

“Harass the Midyanim and smite them.” (25:17)

Hashem commanded Moshe Rabbeinu to do battle with Midyan because of that nation’s malicious attempt to destroy Klal Yisrael’s spiritual standing. Their attempt to corrupt the Jewish People warranted their destruction. This punishment is different than that which was meted out against the Egyptians. The Torah in Sefer Devarim 23:8 insists that the Egyptians not be rejected. Is this equitable? One would think that the nation that tried so hard to destroy us physically would deserve a more severe punishment than the Midyanim, who “merely” attempted to corrupt us. Chazal have a different perspective than we have. They view a spiritual threat as having greater significance, and potentially being more harmful, than the physical threat of the Egyptians. True, the Egyptians ruthlessly enslaved our People and cruelly killed our newborn infants. Yet, they are not to be totally rejected, because a physical threat – as painful as it may be – will not destroy our People. We have survived physical danger. However, a threat to our moral/spiritual future threatens the very essence of Klal Yisrael. We are a nation whose uniqueness is our moral fiber, our spiritual essence. To corrupt these virtues is to destroy Hashem’s nation.

The Torah’s perspective is different than that to which we have become accustomed to in contemporary society. Some of us think that while spirituality is definitely a primary component of life, along with other major ingredients, it does not yet comprise the major component in life. Our Torah – and, by extension, our entire religion – teaches us that spirituality comprises life. Indeed, it was necessary for the Torah to emphasize that one should transgress a mitzvah if one’s life is in danger. Otherwise, one might have conjectured that martyrdom is required whenever there is a danger to one’s spiritual dimension. This is true in the case of the three cardinal sins: idolatry, murder and adultery. These sins totally ravage one’s spirit. In these cases life is not worth living, since the potential for spirituality has been so severely compromised.

We have to ask ourselves if we can integrate this crucial idea into our lives. We take every precaution to protect and enhance our physical welfare. Do we do the same for our spiritual well-being? We set up safeguards to eliminate any serious threat to our health. Are we just as careful in setting up a similar bulwark to avoid incursions that diminish our spirituality?

We are bombarded daily by the perverse media. The mass media of today reflects the moral degradation of contemporary society. They communicate both graphically and verbally the ills that plague society – of course, presenting it all in a matter-of-fact manner, as if this is the standard of the way people live. While this might be the norm for the rest of the world, for us it is utter revulsion and an insult to us as human beings, particularly as Hashem’s Nation. Do we protect our children and ourselves from the onslaught of today’s media? Do we take as many precautions to protect our children from exposure to this mortal threat to our spirituality as we would if it endangered their physical well-being?

Regrettably, the contemporary parent, the observant included, tends to rationalize permitting his children’s exposure to objectionable material. He wants his child to get a feel for the “real world.”

They should not be sheltered or raised in a vacuum. All of these statements are lame excuses for ineffective parenting. The parent would not expose his child to a communicable disease, or radiation, or some of the physical ills of today's counterculture. Why is their child's spiritual safety any less important? The answer is that the parent unfortunately places greater value on the child's physical well-being than on their spiritual health. It is, therefore, no wonder that these children grow up into physically healthy, spiritually deficient, adults.