

ZEALOTRY IS LIKE RADIATION: ONE HAS TO KNOW HOW TO USE IT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayikra

Zealotry Is Like Radiation: One Has To Know How To Use It

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #850 Taking Medicines on Yom Tov. Good Shabbos!

The Parsha [Vayikra 1:14] contains the Olas haOf [bird burnt offerings], which can be brought either from the "turtledoves" (torim) or "young doves" (bnei yona), which are different forms of doves. The Ramban writes that these birds are easily accessible and it was for this reason the Torah commanded us to use these species for the Olas haOf. He notes that chickens are even more common than these types of doves, but since chickens have "looser morals," the Torah prefers doves.

The Ramban adds that if one has the choice between bringing the mature turtledoves (torim), as opposed to the younger bnei yona, the torim are preferable. The reason is that the torim are faithful to their mate for their entire lives. Once a male turtledove mates with a female, he will never go to another mate for the rest of his life. Therefore, the Torah views this species as the optimal choice for a bird burnt offering, symbolic of the Jewish people's loyalty to the Master of the Universe.

The Rambam writes that regular doves (yonim), on the other hand, are very jealous birds. If one dove sees his mate "flirting" with another dove, he will abandon her immediately. As a result of these jealousies, they often split up and switch mates. That is why the Almighty does not accept mature doves as offerings and only accepts "bnei yonah" - the immature, young, doves who have not yet found mates.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky writes that we see from this Ramban that "kanaus" [jealousy / zealotry] is a very dangerous type of attribute to possess. It must be employed in the right hands by the right people. Kanaus is positive only if it is done within the narrow strictures of what halacha and 'Daas Torah' allows and sometimes demands. Zealotry that is not channeled by the appropriate

parameters of Torah guidance is worthless and even counter-productive (sofo l'kalkel).

Rav Yaakov points out that Ramban highlights the hypocrisy of the "zealous dove". He throws out his wife for her supposed infidelity and then he switches mates. So now all of a sudden he takes another dove as his mate who apparently had been another dove's mate previously. So what happened to his 'kanaus'? "You were so upset about your wife's flirting and now you take another dove's wife as your own! You hypocrite!" This was not a zealousness born out of Torah stricture and self-control, it was simply a zealousness born out of petty jealousy and anger. We never see positive results from zealotry born of anger and emotion. In the rare instances where zealotry is positive, it must be born out of intellect (sechel) and rational thinking.

Rav Yaakov has a lengthy discussion in Parshas Vayechi where the Ramban points out that both Shimon and Levi possessed the attribute of kanaus. It was Shimon and Levi who could not tolerate the fact that their sister Dinah was violated. All the other brothers sort of made peace with it, but they insisted "Such shall not be done in Israel!" -- This is intolerable. This will not stand!

They took their zealotry and wiped out an entire city. Yaakov Avinu held that this was illegitimate, it was wrong, and it violated Torah principles. He chastised them: "Cursed be their anger for it is violent..." [Bereishis 49:7]. Such kanaus is unacceptable, he told Shimon and Levi.

Kanaus is like radiation. Radiation can cure but radiation can kill. One must know what they are doing when they start administering radiation treatments!

What happened with Shimon and Levi? Levi went down to Egypt and spent the entire time there learning. Members of the tribe became Talmidei Chachomim. They became the leaders of Israel. Amram, Aharon, and Moshe were direct descendants of Levi. They learned during that period how to employ the attribute of zealotry. They became "radiologists," so to speak. They knew what they were doing.

Therefore, when it came to the sin of the Golden Calf and Moshe Rabbeinu demanded "He who is for G-d, come to me" [Shemos 32:26], it was the tribe of Levi and no one else who stood up and joined him. The Tribe of Levi was able to refine the attribute of zealotry-kanaus through the prism of Torah.

Shimon never had that opportunity, but Shimon remained a zealot. So what happened in the Wilderness? The Tribe of Shimon challenged the authority of Moshe Rabbeinu. The kanaus of Zimri, the prince of the Tribe of Shimon, was born out of emotion and anger rather than a kanaus born out of Torah.

Who was it who had to put Zimri (from the Tribe of Shimon) in his place? It was Pinchas (son of Elazar son of Aharon the Kohen) - it was the descendant of Levi, who learned how to properly use zealotry.

Rav Yaakov's final words in Parshas Vayechi: Only the Gedolei Torah in each and every generation possess the sense and the sensitivity to know when it is appropriate to be zealous and when it is appropriate to be silent. Kanaus must be left for people are permeated with Torah values and know

when and how to use it -- when to object and when to be quiet.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayikra are provided below:

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