

Pursuit of Purpose

INSPIRING A LIFE OF MEANING AND CONNECTION

Reality Check On Our Middos

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
לרפואה שלמה יוסף בן מלכה מטל | יעקב אליעזר בן חנה נשא

In this week's Parsha, Hashem says to Moshe (31:2), "Take revenge for Bnei Yisrael from the Midyanim". The Medrash says the following, "Rebbi Abin says this can be compared to a Rabbi who commands his student and says, 'Don't pervert justice', and then the Rabbi goes and perverts justice. Or the Rabbi says, 'Don't show favoritism', and then he shows favoritism...The Rabbi says to him, 'Don't lend with interest', and then the Rabbi goes and lends with interest. The student says to him, 'Rebbi! You said to me don't lend with interest, and then you go and lend with interest. Is it permitted for you and forbidden for me? The Rabbi responds, 'I said don't lend with interest to a Jew, however, you can lend with interest to a non-jew, as the Pasuk says, "To a non-jew lend with interest and to your brother don't.' This applies to our scenario in the following way; The Bnei Yisrael said to Hashem, "Master of the universe! It says in Your Torah, 'Don't take revenge or bear a grudge', and You are taking revenge and bearing a grudge..." Hashem responds to Klal Yisrael, "I wrote in the Torah don't take revenge or bear a grudge to the people of your nation, however you can take revenge or bear a grudge to the nations of the world. Therefore, I commanded you to take revenge."

Upon initial analysis, the back and forth between Klal Yisrael and Hashem needs further clarification. We can safely assume that Klal Yisrael was well aware of the entire Pasuk, and they knew that the Mitzvah only applies to Klal Yisrael and not to the other nations.

Yet, they still had the question, because they thought taking revenge builds bad Middos. Granted, Hashem only commanded us not to take revenge on our brothers, however they thought that this idea by way of extension also applied to non-jews. Therefore, they asked Hashem, 'How can You ask to take revenge on Midyan, this will build bad Middos in us.' Based on this understanding, what is Hashem's response? He does not seem to be sharing anything with them that they don't know?

It must be that this itself is what Hashem is teaching Klal Yisrael. Klal Yisrael interpreted Hashem's commandment regarding not taking revenge as telling them that revenge itself causes a deficiency in Middos. Therefore, they felt that they would develop this bad Middah even if they took revenge from non-jews. Hashem tells them 'You made a mistake. The root of the bad Middah is not based on revenge, rather, it is based on the commandment of Hashem.' The impact is controlled by what Hashem said. Since Hashem said that they should take revenge on Midyan, it is not possible for it to have a negative impact on their Middos.

Often we tend to think that the reality of what influences us is psychology and science. However, we see from here that the ultimate Hashpaah comes from the Koach Hatorah. If Hashem says to do it or not do it, that is what creates the positive or negative result in our Middos.