

HASTENING TO FULFILL MITZVOT

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, "Speak to Aaron and say to him, 'When you kindle the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light.' Aaron did so" (Bamidbar 8:2-3).

Here Rashi cites the Sifrei in stating that "Aaron did so" is mentioned in order to demonstrate "Aaron's virtue, insofar as he did not deviate [from G-d's command]." However the book *Otzrot HaChida* asks why he would have deviated from anything! Furthermore, why was Aaron praised for this? Did he ever deviate from a given command?

Our teacher Rabbi Shlomo Astruc writes that the reason for this praise is the following: Although a simple kohen could have arranged the lamps and lit the Menorah (as we read in Parsha Tetzaveh: "Aaron and his sons shall arrange it" [Shemot 27:21]) and although G-d said beha'alotcha ("when you cause to kindle") – not be'alotcha ("when you kindle"), Aaron committed himself to fulfilling this mitzvah himself. Furthermore, this verse does not give the order to kindle the lamps. It only serves to specify that at the time of the lighting, the seven lamps together must cast light towards the Menorah, meaning that the lamps were lit on their own. Now despite this, Aaron hastened to perform this mitzvah and personally light the lamps. Yet the Chida has a reservation: Even if this idea is well-understood, it does not explain how "Aaron did not deviate [from G-d's command]"!

In order to resolve the Chida's question, let us first examine another subject. There are two ways to act when an opportunity to perform a mitzvah presents itself. A person can hasten to do it himself, meaning that even if others want to perform it as well, he will gain the upper hand and merit to accomplish it. The other approach consists of not taking advantage of the mitzvah himself, but finding volunteers to perform it – and not because he doesn't love mitzvot, but because he wants to confer merit upon others.

The first approach is more precious in G-d's eyes. As the Mechilta states in Parsha Bo (see Rashi on Shemot 12:17), "If it [the opportunity to perform a mitzvah] comes into your hand, perform it immediately!" Indeed, we must fulfill it immediately and not forgo such an opportunity! We will then be worthy of praise before G-d, for we will have demonstrated just how important the performance of mitzvot is to us.

Let us return to the issue of kindling the lamps. At the beginning of Parsha Beha'alotcha, Rashi states: "Why is the portion dealing with the Menorah juxtaposed to the portion dealing with the leaders? For when Aaron saw the dedication [offerings] of the leaders, he felt distressed over not joining them in this dedication – neither he nor his tribe. G-d therefore said to him, 'By your life, yours is greater than theirs, for you will light and prepare the lamps.'"

In reality, why was Aaron so sad? The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 13) explains that the offerings brought by the leaders at that time contained many lofty concepts. Furthermore, this inauguration was a unique event. To find himself excluded from it had a profound effect on Aaron. Thus in order to calm and console Aaron, Hashem assured him that the lighting of the Menorah was a greater mitzvah than theirs, for he could elevate himself each day through this mitzvah. In fact the leaders brought their offering just once, whereas Aaron's actions would occur on a regular and perpetual basis.

Now although Aaron wasn't personally obligated to light the Menorah every day – for his sons (regular kohanim) were also authorized to take care of it – he still committed himself to this task in light of the principle: "If it [the opportunity to perform a mitzvah] comes into your hand, perform it immediately!" That is why Aaron was praised insofar as he "did not deviate." In fact he always hastened to fulfill a mitzvah himself, thereby meriting its performance.

We can derive a lesson for other mitzvot from this, such as the mitzvah of tzedakah. When the opportunity to give tzedakah presents itself, we can either send money by mail or through an envoy, or we can sidestep it by saying that other people are wealthier and more capable of performing this mitzvah, and that we want to leave them the merit (so to speak) of performing it. Yet from this parsha, we learn that we must fervently seize the opportunity to give tzedakah and realize that such an attitude makes us worthy of praise before the Creator.

Likewise, when someone sees a Torah book on the floor, he should hasten to bend down and pick it up, even if other people are present. Wanting to give this merit to others is unnecessary! Furthermore, those who see us doing this, acting with fervor for the sake of a mitzvah, will also derive more incentive to fulfill mitzvot themselves. This also procures merit for us before G-d.

This principle also applies to the fervor with which we go to synagogue: We must not tell ourselves, "There'll be a minyan there in any case, so why should I hurry to be among the first ten?" On the contrary, a person who hastens to synagogue, and on whose account a minyan is formed, demonstrates how precious this mitzvah is to him. He does not count on others to fulfill it, but makes certain that he is among the first ten.

