

MOTIVATIONAL TECHNIQUE

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Parshas MATTOS AND MASEI

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Following the Midianite incitement of the children of Israel to immorality (at the end of Parshas Balak), G-d praised Pinchas for his zealous response and called upon Moshe and the Jewish nation to avenge this disgrace to His name by destroying the Midianite nation in battle (early in Parshas Pinchas). Early in this week's parsha, "Moshe sent them - a thousand from each tribe for the legion - them and Pinchas the son of Elazar the Kohen (priest) to the legion, and the sacred vessels and the trumpets for sounding in his hand. They massed against Midian, as G-d had commanded Moshe, and they killed every male." (Bamidbar/Numbers 31:6-7) Usually the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) accompanied the nation into battle. Why was his son, Pinchas, sent in his stead?

Rashi offers a number of different rationales. The one who started the mitzvah (Divinely instructed act) of killing the Midianites - which Pinchas did when he killed Cozbi - should complete it. Furthermore, he was avenging the Midianites who sold his maternal forbearer Yosef (Joseph) to the Egyptians (Beraishis/Genesis 37:36).

Kli Yakar (Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Lunshitz; c.1550-1619; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean in Lemberg and Rabbi in Prague; a leader of Polish Jewry) explains Rashi's answers. Indeed, Pinchas did not avenge the sale of Yosef, per se, as the Midianites were simply completing their part of a Divine mission, fulfilling the first stage of G-d's promise to Avraham that his children would be slaves in a foreign land but would later leave with great wealth (Beraishis/Genesis 15:13-14). But their mission was only to sell Yosef; they chose to sell him to Egypt, the most morally deviant culture in the world at that time. Their recent incitement of the Jewish people to immorality was a replay of history; the Midianites followed the depraved example of their grandparents in misleading the Jews to immoral behavior. Thus, Moshe was confident that Pinchas would have no mercy in completing the Divine charge, because Pinchas had a perspective on Midian that others did not.

Furthermore, continues Kli Yakar, because Pinchas initiated and was invested in the mitzvah of

crushing the Midianites - although he did not appreciate at the moment he performed the first act that there would be a "continuation" - he developed a strength of heart that facilitated the completion. The Torah has a maxim "mitzvah goreres mitzvah", one mitzvah spawns another mitzvah - that one mitzvah occasion capitalized upon generates a sensitivity, a "G-d consciousness", that engenders exploiting new mitzvah opportunities. If this rule applies to two unrelated mitzvos, how much more logical is it that starting a mitzvah creates a resolve that encourages one to finish it, even if that completion was not an option from the start.

The Torah cautions us, regarding the production of Passover matzos, "And you shall guard the matzos," (Shemos/Exodus 12:17) that fantastic care must be exercised to insure they do not become chometz, that speed and alacrity are essential to make sure they are fully baked and completed before they have the chance to leaven, which would render them useless. Mechilta derives homiletically, "And you shall guard the MITZVOS": that any mitzvah which comes to you must not be allowed to become "chometz". Moshe realized that this mission of battling Midian required speed and alacrity to make sure none of the elements of the mitzvah became "chometz", rendering the entire mitzvah useless. He picked the man with a unique resolve and motivation - and each of us, in our unique situations, have our own "special motivations" - who, with his perspective on the Midianite perversion and the special sensitivity borne in having started the battle, would make sure the job was done and done right!

Have a good Shabbos!

Please forward your questions for Rabbi Avruch to RabbiAvruch@MilwaukeeKollel.org

We extend our warmest Mazel Tov to Kol HaKollel contributor, Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig, and his wife, Ahuva, on the birth this week of a baby boy!

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