

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

What difference does one man make? Consider the question rhetorical because the answer is so obvious. One person can and does make all the difference in the world - for better or for worse.

Let us first consider the confluence of coincidence required for any one person to be positioned in any circumstance to affect an outcome. I often quote Rav Kook Ztl's insight that we must consider G-d's intention in why all of us are sharing the same time and place. Rav Kook's conclusion is that there is Divine intention in the circumstances of our existing in a certain place at a certain time and we must factor that intention in the importance we assign to every person we know, meet, will not know and never meet. Rav Kook's insight equally applies to the individual in relation to his family, community, his entire generation, and its historic setting. Therefore, everyone individually and everyone collectively make a significant difference.

Getting back to the confluence of coincidence, it is mind boggling to consider the variables brought to bear on any two people meeting each other, interacting with each other, and affecting each other's lives. The Talmud describes it in terms of shiduchim - matchmaking. "For G-d to make a shiduch between a man and a woman is more difficult than His parting the Yam Suf." Obviously, more or less difficult are irrelevant terms when used in reference to G-d; nevertheless, Chazal (the Rabbis) wanted us to know that all confluences of coincidence are the sum total of history.

Imagine the following. A person walks down a busy street on his way to his next meeting. Coming to a busy intersection he neglectfully steps into oncoming traffic. Another person waiting to cross safely sees our hapless victim about to buy a direct ticket to heaven when he reaches out, grabs him by the sleeve and pulls him back to safety. The light turns green and the unknown hero walks across the street and into the smog. Counting his lucky stars, the nearly-died looks up to thank his savior only to see a mass of human backs rushing across the street.

How many variables had to be factored into the course of history to bring about the happy ending? How much does the almost-died owe the quick-witted reflects of a stranger he will never again meet or get to know? Clearly, as Rav Kook explained, G-d ordered His entire universe to provide for this nonchalant miracle. Does one man make a difference? Yes he does.

This week's Parsha begins where last week's Parsha left off. Following Bilam's attempts at cursing Am Yisroel, Bilam advised Balak to seduce the Jewish men and bring down G-d's wrath against the nation. Balak did as he was recommended and sowed disunity among the tribes with near civil war

breaking out. After the pell-mell and confusion subsided, 24,000 men were dead and the Jewish nation was shamed and humbled; yet, it could have been far worse. The Torah recorded the zealousness of Pinchus in fearlessly confronting the immorality of the moment, his killing of Zimri and the Midianite princess, and the ending of the plague. G-d informed Moshe that Pinchus was to receive "My covenant of peace" and become a Kohain (priest) like his father, uncle, and grandfather before him.

Besides Aharon, Pinchus was the only other person to be gifted with the office of priesthood. When the Kohanim bless the congregation they start with the blessing, "...Who has sanctified us with the holiness of Aharon and has commanded us to bless His people..." What if a Kohain is a descendent of Pinchus rather than one of the other Kohanim? Granted, Pinchas was also a descendent of Aharon; however, his designation as a Kohain was not due to being a grandson of Aharon. Pinchas's Kehunah (priesthood) was unique to Pinchus and Pinchus alone. Theoretically, his descendents should replace "... Who has sanctified us with the holiness of Aharon" with "...Who has sanctified us with the holiness of Pinchus!"

The Kohanim were intended to teach the Jews in word and deed how to live a sanctified life. Unfortunately, because of the Golden Calf, the rights of priesthood were taken away from all the Jews (represented in each family by the first born) and given to Aharon. In Aharon's merit, his descendents would also become Kohanim. At the end of Parshas Korach G-d proved to the entire nation that Aharon had become Kohain Gadol on merit alone. The fact that he happened to also be Moshe's brother was irrelevant to his appointment. My Grandfather Zt'l explained that the miracle of Aharon's staff simultaneously sprouting flowers, buds, and almonds revealed that Aharon deserved his appointment because of his lifetime of commitment and devotion to G-d and His people. The existence of each developmental stage of the almond, flower, bud, and fruit, symbolized the importance of each step in Aharon's personal development. G-d was telling the generation that the reward of priesthood was the sum total of Aharon's being, rather than the nepotistic generosity of a younger brother.

When Aharon was designated as Kohain, so too were his four sons and all their subsequent descendents. At the time, Pinchus was already born and for whatever reason was not included in the original count; instead, he remained a regular Layvie. However, the concept of priesthood was the consequence of Aharon's lifetime of achievement and no one else. In essence, G-d conferred on Aharon a special level of holiness above and beyond the standard Kedusha (sanctity) of being Jewish. That special Kedusha could only be passed from father to son. The fact that 38 years later Pinchus became deserving of his own designation did not mean that G- d had conferred on him a new and separate level of Kedusha. Instead, Pinchus was granted entrée into the exclusive sanctity of his grandfather's unique holiness and responsibilities. How important is one person's lifetime of achievement and can it effect changes in the universe? Yes! Very much so!

In discussing this with my Father Shlit'a he told me an insight from the Rav Zt'l that to the best of his knowledge was never published. The Rav was discussing the episode in B'Haloscha when Moshe expressed his difficulty in satisfying the needs of the people. (11:11) "...Why have You done evil to Your servant; why have I not found favor in Your eyes, that You place the burden of this entire people upon me?" G-d's response was to instruct Moshe to gather 70 Elders who would become the Sanhedrin and help Moshe administrate the nation. (11:16-17) "Gather to Me seventy men...take them to the Ohel Moed... I will increase some of the spirit that is upon you and place it upon them..."

The Rav asked, "Why did G-d have to take from Moshe's spirit and give it to the 70 Elders? Why couldn't G-d grant them "spirit" of their own? Was there a limit to the "spirit" that G-d had in reserve?"

The Rav Zt'l explained that G-d was responding to Moshe's presenting complaint regarding his inability to deal with the people. Everyone will occasionally become despondent and depressed, and Moshe was no exception. Overwhelmed by the nation's demands, discouraged by the nation's inconsistent faith, depressed and frustrated, Moshe turned to G-d. G-d's response was not to challenge Moshe's despondent mood; instead, G-d decided to prove to Moshe that, not only did Moshe have the strength to deal with the people, he had enough strength to empower 70 other men to do the same!

There was no limit to G-d's reserve of "spirit" just as there was no limit to His conveyance of Kedusha (sanctity). In each instance, Moshe as leader and Aharon as Kohain, the strength and ability were realized through the uniqueness of each of them. Moshe was unique as a leader and teacher of the greatest generation to ever live and Aharon was unique as the individual who could love, atone, represent, and inspire them in their yearning for closeness with the Divine. All Torah comes through Moshe and all priestly Kedusha comes through Aharon. It was the merit of their lifetime of devotion and commitment that changed them, their families, their nation, and the universe.

Do you have the power to affect big and small changes in the world? Were you born into a time and place for reasons both big and small? Is it G-d's intention that in some way you make a significant difference? Yes, Yes, and Yes.

We simply have to believe it and always try to do the right thing. All the rest, the confluence of coincidences, nonchalant miracles, and the sum total of history, is G-d's business.

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