In noting that the behavior of the tribal leaders displeased Hashem, we learn that a person who fulfills mitzvot without hesitation, but instead with fervor, is greatly cherished by G-d. In fact it is written, "Vehanesim [And the leaders] brought the shoham stones" (Shemot 35:27), and here the term



Publication of
HEVRAT PINTO

Under the Direction of
**Rabbi David Hanania
Pinto Shlita**

CHEVRAT PINTO

207 West 78th Street
New York - NY 10024

Tel: 1 212 721 0230

www.hevratpinto.org
hevratpinto@aol.com

Editor-in-Chief:
Hanania Soussan

vehanesi'im is lacking the letter yud. Rashi explains that for the inauguration of the Sanctuary, the leaders demonstrated a lack of fervor by declaring: "Let the community donate what they will donate, and we will complete what they are missing."

We can now understand why this approach, which consisted of delaying to bring their offerings to the Sanctuary, was displeasing to Hashem. Besides the fact that hastening to fulfill a mitzvah confers merit upon a person, these men were the leaders of Israel and should have served as an example for the people. They should have been the first to bring their offerings, thereby setting an example and arousing a desire among the people to willingly give. Yet regrettably, they did not act in this way, which was considered a failure on their part.

On the other hand, we find a completely different approach with Moshe, as it is written: "On the day that Moshe finished erecting the Sanctuary"

(Bamidbar 7:1). Our Sages ask, "Was it Moshe who built it? It was Betzalel and all the wise-hearted men who built it!" However they added, "Yet since Moshe completely devoted himself to fulfilling the mitzvah of the Sanctuary, in learning and teaching others about all its details, in overseeing the work, and by arousing the fervor of the Children of Israel, he is considered to have done all the work." We may expand upon this subject and learn how to build a yeshiva or synagogue: When we collect funds to fulfill this mitzvah, some hasten to give a significant contribution and others follow their example. However the first to give earns a double merit, as our Sages have taught: "One who makes others act is greater than one who acts." A person who leads others into making a donation has greater merit than the donor. Thus the first to make their contribution to a mitzvah have, as a result, incited others to emulate them. Hence they have the merit of their own actions as well as the merit of others. Happy are those who have consideration for mitzvot!

The Words of the Sages

Demonstrating Unselfishness and Being Rewarded for It

The incident involving Miriam the prophetess, which concludes this week's parsha, contains a wealth of instructions on the honor that we must have for others. Concerning this subject, let us recount an illuminating story as told by the maggid Rabbi Shlomo Lewinstein:

One of my acquaintances, a G-d-fearing man, told me that he started feeling ill about a month ago. He underwent some medical tests, and the results were extremely bad: He was suffering from a very serious and dangerous illness.

We won't dwell upon his tremendous pain, nor upon the suffering of his family, which only intensified upon noticing that the doctors themselves were among the most worried. As every Jew would have done in the same situation, this man poured out his heart in prayer, beseeching G-d to show him mercy and spare his life. He also went to ask for blessings from the great men of the generation.

Being that he was very close to Rav Chaim Kanievsky, the man went to see him and asked that he pray for him. Nevertheless, the man was aware that the prayer of a sick person himself is especially powerful. Hence he decided to go and recite the entire book of Tehillim by the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, as he used to do every time that he was facing a difficult situation in life.

All the same, before even undertaking this journey, he went to see Rav Chaim and asked for a blessing for his journey and for his healing. The Rav then said to him, "Do you remember when I came to see you eight years ago?" Now a visit from Rav Chaim is a particularly special event, so who could have forgotten it, even several years afterwards? The circumstances in which that visit took place are the following:

More than 20 years earlier, someone had seriously harmed the wife of the man who was now ill. Following that incident, the family of this woman had suffering a serious misfortune. A few years later, she married but was still childless. Having heard of this, Rav Chaim went to visit his friend and asked his wife to sign a declaration that she would sincerely forgive the man who had harmed her years earlier.

The memory of that terrible wound then arose in the woman, inundating her heart with feelings of frustration and anger. As a result, she couldn't bring herself to sign such a declaration! However the Rav insisted, saying to her: "I am still asking you to accept." The woman replied, "If the Rav wants me to sign, I will. But forgive, that I can't do!"

Rav Chaim was not content with this, and he said to her: "I want you to go beyond yourself. Sincerely forgive him and sign this paper." After several long minutes of thought and internal debate, she agreed to sign it and completely forgive him. The Rav then asked for a copy of this sheet and he kept the original.

Rav Chaim now said to my friend, "Take that sheet with you to Meron, and pray to be saved by the merit of this act – by the merit of your wife's forgiveness – from the evil decree that you may be subject to."

