

AN IDLE MIND...

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Chukas

An Idle Mind...

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Today's Learning:
Menachot 2:5-6
O.C. 160:1-3
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Sotah 42
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Ketubot 50

Our parashah opens: *"This is the Torah-a man who will die in the tent..."* Making a play on these words, our Sages say that the "tent" refers to a place of Torah study, and that Torah will remain only with one who "kills" himself studying it. R' Avraham Yishayahu Karelitz z"l (1878- 1953; the "Chazon Ish") explains that "killing" oneself means penetrating below the superficial covering of one's soul. That covering consists of one's personality traits. Thus, Chazal are teaching that one must conquer one's character. "Killing" one's impulses leads to life on the Torah path.

There are many degenerate traits, the Chazon Ish writes, but breaking even one of them gives a person life and enables Torah to remain with him. Prominent among those traits is laziness. Laziness is so pervasive that it can affect both thoughts and deeds. Laziness is hard to recognize, because it is not always associated with idleness. Sometimes one acts because he is lazy, as when, for example, a person knows that what he plans to do is wrong, but he is too lazy to control himself and to declare war on his impulses.

Laziness causes a person to adopt a "business as usual" attitude towards his own development, and this is the root cause for abandonment of the Torah. (Igrot Chazon Ish I, No.3)

"He shall purify himself with it on the third day and on the seventh day become pure; but if he will not purify himself on the third day, then on the seventh day he will not become pure." (Bemidbar 19:12)

Literally, this verse teaches that one who has become defiled by contact with a corpse must be sprinkled with water containing the ashes of the parah adumah/ red heifer on the third and seventh days.

R' Chaim Tirer z"l (1760-1817; better known as "R' Chaim of Czernowitz"; rabbi in several Bessarabian cities and early chassidic figure) offers an additional lesson:

The "third day" refers to the Torah, which the Gemara (Shabbat 88) refers to as the "Tripartite Torah." [Some interpret this as referring to the three parts that make up the acronym Tanach -- Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim.] The "seventh day" refers to Shabbat. The only way for a person to purify his soul is through study of Torah and observing the sanctity of Shabbat. (Be'er Mayim Chaim)

"Bnei Yisrael, the whole assembly, arrived at the Wilderness of Zin in the first month and the people settled in Kadesh. Miriam died there and she was buried there. There was no water for the assembly, and they gathered against Moshe and Aharon." (Bemidbar 20:1-2)

R' Shlomo Ephraim of Lunschitz z"l (rabbi of Prague; died 1619) writes in his commentary Kli Yakar that the lack of water was a punishment for Bnei Yisrael's failure to mourn Miriam adequately. In contrast to Moshe and Aharon's deaths, the verse does not say that Bnei Yisrael cried over her death. Rather, the verse implies, she was "buried there" and forgotten. Accordingly, Bnei Yisrael had to be shown that the fact that a spring had traveled through the desert with them had been in Miriam's merit.

R' Ben Zion Rabinowitz shlita (the Biala Rebbe in Yerushalayim) teaches that we must learn a practical lesson from the Kli Yakar's comment: When one receives a gift in the merit of a second person, then the recipient is obligated to show gratitude to the person in whose merit the gift was given.

He observes further: We have a tendency to not show proper gratitude to our mothers and wives. King David extols the tzniut / discrete nature of Jewish woman in the verse (Tehilim 45:14), "All of the honor of the king's daughter is inward" - the consequence, however, is that the low-key, behind the scenes contributions of mothers and wives go unnoticed. When this happens, the "spring runs dry," as in our verses. (Mevasser Tov: B'zchut Nashim Tzidkaniyot p.292)

"Give drink to the assembly and to their animals." (20:8)

Rashi comments: "From this we may see that the Holy One, Blessed is He, has concern for the possessions of Yisrael."

R' David ben Shmuel Halevi (1586-1667; author of Turei Zahav) asks: How does this prove that G-d is concerned for the Jewish People's possessions? Maybe His concern for the animals was motivated by the animals' thirst and pain?

