PLAYING IT SAFE BY DOING WHAT THE TORAH COMMANDS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Pinchas

Playing It Safe By Doing What The Torah Commands

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 821, Chulent On Sunday of the Nine Days. Good Shabbos!

In Parshas Pinchas, Moshe Rabbeinu was commanded to go out, do battle, and take revenge against the Midyanites. The Midyanites allied themselves with the Moavites and were unfortunately successful in causing the Jewish men to succumb to the sin of illicit relationships with the daughters of Midyan. Moshe Rabbeinu was commanded to wipe out all the people who participated in this terrible act. The Medrash comments that causing one to sin is worse than killing a person, for when a person is killed he loses his life in this world but will still have life in the world-to-come. When a person sins, however, he loses his life in both this world and in the next world. Since the next world is far more valuable than this world, the crime of seducing one to sin is worse than murder.

As proof to this distinction, the Medrash cites a contrast between two nations who afflicted the Jewish people physically and two other nations who afflicted us spiritually. The Egyptians and the Edomites did physical battle with us. The Moavites and the Ammonites enticed us to sin. Concerning the Edomites, who merely tried to kill us, the Torah tells us "Don't hate an Edomite" (lo tesaev edomi) but concerning an Ammonite and Moavite, who caused us to sin, we are taught "An Ammonite and a Moavite shall not enter the community of Hashem." They are rejected from having any connection with Klal Yisrael because they did something far worse than attack us - they made us sin.

The Medrash further states that anyone who tries to be nice to the Ammonites and Moavites will wind up paying a terrible price. This happened with Dovid HaMelech [King David]. When the King of Ammon died, Dovid HaMelech sent a delegation to pay homage (for favors he had received from the King of Ammon) and offer condolences before the son of the King, whose name was Nachash the Ammonite. We are told in the book of Shmuel that the delegation was accused of being spies for the King of Israel and they were humiliated by being forced to shave off half their beards and sent back to Jerusalem in that condition. Nachash the Ammonite further hired mercenaries and he did

battle with the Jewish people.

The Medrash teaches that this happened to Dovid HaMelech for trying to be "smarter than the Torah" and "more religious and compassionate than the Torah" (which counsels not to be nice to the Ammonites). The Medrash references the pasuk "Do not be overly righteous or overly wise..." [Koheles 7:16]. Like the motto of the Marines "Ours is not to question why? Ours is simply to do and die."

Before coming to America, Rav Moshe Feinstein led a small community in Eastern Europe. There was a "moser" [an individual who made it his practice to slander fellow Jews to the communist government] in town. A moser was classically known as the most despicable type of person. The man left a Will and Testament: "I was such a terrible person in my lifetime that I want to do Teshuva after my death. Therefore, I want my body to be mutilated and treated with utter disrespect, as one would treat a donkey! I want to be buried away from the Jewish section of the cemetery and I want all this to be an atonement for my sins and for all the trouble I caused the Jewish community during my lifetime."

The Burial Society came to their Rabbi and showed him the Will, asking for his advice as to how to proceed. Rav Moshe Feinstein ruled: You must bury him like you bury every other Jew - with respect and with dignity. He ruled that a person does not have control even over his own body after he dies and the Halacha forbids desecrating a dead body. The Chevra Kaddisha argued with Rav Moshe, "But look, he said he wanted to do Teshuva. This would be his atonement!" Rav Moshe responded, "The law is the law. We cannot superimpose our own thoughts or emotions onto it!" The Burial Society reluctantly listened to their Rabbi and buried this Jew like all other members of the community.

Three weeks later, a delegation came from the government and presented a government order to the caretaker of the cemetery demanding to exhume the body. They exhumed the body, opened the coffin, examined the body and saw that his body has not been desecrated. They further confirmed that he was buried in the regular part of the Jewish cemetery. They then reburied the body.

The caretaker asked what this whole investigation was about. They explained that before the man died, he sent a letter to the Russian Government. The letter stated that the Jews hate the government and they mistreat anyone who had any connection with the government. He claimed that he would prove this claim by his "prediction" that the Jews would desecrate his body and bury him in a separate portion of the cemetery! In other words, repentance and atonement was the farthest thing from the man's mind. He intended to give a parting shot to the community from the grave and "trap them" into committing an incriminating "crime and insult" against the government.

Anyone who hears this story states "Rav Moshe Feinstein had ruach haKodesh [Divine intuition]. How else was he able to smell this rat?" Rav Moshe Feinstein may well have had ruach haKodesh, but this

story is not proof of that. This story is not about Rav Moshe Feinstein, the possessor of Divine Intuition. This story is about Rav Moshe Feinstein, the posek [decider of Jewish law]. Because of his fealty to Halacha, he saved himself and his community from untold troubles.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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