

A BUNCH OF MAD MEN

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

G-d told Moshe, "Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon HaKohen, stopped My anger towards the Children of Israel because he was zealous on My behalf, which prevented Me from destroying them because of jealousy." (Bamidbar 25:10-11)

This week's parshah brings up the issue of kana'ot (zealousness). Being a zealot is tricky business, because it is far easier to do it wrong than to do it right. On the surface of it, what Shimon and Levi did in Shechem seems exactly like what Pinchas did in Shittim. Yet, Ya'akov scolded them for their anger, and their act almost resulted in a premature war with the Amorites and the early destruction of the Jewish people. However, Pinchas was not only praised for his act of zealousness, he was handsomely rewarded for it as well.

Even more curious is how, in the eyes of the Shevatim, Shimon and Levi appeared like heroes when they avenged the honor of their family against Shechem and his city, whereas the Shevatim had come to lynch Pinchas after he had performed his act of zealousness against Zimri. That is why G-d intervened in this week's parshah on his behalf, to set the record straight before the eyes of the entire nation.

It is also not only a case of who, but also of when, as the following story relates:

Our Rabbis taught: When Rebi Yosi ben Kisma fell ill, Rabbi Chanina ben Teradion went to visit him. He said to him, "Chanina, my brother, do you not know that this nation has been placed in power by G-d Himself, for she has destroyed His house, burned His Temple, killed His pious ones, and caused His good ones to perish, and still continues to rule! Yet, I have heard that you sit and study Torah and gather crowds in public with a Torah Scroll resting on your lap!" (Avodah Zarah 18a)

What did Rebi Yosi ben Kisma mean? We know that there is a mitzvah to teach Torah and not change from our lives of mitzvot, particularly during times of "shmad" (religious persecution). Then, even if a Jew is asked to tie his shoelace in order to make a mockery of Judaism one must die instead; how much more so must he keep learning and teaching Torah during such times! So, what did Rebi Yosi ben Kisma warn his student about? To appreciate the answer to this question, we have to first recall that the basis of zealousness on behalf of G-d is the mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem, the mitzvah to sanctify the Name of G-d. As such, then a mitzvah of kana'ot generates kedushah (holiness), and as good as that sounds, it can be problematic, especially in a place where the Klipot

(the forces of impurity) are strong.

For example, we are not allowed to even think about Torah while in the bathroom. The bathroom is an impure place, which means that the Klipot, or the Gevurot, are strong there. To increase kedushah there would be to directly feed the Klipot and make them stronger, not a good thing at all. That is one of their domains in Creation, so why go in there with kedushah guns firing if they are only going to catch those bullets and digest them, and get stronger?

This is one of the reasons why Moshe Rabbeinu was told not to pray by the sea. At that time, as the scene revealed, the Klipot were strong and flying all around. All the kedushah that would have been generated by the prayers of Moshe Rabbeinu, and that is a lot of kedushah, would have only strengthened the side of impurity at a time that the Jewish people needed to weaken them. So, G-d had Moshe Rabbeinu stop his praying, and instead commanded the Jewish people to enter the sea and split it in the merit of their bitachon (trust in G-d).

This is what Yosi ben Kisma was pointing out to Chanina ben Teradion: The fact that the Romans have been so successful in their conquest of Jerusalem and the Jewish people, and yet, have not suffered because it, reveals just how strong the Klipot are at this time, and you want to strengthen them with your acts of zealousness? Shimon and Levi did, and it almost cost Ya'akov's family their lives.

On the other hand, Pinchas also acted at a time that the Gevurot were very strong, so why didn't he feed the Klipot as well? To answer that question, permit me to take a little detour first.

SHABBAT DAY:

Moshe and Aharon assembled the people before the rock, and said, "Listen you rebels! Will water come out of this rock?" (Bamidbar 20:10)

Apparently not, for as the Midrash explains, the rock that was meant to bring forth water, the Be'er Miriam, hid from Moshe amongst other rocks, and was no longer recognizable. As a result, when Moshe first spoke to a rock, as commanded by G-d, it did not bring forth water, since it was the wrong rock. In the end, he was "forced" to hit the rock, after which it finally responded to the amazement of all involved.

