

Mussar HaTorah

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

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Purim

“THE JEWS ACCEPTED AND TOOK UPON THEMSELVES ... THAT THEY WOULD KEEP THESE TWO DAYS...” (ESTHER 9:27)

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THE TALMUD YERUSHALMI (Megilla 1:5) tells us that Mordechai and Esther addressed the sages of the generation and asked them to institute the days of Purim as an annual holiday for the Jewish people. At first, these great rabbis refused Mordechai and Esther's request. The sages were concerned that celebrating the downfall of Haman would raise the ire of the nations of the world. The Yerushalmi tells us that Mordechai and Esther responded that the episode was already well recorded in the secular history books. The rabbis then countered that it is impossible to add to the Torah. The Yerushalmi continues to tell us that there were eighty-five sages – and among them over thirty prophets – and that they conferred and debated to try to find a way to institute this new holiday until Hashem made it clear to them that it was indeed appropriate to establish the *yom tov* of Purim.

These sages were Torah scholars, even prophets, of the highest caliber. Their utmost concern was to decide the correct *halacha* and illuminate the proper path that Hashem and the Torah demand we follow. Was it proper to try so hard to find a way to institute this new festival? Shouldn't they have decided the *halacha* without any bias or desired outcome? Shouldn't the act of deciding a *halacha* be a straightforward, totally logical and emotion-free exercise?

In truth, weighing emotional factors is a crucial component to deriving the correct *psak halacha*. When a rabbi sees and feels the pain of a patient requiring an urgent transplant, that appropriate emotional dynamic will motivate him to delve deeper into the Torah's depths to find the truth and the correct *halacha*. Without this extra kosher motivation, important points may be overlooked or not given the correct weight. The pressure of knowing that there is significance to the outcome of this *halacha* keeps the *posek's* bearing straight and true. Knowing that there was a great need to establish the new holiday of Purim gave the sages extra urgency to decide the correct *halacha* – that it was appropriate to add a new holiday to the calendar.

Reb Chaim Volozhin, close *talmid* of the Vilna Gaon, writes in his responsa Chut Hameshulash (chap 8) defending his lenient ruling in the matter of an *aguna* to another rabbi who was stringent: “I read your words carefully and I see that most of our thoughts concur, but that you lean towards a stringent ruling, because the matter is not your responsibility. And I too was like you – I did not turn to the lenient aspects that are derived from a deeper understanding, before the yoke of *halachic* ruling was placed upon me. But now ... [I] saw myself obligated to strengthen myself with all my might to diligently work to help *agunos*, and may Hashem save me from errors.” Here too, we see that the great Reb Chaim Volozhin reached greater depths of understanding because he felt obligated to help his fellow Jews and alleviate their suffering. This motivation was not a bias which tainted his vision; to the contrary, it propelled him to toil more and reach greater depths of clarity, until he arrived at the truth.

May we feel that urgency and motivation to achieve greater clarity in Torah study and in making day-to-day decisions, to arrive at the full truth and make the proper determination, and thereby implement the will of Hashem in all our endeavors.