He explains: Had G-d's concern been for the animals themselves, the verse would have said, "Give drink to the assembly and to the animals." Instead it expresses concern for "their animals."

Still, how does this prove that G-d is concerned for the Jewish People's property? Maybe He mentioned the animals because Bnei Yisrael had said in their plea for water (verse 4), "Why have you brought the congregation of Hashem to this wilderness to die there, we and our animals?"

R' David answers: Perhaps Bnei Yisrael mentioned their animals because they feared that they did not have sufficient merits to obtain water for themselves. However, Hashem knows the truth and had no reason for speaking thus, unless His intention was to demonstrate His concern for Bnei Yisrael's property. (Divrei David)

"Moshe stripped Aharon's vestments from him and dressed Elazar his son in them." (Bemidbar 20:28)

Ramban z"l writes (in his commentary to Parashat Tetzaveh) that the vestments of the Kohen Gadol must be made with kavanah / intention to perform the mitzvah of making the vestments.

R' Aharon Lewin z"l hy"d (the Reisher Rav; killed in the Holocaust) asks: There is a halachic dispute whether kavanah is an essential aspect of mitzvah performance. According to the view that all mitzvot require kavanah, why does Ramban single out this mitzvah? And, if one holds that mitzvot do not require kavanah as an essential aspect of their performance, why should this mitzvah be different?

He answers: Only in rare instances does the Torah tell us a reason for a mitzvah. For example, the Torah says (Shmot 28:2), "You shall make vestments of sanctity for Aharon your brother, for glory and splendor." In such cases, everyone would agree that the mitzvah requires specific intention to accomplish the reason specified in the Torah.

Two more examples:

The Torah says (Vayikra 23:42-43), "*You shall dwell in sukkot for a seven-day period; every native in Yisrael shall dwell in booths, so that your generations will know that I caused Bnei Yisrael to dwell in sukkot when I took them from the land of Egypt; I am Hashem, your G-d.*" R' Yoel Sirkes z"l (the Bach; 1561-1640) rules that one has not fulfilled the mitzvah of eating in the sukkah properly if he does not focus on the fact that G-d provided shelter to Bnei Yisrael in the desert.

The Torah says (Bemidbar 15:38-40), "*Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them that they shall make themselves tzitzit on the corners of their garments... So that you may remember and perform all My commandments and be holy to your G-d.*" Therefore, wearing tzitzit requires a person have kavanah to remember all the mitzvot. (Ha'drash Ve'ha'iyun)

Letters from Our Sages

The following letter was written by R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (a leading teacher of mussar in the last 50 years; died 2005) to his grandson. It appears in the pamphlet Igrot U'ketavim, published on the occasion of R' Wolbe's shloshim.

To my beloved . . . peace and a blessing!

R' Yisrael Salanter, may his merit protect us [founder of the mussar movement and a brilliant scholar] said, "I know that my head is equal to that of a thousand men; this merely obligates me to do the work of a thousand men."

We learn from this that one is obligated to recognize the strengths and talents that G-d has given him. One certainly did not receive these for nothing, only in order to use them to serve his Creator through Torah and through sanctifying His Name in the world.

To be full of pride over one's talents makes no sense, for we did not give ourselves these talents. The reason that G-d did not give everyone the same talents is that not everyone has the same task. If one takes pride in his talents, it is a sign that he does not believe that G-d gave them to him. In so doing, he is taking pride in G-d's garment, as the verse says (Tehilim 93:1), "*Hashem donned grandeur.*"

Grandeur [which shares a root in Hebrew with "pride"] belongs only to the Creator, not to the created.

When a person does recognize his talents, he needs to know that he is obligated to exhaust them for the sake of Torah and service of G-d. Who can believe that he is fulfilling his obligation? Everyone is obligated to do infinitely more than he is doing using whatever talents he has. . . . Indeed, in contrast to a multi-talented individual, one who is not talented but works hard to understand and know [the Torah] is using his talents. A talented individual should feel shame, not pride, in the presence [of a person whose talents are limited]. . . .

With love, Grandpa Shlomo

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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