

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

Doing Hashem's Work

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GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

Pinchas... turned back My anger from upon the Children of Israel, when he avenged My retribution among them, [and as a result] I did not destroy [them]... Therefore... I give him my covenant of Peace. (25:11)

“When he avenged My retribution...” When he took My revenge, when he displayed the anger which I should have displayed. (Rashi’s commentary)

Hashem now rewarded Pinchas with the Priesthood—he had been born before Hashem told Aharon that his future offspring would be *Kohanim*. Ibn Ezra says Hashem promised to protect Pinchas from retribution by Zimri’s family. According to the *Midrash*, Pinchas was eternally spared from death (and he later took on the alias of Eliyahu). Those are fantastic rewards!

What can we learn from this? How can we emulate Pinchas? Do we need to be that brave, that firm in our convictions, to earn Hashem’s good graces?

Rav Moshe Feinstein (in *Darash Moshe*) says that if we take the words of the Torah and Rashi at face value, we can make a very simple observation: Hashem rewarded Pinchas for taking care of something that Hashem would have, otherwise, wanted to accomplish Himself.

Rav Moshe likens this to a woman running errands, preschooler in tow. At some point, the child looks at his mother and all of her bundles, and asks if he can help. The mother may find something small for the little boy to hold, but a preschooler can’t carry much. But won’t the mother be thrilled with her child’s magnanimity?

In a similar way, we can express our love for Hashem by volunteering to do His work for Him, as it were.

Rav Moshe offers two practical examples. One relates to religious observances, and one to interpersonal relationships.

The wicked Turnus Rufus once asked Rabbi Akiva... “If G-d wants man to be circumcised, why isn’t an infant born circumcised?”

Rabbi Akiva retorted, “Why is a baby born with an umbilical cord, which his mother must cut?... G-d gave Israel the *mitzvos* solely as a means of refining them.” (*Midrash Tanchuma, Tazri’a* 5)


Hashem certainly could have fashioned man with nothing to circumcise. But He grants us the opportunity to put on the finishing touch ourselves—on His behalf, as it were—and He then calls it *chosam b’ris kodesh*, the mark of the holy covenant!

Not everyone is able to perform a *b’ris milah*, of course, but Rav Moshe’s second example is more accessible.

Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva, “If your G-d loves the poor, why doesn’t He provide for them [instead of asking you to give *tzedaka*]?”

[Rabbi Akiva] answered, “So we can be spared, through them, from judgment in Gehinnom.” (Talmud, *Bava Basra* 10a)

Of course Hashem can take care of the poor! Every time we *bentch*, we ask Hashem to provide for us Himself, so that we won’t have to come on to our fellow man.

But with *tzedaka*, and many other *mitzvos*, Hashem offers us chances to do His work for Him. If we take advantage of those opportunities, and we gladly offer to help Hashem with His chores, as it were, they can be our salvation from suffering, G-d forbid, and wellsprings of great reward. 

THE RABBI WAS ASKED

ADAPTED BY RABBI DOVID TZVI MEISSNER FROM ME’AH SHE’ARIM BY RABBI YITZCHOK ZILBERSTEIN

The Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 30b) states that the *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick, applies to everyone, but an extra exhortation is needed for one who is *ben gilo*, born under the same constellation as the sick person, for he gets 1/60 of the sickness from his visit. Nevertheless, he must go and visit his friend.

Q How can it be that one would get harmfully affected from the performance of this special *mitzvah*? Also, is one obligated to cause himself harm in order to fulfill a *mitzvah*?

A Ben Yehoyada (*Nedarim* 39b) explains that the Gemara’s intent isn’t that the visitor contracts 1/60 of the sickness; it’s naturally impossible. Furthermore, the *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim* is so valuable that one gets reward for it in this world and in the World to Come. It can’t be that the visitor would get hurt through the performance of the *mitzvah*. Rather, the Gemara means that, since the visitor is pained over the sick, his sharing of the pain atones, for all Jews are interconnected, causing Heaven to remove 1/60 of the illness.

