

A Taste of Torah

Motivation, Motivation, Motivation

By Rabbi Mordechai E. Fleisher

When we read in the Torah about some of the sins the Jews committed in the desert, we tend to do so with eyes widened in wonderment and mouths agape. How could they commit such heinous crimes? How could they stoop to such a level?

This is our tendency. Truth be told, it's a big mistake. We're talking about a generation that reached unprecedented levels of spirituality and holiness. A generation that achieved levels of prophecy not reached by most of our prophets. A generation that received the Torah and heard Hashem speak at Mt. Sinai.

It is imperative to realize that it is we who lack the proper understanding of the actions of scriptural figures. The Torah holds them to a very high standard because they were on a very elevated level; thus, a seemingly slight misstep was, at their level, tantamount to a tremendous sin.

A classic example of this idea is the Sin of the Spies. The Jews send twelve of the greatest, most pious members of Bnei Yisroel to spy out Eretz Yisroel prior to the nation's entry into the land. The Spies return and repeat that the Jews will have difficulty conquering Eretz Yisroel. The people panic, and spend the night crying. Hashem decrees that this night, the Ninth of Av, will be a night of crying for all generations until the coming of Moshiach.

We are left in shock. How does a generation that saw open miracles from Hashem, day in and day out, begin to doubt His ability to drive out the nations

currently residing in Canaan?

The Sforno (1475-1550), a classic commentary on the Torah, explains that when the Jews realized the enormity of the miracles Hashem would have to perform for them, they felt that they weren't worthy of such miracles. They feared that because of the previous sins they had committed, Hashem would deliver them into the hands of the Canaanite nations. Their crying was, in their minds, crying of remorse and repentance for past sins.

Of course, this explanation raises a different problem: What indeed was their sin?

Rabi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler (1892-1953), a great Mussar personality, explains that deep down, in the deepest depths of their hearts, there was a slight imperfection in their faith in Hashem. Although they perceived that their crying was out of repentance, it stemmed, in reality, from that slight imperfection in faith. Very slight, yes. But, as mentioned previously, even a slight error can be grounds for serious consequences because Bnei Yisroel were at such a high level.

The lesson we can take from this, at our level, is that we must always check and double-check our motives. We all have varying motives that drive us, some of which are not of the highest caliber. An honest, objective assessment of our motives can often help prevent us from doing something which, at first glance, appears correct, but in reality is not the proper course of action.

Stories For The Soul

For Love of a Mitzva

It was shortly before Sukkos in the 1950s, and Yosef was eyeing a particular esrog for his father, a Holocaust survivor. Though he could not afford the \$10 price tag, he so badly wished to purchase it.

The day before Sukkos, a neighbor came to Yosef's father and asked him to make a basket holder for his lulav. Yosef had an idea - he asked his father to make more holders and he would sell them to pay for the esrog.

The next morning, however, only two people bought the holders. Just then, the esrog seller approached Yosef and asked if his lulav holders were for sale. He bought them, and gave Yosef more scraps to give to his father to make more holders.

Yosef sold holders the whole day, but still had only \$8.75. Just before Yom Tov, he went to the esrog seller, but stopped short when he saw someone else examining his esrog. He begged the seller to sell it to him instead. The other man then offered \$15 for the esrog. Though the seller could have used the extra money, he felt he couldn't let Yosef down.

That Sukkos, no one was prouder than Yosef when he walked to shul with that esrog in his hand.

"So that you may remember and perform all My commandments and be holy to your G-d" (Num 14:40). We are proud that G-d entrusted us with His precious mitzvos. We must view them not as a burden, but as a privilege.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.

Kollel Happenings

DERECH HASHEM SERIES MON. NIGHTS

Join Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher for "Derech Hashem: Who is G-d and Why Did He Create the World?", a series for women based on Derech Hashem by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato. The classes will be held on Mondays at 7:45 p.m., locations to vary. For info, call 303-257-1089 or email pit@denverkollel.org



FATHERS-AND-SONS PROGRAM SUN., JUNE 26 AT EDOS

The next Fathers-and-Sons learning program will be held on June 26 at EDOS. Breakfast begins at 9 a.m. with learning following. For information, contact Rabbi Yehuda Amsel at 303-820-2855 or email rya@denverkollel.org



TUESDAY NIGHT TORAH AT AISH KODESH IN BOULDER

Join the Kollel for a dynamic one-on-one and small groups Torah encounter. Maariv will be held at 8:15 followed by Torah study at 8:30. Program will be held at Aish Kodesh, 1805 Balsam Ave. For information, contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at 303-820-2855 or rmh@denverkollel.org or Charles Fried at 917-499-4307 or charlesfried@gmail.com.

Interpersonal Issues Returning Stolen Property Part VIII

If a person stole from his parents (when he was thirteen years old or older) and he now wishes to do teshuva, he must either repay his parents or inform them of what he stole and ask them explicitly to absolve him of payment.

He may not assume that his parents automatically pardon him, unless they explicitly say so.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi Going Through the Motions

Email@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

If a Jew observes Torah Law, yet does not believe that there is a G-d or that the Torah is true, do his mitzvos have any value? For example, one born into an observant home who stays observant, but in his heart doesn't accept the Torah as valid.

This is an extreme example, obviously, but your answer may help me understand what my own mitzvos accomplish if I perform them without 100% faith in their necessity. Basically, is "going through the motions" without the inherent belief worth anything? Thank you.

Dear Email@Withheld,

In principle, the fulfillment of a mitzvah requires the belief in G-d, and that He wants us to do the action. The word "mitzvah," commandment, implies a Commander. The real spiritual value of a mitzvah is when it is performed with this understanding. Still there are many reasons to "go through the motions" even though there may be less than 100% belief, and I will try to elaborate briefly as best as I can.

First of all, there are many, many levels of belief, and often even a very low level can produce a lot of benefit, and make mitzvah observance worth something.

Secondly, in terms of negative

commandments, the "Thou shalt nots," if he refrains even for the wrong reasons, still he is refraining and not bringing all kinds of negative consequences onto himself.

If there is a basic belief in G-d, just a lack of understanding of the necessity of the mitzvah, then performance with trust in G-d that it is the right thing is really performance on a high level. The very acceptance of mitzvot by the Jewish people at Sinai was with the condition "na'aseh v'nishma," "we will do and we will understand," meaning that we will do even before we understand.

True, a person should try to understand, and certainly an understanding of the background and fullness of the mitzvah will create a deepened satisfaction in mitzvah performance. This usually comes with increased Torah study. Lack of this understanding, however, does not take away from the fulfillment of the mitzvos.

A person in the state that you describe will either go one way or the other. Hopefully, the continued performance of the mitzvos will keep him in tune, like the parable of a watch which isn't keeping time: If the person keeps winding it then ultimately when he brings it to a watchmaker there will be something to fix. But if he just lets it sit, it'll get rusty beyond repair.

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