

Pursuit of Purpose

INSPIRING A LIFE OF MEANING AND CONNECTION

The True Measure of Our Actions

Based on the weekly Shmuess given by HaRav Shaya Cohen, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנח | הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר | רפאל חיים דוב בן בן-ציון שלום | ר' ברוך בן ר' יהודה | שרה בת ר' יחזקאל | ראובן יוסף בן יהושע | דב בעריש בן פסח צבי
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In this week's Parsha, the Pasuk (24:17-18) states, "And a man who kills a person receives the death penalty, And one who kills an animal should pay..". The Seforno comments on this Pasuk, "However, an evil action, when it is done in different scenarios, even though in essence it is one action, the punishment changes based on the different outcomes. In one scenario, the sin will get a physical punishment or a punishment of death, and in another scenario it will receive a monetary punishment. There are three proofs to this; One is by a murderer. If a person kills a person he receives the death penalty, however if he kills his friend's animal, he has to pay money..".

The Seforno emphasizes that even though murdering an animal and a human are both murder and therefore should face the same punishment, as he says "even though they are in essence one action," they are treated differently based on the outcomes. The perspective the Seforno is addressing and assuming is perplexing, don't we already know that the severity of our actions are based on the results? This rationale would seem to be very logical, the severity of the crime is measured by the outcome. Why would he assume that murdering a human and animal should face the same treatment that makes it necessary to bring a proof against this perspective?

We see from this Seforno that our perspective on our actions

are incorrect. The starting point is not that the results of our actions dictate the severity of our actions, but rather it is the action itself that dictates its severity. This would mean that whether you kill a person or animal, both actions are murder and it is one and the same. If a person hits his father or mother or hits his friend, it is one action of hitting, and the actions should be treated the same. Therefore, the Seforno addresses this perspective and says that even though it is one action, the punishment is based on the results despite the fact that the action is the same.

A tremendous insight can be gleaned from this Seforno; often we minimize the severity of our actions based on the outcome. However, we see from here that the Torah views our actions through a different lens, and separates it from the result. Therefore, whether you murder an animal or person it is viewed as the same act. This insight can help us increase our Zehirus to Mitzvos by allowing us to view the severity of our actions independent of their results, and realize that the actions themselves can have a similar negative impact on our Middos, even though they receive different punishments. This idea also applies to our Mitzvos and good deeds. Often we measure the value of our Mitzvos based on the result. We see from here that regardless of the extremely different results that may come about, the action itself is identified as one and the same.