Except, of course, G-d, Who had been anything but impressed:

G-d told Moshe and Aharon, "Since you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me before the Children of Israel, you will therefore not bring this people into the land which I have given to them." (Bamidbar 20:12)

There are various different explanations as to exactly what the Chillul Hashem was, including lessening the miracle of hitting the rock to bring forth water versus only speaking to it. Any time a lesser miracle is performed than what could have been executed, the difference between the two is called a "Chillul Hashem", a profanation of G-d's Name.

However, the rock hid on Moshe Rabbeinu, denying him the opportunity to perform the greater miracle! Furthermore, what did Aharon HaKohen have to do with anything, that he received the same severe punishment of dying in the desert? And, while we're on the topic, what did Eretz Yisroel have to do with the Chillul Hashem, that not entering it was the measure-for-measure punishment for hitting the rock?

All questions have the same answer:

Through anger a person truly becomes known, and you can really know him. If his holy Neshamah is protected during times of anger, and it is not uprooted from its place so that a stranger can replace it, then you know that the person is good, that he serves his Master, and that he is an "Adam Shalaim" — a "Complete Person". If he is someone who does not protect his Neshamah, and he uproots the upper holiness from its place to allow the Sitra Achra to reside in its place, certainly this is someone who rebels against his Master; it is forbidden to come close to such a person. It is to this type of person that the verse refers, "You who tears himself apart in his anger" (Iyov 18:4); he tears himself apart and uproots his Neshamah in his anger, and a stranger dwells in its place. (Zohar, Tetzaveh 182a)

The Jewish people, especially at times like this, are not easy to deal with, to say the least. We are an intense people, and often that intensity does not come out exactly the right way. It can be enough to drive a leader bonkers, and certainly make him angry. The Jewish people definitely did that to Moshe Rabbeinu on a few occasions, this occasion being one of them, and it cost them the redemption.

However, as justified as anger may seem to be, says the Zohar, it represents capitulation to the Sitra Achra, to the Klipot. And, when that happens, kedushah has to hide to protect its precious cargo from the would-be impure predators constantly hovering around during times of hester panim, the hiding of G-d's hand in history. Hence, the rock high-tailed it out of there before Moshe was able to bring down the shefa, the Ohr Ain Sof, the light of G-d that was meant to turn into water as it flowed from the rock.

This is why the Torah does not merely tell us that Moshe Rabbeinu got angry, but it even tells us what he called them, "Rebels!" The fact that the word was able to leave his mouth indicated a lack of control over the situation, something that Aharon helped convey by standing at Moshe Rabbeinu's side as all this took place, and that was exactly the opposite message G-d had set up, as the final message to the Jewish people before entering Eretz Yisroel.

For, regarding Eretz Yisroel, the Torah states:

For, the land you are about to possess is not like Egypt from where you came, and in which, if you sowed seeds, you had to bring water to them as you would for a garden of green herbs. The land you are about to possess has mountains and deep valleys, and is watered by rain from the sky — a land which G-d, your G-d, cares for, G-d, your G-d pays attention to continuously the entire year. (Devarim

11:11-12)

Translation: When it comes to Eretz Yisroel, G-d is always there running the show, and everything that happens there is for the good. Even if it looks crazy and destructive and totally against what one might think G-d wants to happen, He is still there, directly involved, and it will always work out for the good in the end. Panic and anger only complicate matters, drawing into the picture the Klipot, forcing G-d, for our own good, to bring the shefa to us through a backdoor means, to protect it from the impure forces that hover over it like vultures to pounce on it. Thus, on his deathbed, Ya'akov Avinu chastises not his sons but their anger, saying:

"Shimon and Levi are brothers. Their means of acquisition are instruments of violence. My spirit will not enter into their councils; my honor, do not be identified in their assemblies. For in their anger they murdered men, and of their own free-will they maimed an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their frenzy, for it is harsh. I will divide them throughout Ya'akov, and will disperse them throughout Israel." (Bereishit 49:5-7)

For, because of their personal rage, the Klipot entered Shechem with them. Worst, Shechem was home to the Klipot already, so when they entered it in anger, they compounded the problem, and all the Kiddush Hashem they tried to create resulted in Chillul Hashem instead, feeding the Klipot by strengthening them, until it resulted in the Amorites assembling their armies to go to war against Ya'akov and his family. Had G-d not intervened, Ya'akov later said, it would have been the end of the Jewish people.

