

# Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Emor

“NOW, THE SON OF AN ISRAELITE WOMAN AND HE WAS THE SON OF AN EGYPTIAN MAN WENT OUT ...[AND] PRONOUNCED THE [DIVINE] NAME AND CURSED...” (VAYIKRA 24 10-11)

**T**HE MAN THAT CURSED Hashem was the son of a Jewish woman – Shlomis bas Divri – and an Egyptian father. Our sages explain that this man’s father was the Egyptian whom Moshe had killed (and hid his body in the sand) when Moshe saw him beating a Jew. The Egyptian was tormenting and beating Shlomis’ husband because her husband had found out that the Egyptian had been intimate with Shlomis (he had tricked her into thinking he was her husband). Moshe interceded and killed the Egyptian. The man now in the dock for cursing Hashem was the product of this illicit relationship.

**Rabbeinu Bechaye questions why this incident is mentioned at all**

Rabbeinu Bechaye questions why this incident is mentioned at all. Recording this event in the Torah for all generations to read, telling the world that Hashem was cursed, besmirches Hashem’s honor. Instead, suggests Rabbeinu Bechaye, the Torah should have merely taught us that it is forbidden to curse Hashem, and not have told us that such an unpleasant incident actually took place. Rabbeinu Bechaye answers that the Torah needs to teach us that a Jew of pure lineage and background would never have committed such a heinous act. Only a Jew with severely tainted lineage, such as this product of an illicit relationship between a licentious Egyptian man and an immodest Jewish woman, could ever come to actually cursing the name of Hashem.

**Was it worthwhile to “disgrace” the honor of Hashem?**

According to Rabeinu Bechaye’s explanation, the Torah felt it necessary to teach us a lesson in the holiness of every Jew – under normal circumstances he would never lower himself to curse Hashem. Nevertheless, this lesson comes at the cost of a great degradation of Hashem’s name by publicizing this story of *chilul Hashem* to everyone forever. Was it worthwhile to “disgrace” the honor of Hashem just to give us a greater depth of appreciation for the greatness of the Jewish soul?

**Every human being has to understand that he is created in Hashem’s image**

Perhaps the most important ingredient in the Torah’s recipe for self-perfection and personal growth is the correct understanding of our own worth, our greatness and our holiness. One who lacks the proper perspective and thinks of himself as just a more “developed” member of the animal kingdom, or even as just another member of the human race, will expect very little of himself and will act in unrefined or even animalistic fashion. Why should he restrain his passions and desires if he’s just another link in the food chain? Every human being has to understand that he is created in Hashem’s image and is the crowning glory of all creation, its purpose and goal. Every Jew has to realize that he is a prince, a member of Hashem’s chosen people, His royal legion, who must provide a shining example of sterling character and holiness in all his actions.

Every extra level of appreciation of our inherent greatness opens up new vistas of growth for us. This recognition of self-worth is so important that Hashem even sacrificed a bit of His honor to teach it to us. May we study and inculcate this appreciation of who we really are, and elevate our behavior accordingly. May we fully grasp our true potential, so that can we live up to the lofty standards of holiness and purity that Hashem has created us to achieve.