

Middah Reflection #3

Savlanut vs. Zrizut, Patience vs. Alacrity

By Shmuly Yanklowitz



Activism requires a very calculated and sensitive balance between patience and alacrity. On the one hand, one must have the patience to teach and engage the apathetic and the uninformed. On the other hand, one must also have the alacrity to respond to crises and injustices at the most crucial time. Oftentimes, the event that necessitates immediate action precedes the completion of the essential education and mobilization of the public. This is one of the reasons why uninformed segments of the public at times view the activist as a radical. One must have the courage to act in the name of *shalom* and *zedek* while maintaining patience and respect for more passive critics from one's own constituency.

Rabbi Preida (*Eruvin 54b*) used to teach the lesson 400 times in one day to a student who was slow to learn in order that he would properly learn it. This *savlanut* (patience) is a necessity for one who believes deeply enough in his or her convictions and also cares enough about his or her students and constituents joining to pursue justice for social change.

Pinchas (*Bamidbar 25:8*) and Moshe Rebbeinu (*Shemot 2:12*) serve as our quintessential Jewish models of *kina* (zealotry) and *zrizut* (alacrity). Moshe's core identity and community were transformed by his courageous decision to protect the abused. In addition, the way that Avraham Avinu greeted his guests (*Bereshit 18:2*) teaches us that one must develop the emotional intelligence to be in touch with another's needs to the point that one can respond with care to situations that demand immediate and urgent responses.

Leo Tolstoy, the great Russian writer, famously noted that "The two most powerful warriors are patience and time." There is a time for *savlanut* and a time for *zrizut*. To balance these traits requires self-awareness, courage, partnership, and sensitivity. With experience and partnership, may we develop this necessary balance to lead and create social change.