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

Cast out anger from your heart, and [by doing this] remove evil from your flesh. (Kohelet 12:10)

One thing is for sure: Pinchas did not work alone. According to the Midrash, Zimri, the prince of the tribe of Shimon, had been well-protected. Pinchas had to first make it past his bodyguards in order to perform his act of zealousness, and do so precisely at the right moment. Had he speared Zimri before or after the forbidden act, he would have been guilty of murder, not zealousness, anger or no anger. He took quite a risk. Therefore, the Talmud says:

Rebi Yochanan said: Six miracles happened for Pinchas. (Sanhedrin 82b)

Wow, six miracles? That's a lot of Heavenly help to rely upon in such a risky situation, which of course Pinchas had not done, for it is not permissible to do so:

Rebi Yannai acted based upon his views, for he said, "A man should never stand in a place of danger and say that a miracle will happen for him, in case it doesn't. And, if a miracle does occur for him, it is deducted from his merits. (Shabbat 32a)

Rather, he simply took the risk to perform the mitzvah, and let Hashgochah Pratit (Divine Providence) deal with it as it would. A risk that was greatly reduced because:

G-d told Moshe, "Pinchas... stopped My anger ...he was zealous on My behalf."

Hence, it was never about Pinchas' own anger; that would have brought the Klipot and kept the miracle away. It was about G-d's anger, and when Pinchas acted on behalf of it, not only did it keep the Klipot at bay, it kept them away. As a result, the shefa of Ohr Ain Sof could "naturally" flow earthward, enabling Pinchas to rectify Creation as Creation needed to be rectified.

For, that is what kana'ot is all about: tikun. It is about the rectification of the world, and drawing down Ohr Ain Sof to where it is obviously not, apparent by the parade of Klipot in the world. However, if personal anger is involved, then kana'ot will not only not sanctify the Name of G-d, it will end up feeding the Klipot, strengthening them until the Jewish people are at risk for an even greater onslaught from the side of impurity.

Resh Lakish said, "A man who becomes angry, if he is a sage his wisdom will leave him, and if he is a prophet his power of prophecy will forsake him. The first instance is illustrated by the case of Moshe, as it is written 'And Moshe was angry with the officers of the host' (Bamidbar 31:14) and later it says, 'And Elazar the kohen said to the men of the army who had gone to the battle, "This is the ordinance of the law which G- d commanded Moshe..." ' (Ibid. 21). Hence, the inference is that Elazar said this because Moshe must have forgotten it. (Pesachim 66b)

Why? Because the wisdom itself is the result of the same flow of Ohr Ain Sof, which must remain protected from the Klipot. To sustain the Klipot for the sake of maintaining free-will, G-d has established a system by which they get their due, but only their due. One thing you don't want to do is give them more than G-d wants them to have, otherwise it upsets the balance and results in chaos in the universe.