My friend was filled with emotion and told me the end of the story: "I just returned from my seeing my doctor, who gave me the results of additional tests that I underwent. He told me that the new results contradicted his initial diagnosis, and that I'm now in perfect health. Thank G-d, everything is alright!"

What follows is another story that demonstrates the power of unselfishness: A man by the name of Rabbi Moshe was the only son of a couple who had escaped the Holocaust and who wholeheartedly wanted to see their family line continue. However years passed, and to their great regret, after 16 long and gloomy years, Rabbi Moshe had not been blessed with the arrival of children.

One day Rabbi Moshe heard that in order to merit children, it was good to purchase the aliyah of maftir on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, a passage that deals with the deliverance of Hanna the prophetess. Thus on the following Rosh Hashanah, he hastened to purchase it. As the fourth aliyah approached, two brothers, synagogue regulars, approached him and explained their problem: The two had purchased aliyahs, but they could not follow one another up to the Torah. Hence they asked Rabbi Moshe to exchange his aliyah with theirs: One of the brothers would take the fourth aliyah, Rabbi Moshe the fifth, and the other brother would go up for maftir.

Without saying a word, Rabbi Moshe agreed to the exchange. The two brothers rejoiced in their success, but at the end of the reading of the Torah, they realized what they had just done. This man, who had hoped for children for 16 years, and had purchased this precious aliyah, had unselfishly given it to them for their simple benefit! With a broken heart, they came to beg his forgiveness. However Rabbi Moshe sincerely responded, "I have tried numerous segulot in my life. Yet until today, I had never tried the segula of unselfishness."

A year later, the two brothers wanted to surprise Rabbi Moshe with a gift, and therefore they purchased the aliyah of maftir for him. However Rabbi Moshe told them that it wasn't necessary, for on Pesach of that same year, his wife had given birth to twin boys! Two sons in perfect health – a gift for demonstrating unselfishness!

The Light of the Shechinah

It is written, “Speak to Aaron and say to him, ‘When you kindle the lamps’” (Bamidbar 8:2).

When Moshe completed the Sanctuary and erected it, a great light – the light of the Shechinah – immediately began to shine. Aaron instantly felt shame and said, “I cannot look at this light, so brightly that it shines. Yet I’ve been commanded to kindle the lamps?” The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: “When you kindle – to grant you merit.”

– Midrash HeChafetz

Like a Baby

It is written, “Aaron shall wave the Levites” (Bamidbar 8:11).

Rabbi Yehudah asked Rabbi Abba, “Why did the kohen wave the Levites?” He answered, “To what can this be compared? What is done to a baby that is crying and angry?”

Rabbi Yehudah said, “They rock him and shake him in order to quiet him.”

Rabbi Abba said, “Yehudah, Yehudah, this word comes to you, but you did not inquire into it? Will your ears not hear what your mouth speaks? This is the attribute of...gevura [strength].... Thus the kohen, who is the supernal chesed [mercy], waves this side of the Levites, which is the attribute of gevura... in order to quiet and pacify its anger and wrath, so that it is not awakened in the world.” – Zohar

True Chesed

It is written, “There were men who had been contaminated by a human corpse and could not make the pesach-offering on that day” (Bamidbar 9:6).

Who were these men? According to Rabbi Yossi the Galilean, they were the ones who bore the coffin of Joseph. Rabbi Akiva said, “They were Mishael and Elzaphan, who were occupied with [the remains of] Nadav and Avihu.”

Rabbi Yitzchak said, “If they were those who bore the coffin of Joseph, they had time to cleanse themselves [before Pesach], and if they were Mishael and Elzaphan, they could [also] have cleansed themselves [before Pesach]. However they were those who were occupied with a met mitzvah, the seventh day [of whose purification] coincided with the eve of Pesach, as it is said: ‘They could not keep Pesach on that day’ – on ‘that’ day they could not keep Pesach, but on the following day they could.”

– Sukkah 25ab

Jethro’s Reasoning

It is written, “[Jethro] said to [Moshe], ‘I shall not go [with you]. Only to my land and my family shall I go’” (Bamidbar 10:30).

Why did Jethro return to his land?

He reasoned as follows: “During all those years, people entrusted their money to me, for I was the only honest person in the city. Now if I leave them and go away, they will say: ‘Jethro fled and took all the money that we entrusted him with, so he can give it to his son-in-law.’ I will therefore cause Lashon Harah to be spoken against myself and Moshe, which is why I must return and give them back everything.”

Another explanation: Why did he return?

