

RECOGNIZING THE HONOR AND KINDNESS OF OTHERS

by Rabbi Yona Zohn

In this week's Torah portion G-d informs Moshe (Moses) that he must exact revenge from the Midianites and then he will die. The Medrash explains that had Moshe delayed the war with Midian for twenty years he would have lived twenty years longer because his death was contingent upon fulfilling his mission to wage war. Nevertheless, Moshe discharged his responsibility immediately, hastening his imminent demise.

Rabbi Leib Chasman expounds that Moshe's alacrity was based in honoring the name of G-d. The Midianites had disgraced G-d's name when they enticed the Jewish nation to sin in Shittim, and this ignominy needed to be avenged. With the honor of G-d in the balance, Moshe did not hesitate and went to war immediately. Moshe's swift response to restore honor to G-d at his own personal expense clearly displays the importance to be given to G-d's honor and teaches the efforts which must be made to enhance the honor of G-d and avoid the desecration of His holy name. We consecrate the name of G-d through our behavior. Acting in a refined, dignified manner glorifies the name of G-d because the masses behold the people of G-d conducting their business with nobility, while disgraceful, ill-perceived conduct lowers the respect of G-d in the eyes of others.

Oddly, we find that Moshe himself did not lead the charge into battle. He sent Pinchas and Elazar in his stead. If the import of this mitzvah was so great that Moshe exercised such eagerness to complete it, even to his own detriment, why did he not complete it himself?

The Medrash explains that Moshe spent a few decades of his adult life in Midian and found himself unable to harm the Midianites. Because of all he had benefited from the Midianites it was not proper for him to engage them in battle. This is the greatness of appreciation for past chessed (acts of kindness). Despite the enormity of the mission to avenge the disgrace of G-d's glory and the accompanying death of 24,000 of his Jewish brethren, the material good he received from the people of this nation, although from different members of the populace than those he would be fighting, dictated he could not with his own hands bring misfortune upon the Midianites. How much more are we obligated to appreciate the Almighty for all of the goodness He showers upon us. The gratitude we have for G-d's grace should create within us a desire and sense of obligation to understand His will and fulfill His commandments. We also have tremendous appreciation of our parents and mentors who spent so many years giving of themselves for our benefit and it is incumbent upon us to demonstrate our indebtedness.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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