THE END DOES NOT JUSTIFY THE MEANS

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This weeks parsha, Shmini, begins with the sacrifices brought on the eighth day of the Miluim, the dedication of the Mishkan. This had been mentioned earlier at the end of Sefer Shemos, as the culmination of the Book of Exile and Redemption.

Aharon's two sons, Nadav and Avihu then brought a fire offering that they were not commanded to bring and died as a result. Moshe questions the behavior of Aharon and the Kohanim during their state of mourning and Aharon explains why his actions were halachically appropriate.

The pasuk describes Moshe's response to Aharon's justification in a very interesting way. "Vayishma Moshe, vayitov b'einav (10:20)"- and Moshe heard and it was good in his eyes. Targum Yonasan writes that Moshe made an announcement saying that he had forgotten the halacha and that Aharon had reminded him. Rashi, quoting the Medrash, praises Moshe who, in his embarrassment, didn't lie and say that he had never heard that halacha, but rather admitted that he had heard the halacha but had subsequently forgotten it.

This praise seems a bit strange. Although we may have pride in a president who admitted to having chopped down the cherry tree (and mock a president who denies having inhaled), I believe that we have higher demands and expectations from Moshe Rabbenu. If so, why is such a big deal made when Moshe simply admitted the truth?!

Rav Leib Chasman in Ohr Yahel explains that we tend to ignore simple acts in the face of greater ones. An act of kindness usually contains many aspects. We tend to focus on the major act, thereby ignoring the many small acts of kindness which led to and comprised the major act.

True! Truth, is something that we demand from Moshe (and hopefully from ourselves!). However, don't think that Hashem overlooks that which is expected. Even the smallest acts are crucially important, must not be overlooked. They therefore deserve mention in our Toras Chaim, our instructions for life.

A story is told about the wife of the Vilna Gaon who used to collect charity for the poor, with a close friend. A pact was made between them that whoever would enter the eternal realm first would visit the other in a dream and tell of the reward awaiting for her efforts on behalf of charity. Her friend died first and, true to her word, came to the Gra's wife in a dream.

In the dream she told that the reward is indescribable but would try to give her a glimpse of what's

to come. "Do you remember the time we went to the house of a certain wealthy man and we knocked and waited until we realized that he must not be home?" she asked. "We started to walk away and then we both saw his carriage pull up to his house. I raised my hand and pointed while saying, 'there he is'. You didn't raise your hand but only said, 'there he is'. For raising my hand and showing more enthusiasm for the mitzva, my act was recorded in a totally different book than yours!"

Moshe told the truth. We must never minimize any aspect of any good deed, no matter how simple, obvious, inconsequential or expected it might be. The Medrash praises Moshe- he told the truth.

I once heard a different explanation of this Rashi. None of us ever lie... unless... ahem... of course... there's good reason to. We will often rationalize our actions- the end justifies the means.

Moshe had a wonderful reason to lie in this situation. He even had a 'frum' reason to lie which, as we all 'know', actually turns it into a 'mitzva'!

Here was a halacha that he had forgotten. Plain and simple. However, wasn't it in the best interest of Klal Yisroel for him to say that he never heard that halacha instead of admitting to having forgotten it! Wouldn't Hashem Himself want him to lie?!

His admission to the truth could jeopardize the whole transmission of the Torah! The people will wonder what else did he forget?! Maybe he 'remembers' something that Hashem never really told him!! How can he be trusted to pass the Torah over to us!?

Moshe had far better reasons to lie than we usually come up with. Yet, Moshe told the truth! Amazing! Hashem, you commanded me to be honest. How will my honesty affect the transmission of the Torah? That's your problem, Hashem, not mine! I'll trust your resources and creativity to deal with the problem! I'll tell the truth!

Our parsha also introduces to us the concept of kosher and nonkosher animals. "And Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon to say 'olayhem'- to them. Speak to Bnei Yisroel... these are the animals that can be eaten... all those with split hooves and who chew their cud. (11:1-3)"

The Sefer HaChinuch explains that kashrus is basically a health issue. The body is the instrument through which the neshama can accomplish its task. As the strength and quality of the anvil in the hand of the blacksmith will determine the caliber of the vessel produced, the fitness of the body will either aid or deter the functions of the soul. We are, therefore, commanded to abstain from these harmful foods.

Now, I know that our medically involved readers are 'having a cow' (a kosher animal, please note) with this explanation, but please allow me to use my own personal historical perspective to shed some light on this issue. I was born about twenty years B.C.- before cholesterol. Growing up, I had

never heard of cholesterol, nor was it listed on any labels in the supermarket. Suddenly, its name conjured images of the Bubonic Plague and it is now viewed as one of the main killers of today. Besides mineral water, it's hard to find a product today that doesn't list its cholesterol content.

With the constant advances being made in medicine today, that which yesterday was considered healthy is today a declared killer. (Some even say that saliva can cause cancer- but only when swallowed in small quantities over an extended period of time!)

There is a book entitled "Your Body and How it Works" which is a compilation of Reader's Digest articles which described the functions of different organs. The author writes about the Thymus gland which "until recently was viewed as an evolutionary leftover" but is now acknowledged as "the throne of immunity". Yet, that very same author will refer to other body parts or functions as evolutionary leftovers! I wonder if he didn't realize that the same mocking tone he uses when referring to yesteryears scientific understandings, won't be directed toward him in a few years!

What becomes quite apparent is that we can't use todays medical beliefs and understandings to measure and validate the laws and warnings of our eternal Torah. If the Doctor of all doctors warned about the danger of a certain food, we'd best keep away.

The Kli Yakar has a very different understanding. He maintains that the general good health of the gentiles proves that these laws do not deal simply on a physical level.

The pasuk that we quoted above stated that Hashem told Moshe and Aharon to say 'olayhem'- to them. The Kli Yakar points out that this word 'olayhem' is redundant. The very next pasuk says to speak to Bnei Yisroel!

We've discussed before how the neshama of a jew is comprised of five parts. The body houses the lowest part. The other parts connect us, like a beacon of light, to the highest areas of the spiritual realm.

Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon to teach to Bnei Yisroel these laws which apply only 'olayhem'- only to them! These laws deal with the health of the neshama. You are what you eat in a spiritual sense. Clearly, only Hashem knows what foods will affect the neshama in which way. Those with different neshamas will not be adversely affected by such foods. We, with a different make-up and with a different purpose in life, must also consume different foods.

May we merit to honestly recognize the myriad aspects of good in others, and to maintain ourselves so as to allow us to realize the myriad aspects of the potential good in us.

Good shabbos.

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