However, the language of the Gemara implies that the visitor would indeed contract some of the sickness, yet he must still go and visit.

It appears that the visitor indeed does get some of the sickness, but it’s not a punishment. Rather, it’s analogous to a vaccine that instills some of the disease in one’s body to develop the immune system to protect one’s self in case one does contract the sickness, G-d forbid.

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED

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So too, the visitor who boosted the sick person's spirit, and joined in his pain, merits to get a small portion of the sickness to develop "antibodies." This little bit is nullified in a 1/60 ratio, the number we find regarding nullification of non-kosher food which falls into kosher food.

However, after the visit, the visitor may feel slightly unwell as a result of getting 1/60 of the sickness. For this, the Gemara states that, nevertheless, one is still obligated to visit. He should know, though, that ultimately, it's good for him, and he isn't getting hurt by visiting. 🥂

A PARASHA Q 4 U

RABBI DOVID SPETNER

The name of which person, who is already deceased by the time of our *parasha*, is mentioned in two unrelated episodes in our *parasha*?

Bring this question to the Shabbos table and see who knows the answer! 🥂

GREAT ACTS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

IRA WAS THE PART OWNER OF A KOSHER GROCERY store. He graciously allowed many families to buy food on credit and pay at a later time, but there was one customer's bill that began to get on his nerves. The man had not even attempted pay any of his bill in a long time and yet still he took food from the store like it was all free. One day this customer came in to see Ira. Ira was quite exasperated with this person but tried to patiently listen as this man told his

story. The man related that his business was not doing well and he was considering filing for bankruptcy. "Bankruptcy!" Ira thought to himself, "then I'll never see anything from him!" It was very hard but Ira let the man continue. "I have a good business idea," the man said, "but because of how I've been

doing financially, no bank will lend me any money." Ira immediately told the man, "Come with me. Let's go the bank." Ira walked out of his store with his customer, went to the bank, and co-signed the loan for his customer to have the chance to get back on his feet. 🥂

Mazal Tov to Rabbi Heinemann and the Daf-A-Week Chaburah on their completion of Maseches Tamid!

GLIMPSES OF THE KOLLEL

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class at Golf Manor turns the entire social hall into a learning environment during the Shabbos kiddush. Kollel Women's Learning provides classes led by Kollel faculty and other local educators on alternating Shabbos afternoons.



BEYOND ELLIS ISLAND

THE TRAILBLAZERS, TRIALS, & TRIUMPHS OF AMERICAN JEWRY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

In the battle to ensure *kashrus* standards in the meat industry, people encountered the problem of those who falsely claimed they sold Kosher meat when, in fact, their meat had not been slaughtered properly at all. In one instance, it seemed the only recourse to prevent this person from his fraudulent activities was to report him to the government authorities. Classically, a Jew who reported another Jew to the authorities had the status of a *mosur* (informer), which carries a heavy penalty in the heavenly realm. Would that be the case in this instance as well? Rabbi Yedidya Shachet of Chicago, a *musmach* of Rabbi Yitzchok Elchonon Spektor, ruled that the problem of informing on another Jew applies only where the Jewish community has the autonomy to punish a wrongdoer. However, since in America this is not the case, the person is to be considered as one who is attempting to harm the public. In such a situation, it is permitted to inform on the person, especially since the American judicial system does not present a danger to life as was previously a concern with reporting on Jews in Europe. Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein in *Aruch HaShulchan* makes a similar point, and adds that to inform on someone in any place where the accused is given the chance to defend himself in court would not constitute a *mosur*. 🥂

SOURCES: Schwartz, Rabbi Gedalia Dov. "Shaarei Gedulah." PP. 133-135. Chicago Rabbinical Council. 2007. Epstein, Rabbi Yechiel Michel. "Aruch HaShulchan." Choshen Mishpat 388:7

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