Hence, the Rambam teaches:

Anger is an exceedingly bad trait and it is best that a person go to the other extreme with this. He should teach himself not to become angry even over something that it is fitting to be angry about. If he wants to instill fear in the members of his household or in the members of the community, being a leader he wants to cause them to improve, so he should appear before them as if he is angry in order to chastise them, but in fact, he should be at peace with himself like a person who is only acting to be angry... Therefore, they have commanded us to distance ourselves from anger even over things that cause anger; this is the proper trait. It is the way of the righteous to be contrite, because the contrite do not hear insults and therefore do not respond. (Yad Chazakah, Hilchot Dayot 2:3)

MELAVE MALKAH:

May it be Your Will, G-d, and the G-d of our Fathers, that no person will be jealous of me and I won't be jealous of them. May I not become angry today and may I not anger You. Save me from the yetzer hara, and place in my heart contriteness and humility... (Elokai Netzor, Shemonah Esrai)

Hence, Rebi Yosi ben Kisma's question to his student: He told him, "Look at the situation today. The Klipot are everywhere and walk the streets as if they own them. They have grown so strong in spiritual power that they have been able to destroy the House of G-d, and seemingly, with impunity. That is the stage on which you are teaching Torah in public, and like Moshe Rabbeinu before you at the shore of the sea, you may be throwing up kedushah for the Klipot to grab for the taking. Therefore, you better make very sure you know what you are doing, and that the kedushah you are generating is in fact, very protected."

Therefore, Rebi Chanina responded:

"How am I as far as the World to Come is concerned?"

Rebi Yosi asked him, "Have you no merits at all?"

He answered, "I once mistook the Purim Seudah charity money for the ordinary charity money [both of which I was responsible for] and distributed it to the needy [compensating for the loss from my own pocket]."

Rebi Yosi said, "If that is the case, let my portion be with you and my fate similar to yours." (Avodah Zarah 18a)

In other words, Rebi Chanina ben Teradion was a pure zealot, through-and-through, which meant that whatever he did, he did it for G-d and only G-d. That's why Rebi Yosi concluded that the portion his student was destined to receive for his act of kana'ot is worthy envying.

This meant that all the kedushah he was creating by his mesirat-Nefesh (self-sacrifice) was protected from the Klipot, and was bringing real tikun to the world, for which he would be duly rewarded, like the other nine martyrs who died at the same time that he did. Indeed, though his own life was not saved as was Pinchas', still, the kedushah he generated was so powerful that it actually began to subdue some of the Klipot at a time that they were so incredibly strong:

They said it was not long before Rebi Yosi ben Kisma passed away and all of the Roman notables went to his grave and delivered a great eulogy in his honor. Upon returning, they found Rebi Chanina ben Teradion sitting and occupying himself with the Torah, publicly gathering assemblies, and keeping a scroll of the Law by his chest. Immediately they took him, wrapped him in the Sefer Torah, placed bundles of branches around him and set them on fire. They then brought tufts of wool, which they had soaked in water, and placed them over his heart so that he should die slowly. His daughter exclaimed, "Father, that I should see you in this state!"

He replied, "If I alone was being burned it would have been too hard to bear. But now that I am burning together with the Sefer Torah, He who will have regard for the plight of the Torah will also have regard for my plight."

His students called out, "Rebi, what do you see?"

"Parchment is burning," he replied, "but the letters are soaring Heavenward."

"Open your mouth," [they begged him] "so that the fire can enter you!" He replied, "Let Him who gave me [my soul] take it away, but no one should injure oneself."

The executioner then said to him, "Rabbi, if I raise the flame and take away the tufts of wool from over your heart, will you bring me to Eternal Life?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Swear to me."

He swore to him, after which he raised the flame and removed the tufts of wool from over his heart, and his soul quickly departed. The executioner then jumped into the fire. A Heavenly Voice exclaimed: "Rebi Chanina ben Teradion and the executioner are going to Eternal Life." (Ibid.)

The bottom line of all of this is, no matter what kind of mitzvah you are performing, small or big, uneventful or dramatic, you have to be a kanoy (a zealot). However, you have to make sure that, when being a zealot, you do it for G-d's sake, not for your own. Any negative trait at such a time when you are generating kedushah is like ringing the dinner bell for the impure side, and feeding them yourself.

If you're going to do a mitzvah, and this is so very true, especially if you are playing the part of the zealot, really do the mitzvah. Generate the kedushah, and make sure it goes to the right destination. We live in times during which the Klipot are strong. If we don't protect the kedushah, who will?

Have a great Shabbat,
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Text

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