

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Yechezkel *ben Moshe a"h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

Overriding Considerations

PARSHAS PINCHAS 5776

The following episode is related regarding the Brisker Rav, illustrating his utter devotion to his father and mentor, R' Chaim Soloveitchik.

Is There a Doctor in the House?

During his own tenure as *rav* of the city of Brisk, R' Chaim Soloveitchik was attended to by a personal physician, a certain Dr. Shereshevsky. While far from the spiritual level of the great sage, the good doctor was nonetheless quite dedicated to the *rav* of Brisk. He assured R' Chaim that he would make himself available whenever he may be needed.

And so it happened one time that R' Chaim, suffering late one night from a certain ailment, was in urgent need of Dr. Shereshevsky's services. He dispatched his son R' Velvel (future Brisker Rav) to summon him to his home. Upon making some hasty inquiries, R' Velvel discovered that the doctor was to be found at that hour in a certain location into which the scholar had never before stepped foot. This was the local theater, hardly the place for a *yeshivah* man – especially one of such eminent stature. But R' Velvel's father was ill and had issued instructions. R' Velvel had a duty to which he must attend.

Upon entering the theater, R' Velvel beheld a most unusual sight: throngs of people, arranged as if on a slope, all sitting in rows in complete darkness. At the front there were other individuals moving around on a stage, bellowing out toward the rest of the assemblage. But there was little time to contemplate these strange and new discoveries. How was he to find the doctor in this dark and crowded hall?

There seemed to be only one way. Standing off to the side, R' Velvel shouted with all of his might: "Dr. Shereshevsky! Dr. Shereshevsky! Father needs you!" No answer yet; and again: "Dr. Shereshevsky! Dr. Shereshevsky! Father needs you!"

Suddenly, he felt a tug at his sleeve. Lo and behold – it was Dr. Shereshevsky! "Please," the doctor pleaded, "here I am, and I will come. Just please, no more calling out my name in here..." (*Barchi Nafshi, Parshas Pinchas*).

Thus we get a glimpse of the extent of the Brisker Rav's loyalty and subservience to his father. While not completely familiar with theater protocol, he certainly, under other circumstances, would have been hesitant to risk making a scene. But there was an urgent matter at hand, namely the welfare of his father and mentor, coupled with the commandments to honor one's parent and Torah sages. As such, he felt top priority must be granted to nothing other than the mission at hand; all other considerations were overridden. In other words, he understood this to be a situation to which applied the following dictum of Shlomoh Hamelech: 'אין חִקְמָה וְאֵין תְּבוּנָה וְאֵין עֲצָה לְנֶגֶד ד' – "There is no (place for) calculated, deliberate or strategic thinking when confronted with the Will of Hashem" (*Mishlei 21:30*). In certain circumstances, there is no place for measured consideration; it is simply a time to act.

All for the Boss

Actually, we find *tzaddikim* (righteous people) throughout the generations who have operated in the spirit of Shlomoh's principle, wherein they cast aside convention and calculation to simply do what is right and preserve Hashem's honor.

In this vein, the Gemara in Berachos (20a) illustrates the concept of “*Ein chochmah...*” with the example of R' Ada bar Ahavah. The issue under discussion there was the question of miracles; the Gemara wondered why it was that the earlier generations merited to have miracles performed on their behalf, while the later generations did not enjoy this privilege. It identifies the key factor as *mesirus nefesh*: the earlier generations were more willing to engage in **self-sacrifice** than the later ones. As evidence, the Gemara cites the ordeal of R' Ada bar Ahavah, who one day encountered a woman (he mistakenly believed to be Jewish) dressed in an immodest and ostentatious fashion unbecoming of a true daughter of Yisrael. He lodged his protest and even damaged the garment. Upon the discovery that the individual was in fact a gentile (and hence beyond the jurisdiction of Rabbinic supervision), R' Ada was fined and set back the hefty sum of 400 *zuz*. But his initial willingness to disregard his personal standing and even welfare is held up as a model of selflessness and passionate devotion worthy of miraculous reciprocation.

Another prominent individual Chazal identify as a proponent of Shlomoh's dictum is none other than Pinchas, namesake of and key figure in this week's *parshah*. The Gemara in Sanhedrin (82a) relates the *passuk* of “*Ein chochmah...*” to Pinchas's initiative in confronting Zimri, who engaged in public impropriety. This behavior left the latter subject to the regulation outlined in the Mishnah (*Sanhedrin 9:6*), which states:

הבויעל ארמית קנאין פוגעין בו.

“One who consorts with a gentile woman is stricken by the zealots.”

While the rest of the nation stood by paralyzed, Pinchas decided to act. To avenge the desecration of Heaven's honor, he took up his spear to fulfill the Mishnah's injunction. And it was no small matter to do so. After all, this was no insignificant personage against whom Pinchas took up arms – Zimri was the *nasi* (chief) of the tribe of Shimon. The Medrash states further that as a result of dispatching their *nasi*, the tribe of Shimon rose up against Pinchas and threatened his life; the latter was only saved through miraculous, Divine intervention.

Thus, it may very well be that Pinchas – one of the earliest figures to display this attribute – was the model for all others who succeeded him. He demonstrated that there are circumstances that simply call for action; when he deemed that the situation warranted it, he put aside all typical considerations – including his own prestige and even physical welfare – just to do what was right in the eyes of Hashem.