He reasoned as follows: “This year was a year of scarcity, and I borrowed money in order to give it to the poor. If I fail to return and repay my debts, I will profane Hashem’s Name. I must therefore return to repay

them.” How do we know that it was a year of scarcity? It is written, “The flax and the barley were struck” (Shemot 9:31) – although the wheat was not affected, its price increases when barley is lacking. – Sifrei Zutah

Favorable Winds

It is written, “When the dew descended upon the camp at night, the manna would descend upon it” (Bamidbar 11:9).

How did the manna descend?

The winds blew and swept up the ground, making it like tables of gold and precious stones. The dew then descended, as it is written: “When the dew descended upon the camp at night, the manna would descend upon it.” The Children of Israel went out and collected it until the fourth hour [of the day], before the sun could melt it away. – Midrash Tehillim

The Great Kohen

It is written, “The people did not journey until Miriam was brought in” (Bamidbar 12:15).

One is entitled to examine any lesion except his own. Rabbi Meir said: Not even the lesion of one’s relatives. In that case, who examined Miriam’s lesion? If you say that it was Moshe who examined it, a non-kohen may not examine lesions. If you should say that it was Aaron who examined it, a relative may not examine lesions.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: “I am a kohen. I quarantined her, and I shall declare her clean.” Hence it is written... “The people did not journey until Miriam was brought in.”

Since the people journeyed along with the Shechinah, it follows that the Shechinah waited for her. – Vayikra Rabba 15:8

In the Light of the Parsha

Becoming a Nazir Serves as an Atonement

Our Sages have said, “Why does the section of the Nazirite adjoin that of the sotah? To tell you that whoever witnesses a sotah in her disgrace should yazir [withhold himself] from wine” (Sotah 2a). Rashi explains that this is because wine leads to promiscuity. This is surprising, for is it only wine that leads to promiscuity? If we say that wine, since it intoxicates man, leads him to having loose morals, then what connection is there between letting one’s hair grow and the sight of the sotah in her disgrace?

It is a great principle that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not show a person something by accident. If someone has seen something that is not good, he should reflect upon his deeds and repent, knowing that what he has seen represents some trace of this sin.

Thus the Gemara states, “A person does not arouse suspicion unless he has done the thing [in question]. If he has not done it wholly, he has done it partly. If he has not done it partly, he has thought of doing it. If he has not thought of doing it, he has seen others doing it and enjoyed [the sight]” (Moed Katan 18b).

Hence it follows that when we see someone committing a sin, some aspect of that sin exists in us, and we must search our souls and repent. Hence the fact that Hashem showed someone a woman in her disgrace is not by chance. Since he saw her, he must tell himself that a small trace of the very same sin exists in him.

This means that in his heart, there exists a tendency to want the pleasures of this world. Even if such pleasures are permissible, the Sages teach us: “Sanctify yourself by what is permitted to you” (Yebamot 20a). He must therefore be holy for Hashem and separate himself from the pleasures of this world, something which embodies the concept of the Nazir, and which constitutes his atonement.

Prayer

The prayers of the great men of Israel have more than once supplied numerous stories of miracles connected to the desire of the tzaddikim to pray to their Creator. Such is the case for the story that you are about to read, a story about the Rebbe of Zvhil, Rabbi Shlomo Zatzal:

The Rebbe paid great attention to the smallest details of Halachah. Even when this resulted in serious difficulties, he never forsook praying at the exact moment for a given prayer. He would have literally done anything not to be late for Mincha. One day, as he was returning from Meron, he went to Jerusalem in a taxi driven by a non-Jew. Since he was afraid that he would reach Jerusalem after the time for Mincha had passed, he wanted to stop on route in order to pray.

“Please, stop for a moment,” he asked the driver. However the driver refused, saying that it was impossible to stop. The driver wanted to continue driving, but something went wrong with his breaks, and his taxi got stuck behind a tree! The driver wanted to get back on the road, but the car refused to move! He tried one thing after another, making every attempt to get the engine to start, but in vain. The car had simply broken down.

Since the car wasn’t going anywhere, the Rebbe calmly got out to pray Mincha while the driver tried to deal with the problem. Against his will, the driver was forced to wait for the Rebbe to pray. When he had finished praying, the driver managed to fix the problem and get his taxi back on the road. On another occasion, as the Rebbe was returning from Meron with a relative near midnight, he felt ill. He therefore asked the taxi driver not to take additional passengers. When they arrived in Jerusalem, the Rebbe’s companion prayed Arvit alone, for he knew that it was so late that there was certainly no way they would find a minyan. Yet the Rebbe, though in pain, spared no effort in trying to find one. Despite the late hour, he went down to the Mea Shearim “shtiblech” around midnight, and imagine his joy when he found a minyan! He was tremendously happy to pray with the community, forgetting his suffering and the time of night!

