever way possible. When the moon did not accept any of Hashem's offers of appeasement, Hashem said, "I see that it's hard for you and I apologize. Bring a *korban* for Me for having hurt the moon."

When a young child misbehaves, sometimes the parent must patch, or otherwise reprimand. This is correct and proper, but it is not correct to 'end off' this way. The parent must afterwards show a sign of love, preferably even finding an excuse to praise and reward the child.

This holds true not only for children but for adults as well. At times we must act harshly but let us not forget to remain friends with the person as a whole, even 'apologizing' for delivering the harsh words if necessary.

In Conclusion:

Let us remember these two lessons that we learn from this Parshah: When there is a "drastic", harsh, measure that must be taken, we need to exercise such caution in if, and how, we will go about applying the measure. And in the more minor "corrections" or reprimands which we inevitably must administer in our everyday lives, let us do so in a constructive manner, which will bring out the good in the other person, while not fostering undue bitterness in the process.

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