

This distressed Moshe greatly. (16:15)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* had just experienced the nadir of *chutzpah*: Korach and his rebels had openly defied his authority. When *Klal Yisrael's* leader, the individual who had led the nation out of bondage, asked them to appear before him with their grievances, they flatly refused. However, that was not all. They read off a list of concocted complaints which were blatantly false. Talk about *chutzpah*! They referred to Egypt, the country that had enslaved them for over two centuries as, "the land of milk and honey." Egypt – not *Eretz Yisrael*! They laced into Moshe for the sin of the *meraglim*, spies, placing the onus of guilt on him: Moshe was demanding; he was a demagogue who lorded over the nation. Sounds ludicrous? If we had not read it in the Torah, it would be absolutely inexplicable.

Moshe's reaction was unusual. While he certainly was deeply upset and hurt, one could never tell this from his reply to them. *Rashi* informs us that Moshe was greatly pained. He was saddened by their actions, but it does not seem that he was very angry. Why? Would it have been wrong for Moshe to become infuriated, incensed – at least angry – at the mutineers? True, Moshe exemplified humility, but does this character trait demand that one allow ruffians to walk all over him? What about *kavod ha'Torah*, the honor of Torah? Moshe represented the supreme spiritual leadership of the Jewish nation. He had achieved what no one before him – or after him – has achieved. These people had undermined the integrity of his leadership and impugned Hashem's Divine authority. Yet, Moshe's reaction is only pain. Why?

In *Forever His Students*, by Rabbi Boruch Leff, an anthology of discourses based upon the lectures of *Horav Yaakov Weinberg, zl*, the *Rosh Yeshivah* distinguishes between doing what one enjoys versus acting out of necessity. There are those who not only hate, but actually take pleasure in acting out their venomous feelings towards others. Some miscreants actually enjoy taking a life. Sometimes, however, punishment is necessary.

The question that we must clarify is: When we see evil perpetrated by individuals who are no doubt criminals, persecutors, terrorists, how do we react? Do we despise the perpetrator, or is it the evil which we seek to expunge? Do we hate the message or the messenger? Are we able to discern between the two? The difference will be in our initial response. If we revile the person, then our response will be filled with personal animus bent on revenge. We will not be happy until we have literally rubbed his face in the dirt. In such a situation, everyone suffers. The perpetrator hardly acknowledges his evil, since he cannot differentiate between himself and his evil. The avenger becomes a hateful person who is truly not satisfied, because revenge never really satisfies. Indeed, it ultimately destroys both parties. There is an old proverb: "He who seeks revenge should prepare two graves." How true this is.

However, if one only hates the action, but not the evildoer, he will act with a strong desire to eradicate the evil. He will not have a personal hatred for the perpetrator, since he is above that. Most perpetrators of evil have their own issues which were responsible for catalyzing them to lead

a life of crime preying on others. Many of them are themselves victims.

We must bear in mind that there is not necessarily a great deal of difference in the manner that we fight our battles. Regardless of who really is the enemy, the evil must be expunged – even at the expense of human life. The battle is similar; the intent, however, is vastly different.

The Jewish People are by nature an ethical, humane and loving nation. Our tradition expounds a commitment to the promulgation of ethical values and standards. Religion is not merely a part of our lives – it is our lifeblood! We have survived centuries of hatred and persecution, maintaining our national character, because we are guided by our Torah. Indeed, as a noted secular author observes, “For two thousand millennia Jews turned their victimization by anti-Semites into a uniquely gentle and ethical self-imagery.” The author bemoans the fact that, “in this century, the Nazi attempt to exterminate Europe’s Jews and the creation of a new, secular Jewish state have created a new Jewish type.” He refers to the “tough Jew,” so foreign to our heritage of old, “who is distinctive, precisely because of the history of Jewish weakness and the Jewish claim to the moral high ground of gentleness.”

Moshe *Rabbeinu* was pained and distressed at the need to punish the perpetrators. He was angry at what they were doing, but he would not permit the anger that he harbored toward the evil to consume him, redirecting it toward the evil-doers. Personal feelings and fury may not dominate our ability to think cogently. Our goal should be to punish evil – not to destroy the evil-doers. Otherwise, we risk losing control of ourselves and acting very much like the animals who throughout the millennia have been our persecutors.

Putting an end to evil often entails meting out severe punishment against the evil-doers, but it does not mean that we have to enjoy it. On the contrary, it should cause us grief that we must act without compassion. We should first and foremost pray that the sinners repent and that an end to sin will materialize.

Let us return to the Korach rebellion and the manner in which our quintessential leader dealt with it. Moshe had every reason to be infuriated with Korach, but he was not. He was pained. His feelings were not personal. He was saddened that such distinguished individuals allowed themselves to destroy their lives. Moshe was disturbed by the forces of evil that had invaded his camp.

We have to question our own motives when we are called upon to respond to evil. Is it the evil that disturbs us, or is it the evil-doer whom we despise? Often, it is the *yetzer hara*, evil inclination, burning within us, provoking us to descend to **their** nadir of depravity. We must learn to ignore the messenger, but to expunge the influence of the message. Indeed, by focusing our hatred on the people, we lose sight of the evil.