



THE NEW OLD PATH

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Consistent Passion

Pinchas courageously takes a stand against the rampant wave of idolatry and sexual immorality caused by Moabite and Midianite women enticing Jewish men. He is rewarded for his courage, and the Israelites are subsequently commanded to wage a war on the Midianites. Subsequent noteworthy events include Zelophehad's daughters receiving their rightful inheritance, and Yehoshua being appointed as Moshe's successor, the new leader of the Jewish nation. Yet following these remarkable events, we are almost let down with the description of the somewhat mundane sacrifices, in particular the *korban tamid* (continual daily offering), 'The one lamb you shall make in the morning and the second lamb shall you make in the afternoon' (Bamidbar 28:4), which has already been mentioned previously in *Parshat Tetzaveh* (Sh'mot 29:38-42). In light of the aforementioned dramatic events of *Parshat Pinchas*, why are we revisiting the very ordinary subject of the continual daily offering?

An intriguing midrash discusses the question of which of the Torah's verses is the most fundamental:

Ben Zoma says we find a more fundamental verse, being, 'Hear O Israel...' (D'varim 6:4). Ben Nannas says we find a more fundamental verse, being, 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Vayikra 19:18). Shimon ben Pazi says we find a more fundamental verse, being, 'The one lamb you shall make in the morning...' (Bamidbar 28:4). Rav Ploni stood on his feet and said, 'The *halacha* is like ben Pazi' (Rabbi Yaakov ibn Chaviv, Introduction to *Ein Yaakov*).

If you ask a Jewish child what the most important verse in the Torah is, he or she is likely to agree with ben Zoma and state: '*Shema Yisrael*' (Hear O Israel). We are commanded to recite twice daily this short verse that describes the absolute unity of God and represents His eternal relationship with the Jewish People. If not this verse, it would also be easy to agree with ben Nannas, who says, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Indeed, Rabbi Akiva calls this a 'great principle' (*Nedarim* 9:4), and when asked to recite the entire Torah on one foot, Hillel paraphrases this verse describing man's integral relationship with his fellow (*Shabbat* 31a). It is unlikely that anyone would suggest the opinion of Shimon ben Pazi, citing the verse from our parsha. Yet the halachic conclusion of this cryptic midrash concurs with ben Pazi's opinion. What is so special about this verse?

My *rosh yeshiva*, Rabbi Yehuda Amital z”l, explains that the non-spectacular nature of this verse is exactly what renders it significant. It does not describe any miraculous historical events, nor moments of spiritual ecstasy. But by continuing to bring the same offering, twice every single day, the Jew expresses commitment with conviction. Shimon ben Pazi is suggesting that dedication, consistency and continuity are the most fundamental elements in Torah life.

Merely two verses later, the Torah makes mention of Mount Sinai, saying, ‘It is the continual elevation offering that was done at Mount Sinai for a satisfying aroma, a fire offering to God’ (Bamidbar 28:6). What is the connection between the verse highlighted by Shimon ben Pazi and the story of Mount Sinai?

While the daily offering is indicative of the value of consistent routine, the inherent danger of consistency is the apathy that can lie beneath the surface of routine – the capacity of a person to become so used to a task that it becomes mundane and complacency sets in.

In contrast, Mount Sinai and the events of the Revelation represent the height of inspiration, excitement and spirituality. Mount Sinai, the epitome of passion, is juxtaposed with the daily offering – the epitome of routine. It is precisely this juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory religious experiences that highlights the balance we are required to strike. While in order to integrate Torah and Judaism within our daily lives, we must be persistent in our pursuit of consistency and routine, at the same time, in order to stave off the real

risks of complacency, we must seek the moments of passion and inspiration.

King David expresses this idea in an apparent paradox: ‘One thing I ask of God, that I seek: That I may *dwell* in the House of God all the days of my life, to see the pleasantness of God and to *visit* in His Sanctuary’ (Tehillim 27:4). The concepts of ‘the House of God’ and ‘His Sanctuary’ are synonymous yet dwelling and visiting are two entirely different experiences. So, what does King David’s request mean?

Later on in the book of Bamidbar, the Jewish People, who were redeemed from Egypt with ten wondrous plagues, were witness to the miraculous splitting of the sea, were fed and guided through a barren desert by God Himself and received the Torah at Mount Sinai, begin to complain. Despite constantly experiencing, or *dwelling* with, God’s divine intervention, they have come to take it for granted. This explains the double nature of King David’s request to *dwell* in the House of God while also *visiting* in His Sanctuary. King David is requesting that his experience of dwelling in the House of God be imbued with the sense of excitement and anticipation experienced when visiting somewhere for the first time. He is seeking to protect his daily routine from the risk of complacency by infusing it with passion and inspiration.

The Torah is encouraging us to seek a life of consistent dedication and routine, balanced with a sense of passion and allowing space for the moments of greater excitement and inspiration. ■

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