



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת היום

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת פינחס תשס"ח 5768

CHANGE THE WORLD

There are many idealistic people who sincerely desire to have an impact. In this week's *parshah*, the Torah shows us how it can be done.

CONCEALED IDENTITY

A grave desecration of Hashem's Name occurs when a Jewish tribal leader commits a brazen act of impropriety in full view of the people. This deed leaves him subject to a punishment sanctioned by the Torah in only a few rare instances of particular gravity: execution at the hands of zealous avengers. Pinchas rises to the occasion, and impales the violator on his spear.

At this point, we observe something curious in the Torah's portrayal of these events. When recounting the actual transgression (at the end of *parshas* Balak), the perpetrator is not named; he is merely referred to as 'an Israelite'. Only in the beginning of this week's *parshah*, when reviewing Pinchas' heroism in dispatching the sinner, does the Torah first reveal the transgressor's name: Zimri. What is the purpose of this arrangement?

Based on the words of R' Moshe Feinstein in *Darash Moshe*, one may arrive at the following explanation: When people learn of a sinful act committed by an individual – especially an individual of high stature – they tend to be influenced. The news of this act makes a great impact, often for the worse. People tend to imitate such behavior. Therefore, to minimize the effect, the Torah deliberately conceals the name of the perpetrator when first reporting the deed. Only after Pinchas 'takes care of him' does the Torah reveal his name. At this point, the potentially negative influence which may have followed from Zimri's deed would be neutralized by the fact that he was stopped dead in his tracks.

From this episode, R' Moshe perceives a vital lesson concerning one's conduct. We see how much importance the Torah placed on the influence which someone's behavior can have on others; so much so, that the protagonist's name had to be temporarily hidden to minimize the effects. The same holds true, however, on the other side of the coin. In R' Moshe's words, when one conducts himself properly, causing others to learn from and copy his example, it is "worth more than all of the admonitions combined."

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

Of course, rebuke has its place. In fact, rebuke is highly encouraged, as the following Mishnah attests. When discussing the obligation to refrain from carrying on *Shabbos*, which applies not only to a person, but his animal as well, the Mishnah states:

אין חמור יוצא במרדעת בזמן שאינה קשורה לו... ולא פרה... ברצועה שבין קרניה. פרתו של רבי אלעזר בן עזריה היתה יוצאה ברצועה שבין קרניה, שלא ברצון חכמים.

"One's donkey should not venture outside on Shabbos wearing an unfastened cushion... nor can a cow go out with a strap tied between its horns. R' Elazar ben Azaryah's cow would go out with such a strap on its horns, which displeased the Sages." (*Shabbos* 5:4)

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 54b) clarifies that the great R' Elazar ben Azaryah certainly never meant to intentionally flout the will of the *chachamim*, or to be lax with Shabbos observance, Heaven forbid. In fact, it was not even R' Elazar's cow; it was his neighbor's! Yet, since R' Elazar possessed the stature and ability to lodge a protest, and did not, the violation was attributed to him, *as if he himself had perpetrated it*.

Rebuke is often necessary and even obligatory. The lesson of our *parshah* is that the most effective way to

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rebuke and truly influence others' behavior is through personal example. As the Chazon Ish states: "Students learn more from their teacher's actions than they do from his *shiurim*." (*Emunah U'bitachon, ch. 4, sec. 16*)

REAL CHANGE

The Klausenberger Rebbe used to beautifully illustrate the power and impact inherent in one's actions.

A certain idealistic individual – let's call him Yankel – full of fervor and enthusiasm, wanted to change the world. If only people could be persuaded to mend their ways and improve their *mitzvah* observance, the *geulah shelaimah* would be imminent! He immediately contacted various *rabbonim* and community leaders, hoping to galvanize support for his *teshuvah* campaign on a grand scale.

Alas, his efforts did not bear fruit. Although people sympathized with the idea, many were overburdened with their own communities' needs, or felt the idea wouldn't work, etc. As much as he tried to exhort the masses to join the campaign, they were not biting.

"Maybe I'm shooting too high," thought Yankel. He modified his goals somewhat, and decided to concentrate on his own city.

Yet here, too, the results were not much different. He made further attempts, each time focusing on a narrower target. Yet even his own *shul* wasn't interested. Not even his family.

"This is ridiculous," Yankel told himself. "The world wouldn't listen; my city wouldn't listen; my *shul* wouldn't take up the cause; I couldn't even get my family to go along. Well, I tried not to be selfish. I was concerned about everyone, and tried to get all of them involved; but there were no takers. I guess, at this point, I'm on my own. I have no choice but to devote all my attention to my own, personal growth."

Yankel started to learn *mussar* seriously. He worked on his *middos*, and increased his *hasmadah* in learning *Torah*.

Soon his family began to take notice. They discovered a more patient, gentle Yankel. His boys were sincerely impressed by his devotion to learning. In short order, they tried to emulate his *hasmadah* and pious ways.

The metamorphosis which his family underwent did not go undetected. In *shul*, people noticed the extraordinary *davening* and the exemplary *middos* of the entire family. They were duly impressed with the sincere devotion to *mitzvos* displayed by this family, and they yearned and strove to duplicate it.

Soon the *shul* itself underwent a transformation, and gained a reputation as one of the most respected places of *Torah* and *yiras Shamayim* in town. When other *shuls* got wind of this, they also felt it was time to raise their standards. As time progressed, the entire city transformed into a veritable *makom Torah*.

And so it went...

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