

“Take vengeance for Bnei Yisrael against the Midyanim. Afterward you will be gathered unto your people.” Moshe spoke to the people. (31:2,3)

Remarkable! The *Midyanim* were to receive their due punishment in response to their involvement in the Jews' sins of immorality and idolatry. This punishment resulted in the deaths of 24,000 Jewish souls. Hashem told Moshe that this “unfinished business” should be addressed now, since his death was tied to it. In other words, Moshe was going to leave this world as soon as he carried out this last retribution. Our quintessential leader, Moshe *Rabbeinu*, could easily have taken his time in executing Hashem's command. He did not. Indeed, he did it immediately, so great and intense was his love for Hashem and his desire to execute the will of G-d. The nation was not happy about this; the people wanted him to tarry as long as possible. They could not bear the thought of losing their beloved leader. Moshe, however, was not wasting time. Thirty-six thousand men were selected in this draft, each group of twelve thousand having their own individual function. Twelve thousand actually fought the good fight; twelve thousand took care of the weapons; and twelve thousand addressed the spiritual support necessary to win the battle – they prayed.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, derives three powerful lessons from the command to exact retribution against the *Midyanim* and the manner in which Moshe responded to it. As mentioned earlier, Moshe had no reason to immediately rush to carry out this command. The longer he waited – the longer he lived. Moshe, however, moved quickly. Why? *Rav Yaakov* relates the following incident:

An elderly woman knocked on the door of the home of *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, with a strange request. “Fifty years ago,” she began her tale, “when the saintly *Shaagas Aryeh* was traveling incognito from town to town as part of his self-imposed exile, he lived in my town for two months. The *Shaagas Aryeh* was careful not to eat *chadash*, new flour. (Scripturally, a new crop of any of the five types of grain is forbidden for consumption until the annual *Omer* was brought on the sixteenth day of *Nissan*.) I was a widow at the time with very little for myself; yet, I offered to bake three small *challos* for him every week. In this manner, his *Shabbos* would be taken care of with *yoshon*, old, flour. When the *Shaagas Aryeh* prepared to leave the town, he blessed me. He said that I would live long enough to build three *shuls*: two in the diaspora and one in *Eretz Yisrael*.

“Hashem blessed me, and I became very wealthy. I built two beautiful *shuls*, one in Vilna and one in another city. Now the time has come to carry out the last part of the *Shaagas Aryeh's* blessing: to build a *shul* in *Yerushalayim*. The problem is that I know no one in the Holy Land. Does the *Rosh Yeshivah* have any contacts in *Yerushalayim* who can help me with this endeavor? I will give this person the money necessary to build the *shul*, and he will carry out the blessing to fruition.”

Rav Chaim was astounded by the woman's remarks: “Go home, and do not worry. If the *Shaagas Aryeh* gave you his blessing that you will not leave this world until you have built these three *shuls*, you can be certain that it will occur. Why ‘rush’ things? When the opportunity to

build will avail itself, you will build. Until then – live! After all, you have the *Shaagas Aryeh's* assurance.”

Rav Galinsky asked, “This woman had the *Shaagas Aryeh's* guarantee. *Rav Chaim* assured the woman that this was considered money in the bank. *Moshe Rabbeinu* had Hashem's assurance that he would not die until after Midyan received its due punishment. So why did he rush into battle? He could have lived a calm and peaceful life for many years – no different than the advice given to this woman by *Rav Chaim Volozhiner*.

“Nonetheless, *Moshe* acted. Why? Our leader decided that his life had no value in comparison with the *mitzvah* of destroying the nation that had been responsible for the Jewish People's fall into moral and spiritual degradation. How could he live knowing that the perpetrators of this unpardonable crime against the Jews had not been obliterated from the world? That same day, *Moshe* announced the draft. He was not wasting time. Certainly, *Moshe* understood the significance of life, and he valued every moment. Furthermore, as long as he lived, the nation would benefit greatly from his teachings and wisdom. This alone was reason for him to stall. Imagine! Extending the life of *Moshe Rabbeinu!*

“The lesson is: Life is great, but the damage caused by a sin is so serious that it must be immediately expunged. The taint remains as long as it is not extirpated from our midst. As long as Midyan survived, the debasement they caused glared at us with overpowering force.

“*Moshe* taught us another lesson,” says *Rav Galinsky*. “Many members of the secular forces in *Eretz Yisrael* decry the fact that the *chareidi yeshivah* students refuse to serve in the Army. They claim that we assume no responsibility for the Holy Land. This is not true. When *Moshe* ran his first draft, he selected 36,000 soldiers, each group of 12,000 had a distinct function. While 12,000 actually went into battle, 12,000 attended to the weapons, and the remaining 12,000 prayed. *Moshe* understood that prayer is an essential component of war. It provides the quotient for success, for without prayer, the bullets and the rockets are of no avail. They will not hit their targets.”

Last, *Moshe* taught the overriding significance of *hakoras ha'tov*, appreciation and gratitude. *Moshe* received the command from Hashem, yet, immediately following the draft of 36,000 men, *Moshe* relinquished the actual leadership and guidance of the war effort to the able hands of *Pinchas*. While *Pinchas* was capable of leadership, and he was involved from the beginning in waging war against Midyan's spiritual insurgency against the Jewish People, he still was not *Moshe*. However, our leader made a judgment call based upon the years he had spent in Midyan. How could he turn his back on the gratitude he owed his host country? *Hakaras ha'tov* takes precedence even over a war of retribution against the evil Midyan.