

Middos – The Roots of Our Actions

פרשת בלק

In this week's Parsha, Parshas Balak (25:1-7), key members of the Bnei Yisrael are first enticed by the daughters of Moav, and subsequently led to worship Baal Paor. As a result of this terrible sin, Moshe is told by Hashem to publicly kill those involved in the sin of worshipping Baal Paor. In addition, a plague struck all of those involved in the sin of Zenus, killing 24,000 Jews. Zimri, the leader of Shevet Shimon, was unaffected by the deaths of his brothers who were involved in this sin. He continued in his evil ways and publicly brought Kazbi bas Tzur, a Midianite women, into his tent.

The Ralbag comments on this episode (Benefit 14), “The Torah is informing us of the evil nature of Zimri. Despite the fact that Zimri witnessed the murders of all those who connected to Baal Paor, and the resultant plague that struck the Bnei Yisrael, he did not hold back from this sin. He went so far as to publicly bring the Midianite women into the camp of the Jews, and into his own tent to connect to her. Perhaps he could not hold back from this sin because he was overpowered by his passions, or his intent was to rebel against Hashem.”

“Witnessing a powerful event that is relevant to you, and closing your eyes to it, represents an internal deficiency in Middos.”

Through a careful reading of the Ralbag, it appears that the factor indicating that Zimri had an evil nature, is not because he was overwhelmed by his passions or acted out of rebellion. Rather it was due to him pursuing this sin even after witnessing its devastating consequences. This represented a deficiency in his middos, the true cause of his sin. In other words, the Ralbag implies that if Zimri would have committed this sin due to his passions or rebelliousness without witnessing the deaths of those who committed this sin, it would not show his evil nature. We see from here that mere actions driven by desire and passion, or even behaving rebelliously, do not necessarily indicate a Middos issue. However, witnessing a powerful event that is relevant to you, and closing your eyes to it, represents

an internal deficiency in Middos. Additionally, it is clear from the Ralbag that had Zimri been softened by what he had witnessed, he would have been able to control his passions or drive for rebellion, and refrain from sinning. So in truth Zimri’s sin was rooted in Middos versus desire or passion.

We find a similar idea of how our actions are rooted in Middos, expressed by the Alter of Slabodka in his sefer, Ohr Hatzofon. The Alter identifies the sin of Adam Harishon as a lack of Hakaras Hatov. Adam Harishon defended himself for sinning by saying, “The woman that you gave me gave me from the tree to eat.” In other words, Adam was saying that since Chava had extra wisdom he listened to her. Although his defense was valid and accepted, he expressed it in a way that showed a lack of appreciation for the good that Hashem gave him. The Yalkut Shimoni says that everywhere Adam walked, the grass said, “Don’t bring upon me the foot of arrogance.” It seems from the Yalkut, that Adam Harishon’s sin of denying the good of Hashem was rooted in the Middah of arrogance.

We can learn from here how critical it is to work on our Middos. Often we tend to change our actions, for external change is much easier than internal change. However, from the above we see how integral it is that we invest significant time and effort into refining our Middos, as they are the roots from which our actions sprout forth.

BASED ON THE WEEKLY SHMUSS GIVEN BY HARAV SHAYA COHEN, ROSH HAYESHIVA ZICHRON ARYEH

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח
לעילוי נשמת הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר
לעילוי נשמת רפאל חיים דוב בן ריסא שושנה
לרפואה שלמה יהושע דוד בן אלטא יענטא