The Rebbe’s prayer was pure and lofty, and from the outside it was impossible to see his fervor and enthusiasm. Everything was concealed with a shroud of humility, to the point that people sometimes thought that he was overcome with drowsiness, whereas in fact he was seized by the most powerful zeal. Especially when it came to the Shema, it was clear that he was immersed in another world, high above, completely enwrapped in sacred thoughts.

One day, as it was time to recite the Shema at the Batei Hunarim synagogue, he was deeply immersed in thought, as was his custom. Concentrating with great fervor, he was completely unaware of what was going on around him. Someone who didn’t know the Rebbe saw him like this, noticing his closed eyes, and thought that he was a regular individual who had fallen asleep.

He called out to him, “Nu...it’s forbidden to sleep with tefillin!”

Such was the degree to which he was immersed in prayer, completely focused on the Shema, a degree of concentration that was normal for him. He prayed with holiness and purity, with unimaginable fervor.

Nevertheless, sometimes his internal zeal burst to the surface, at which point people could see the fire that burned within him, as well as the bond with which he served his Creator.

Completely Merciful

The gaon Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach Zatzal used to cite the words of the prayer, “Who among all the works of Your hands...can say to You, ‘What are you doing? What are You making?’ Our living and eternal Father in Heaven, deal graciously and kindly with us!” He would explain this to mean that we must certainly not insist or demand that Heaven must act in a certain way, for we are far from such a level. Rather, we must implore G-d to show us His graciousness.

Even if we experience much suffering, we must remind ourselves and believe that G-d is merciful, and that we do not understand His ways. Nevertheless, His ways are certainly ways of mercy. Hence in the prayers for the dead, we begin with the expression: “Merciful Father.” This is to recall and proclaim our faith that all His ways are truthful and just, and that He is merciful. However we ask G-d to demonstrate His kindnesses in a clear way, as the prayer states: “Who bestows chassidim tovim [bountiful kindnesses].” In other words, kindnesses that the entire world can see are kindnesses.

The book Halichot Shlomo also recounts that Rabbi Shlomo Zalman would direct teachers to instruct their students to not get used to thinking that this entire prayer is answered. Instead, we must simply pray for the things that we need, and the Holy One, blessed be He – Who knows how to direct the world, both generally and for every person in particular – will do what seems right to Him. As for ourselves, we must simply pray, beseech, and ask for mercy. However we must wait for the Holy One, blessed be He, to answer us immediately. We are like children before their father, each one asking for something else. A compassionate father weighs the pros and cons of each request, and decides who to answer and how. This is how we are before G-d.

The Rav once explained what the Sages meant when they said in the Gemara: “Maveh [which means ‘to graze,’ but also ‘to ask’] denotes man” (Bava Kama 3b). This is because it is human nature to constantly “ask” and beseech the Creator. It once happened that in his regular minyan, someone who raised his voice excessively served as the shaliach tzibur. He had the appearance of demanding what he was asking for in prayer.

The Rav did not take this well, and so he went to pray in another minyan.

The Faithful Ones - Accounts from the Tzaddikim of the Pinto Family

You’re Still Alive?

About 20 years ago, a Jew travelled to Morocco for the Hilloula of Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us. As he wept, he recounted his own terrifying story to all the participants:

He had recently undergone some medical tests, and they revealed that he had generalized cancer. The doctors gave him no more than six months to live, telling him that there was nothing more they could do. “There’s no cure for what you have. Take advantage of the six months you have left.” Those who participated in the Hilloula encouraged him not to lose hope, saying: “There’s a very great physician here, Rabbi Haim, may his merit protect us. Pray to Hashem that by the merit of this tzaddik, you will have a complete recovery.” In his despair, the man replied: “All the greatest doctors can’t do a thing, so what use do I have with a grave?” They asked him, “Then why did you come here?” He answered, quite simply: “I heard that there was a Hilloula here, and that there was a festive meal, and so I came.”

The participants told him, “Since you arrived at this sacred place, it’s a sign that from Heaven, a gate of healing has been opened to you.”

Guard Your Tongue

Absolutely Forbidden

It is absolutely forbidden to praise someone in public, for when many people gather together, in general there are some who hold different points of view or are jealous, and the fact that someone is being praised will lead others to disparage that person.

Even if we believe that our listeners will not disparage the person in question, for example because they do not know him, then even in public it is better not to say too much good about him. – Chafetz Chaim