

Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, "Take vengeance for the Bnei Yisrael against the Midyanim; afterward you will be gathered unto your people. (31:1,2)

Moshe is instructed to seek vengeance for the harm Midyan caused *Bnei Yisrael*. *Chazal* tell us that Moshe responded to Hashem, "If we had been idol worshippers they would not have harmed us. They persecuted us only because we believe in You. Therefore, the vengeance is Yours, Hashem, not mine." Thus, when Moshe conveyed Hashem's message to *Bnei Yisrael*, he spoke only of avenging Hashem's honor, not his own. Moshe's death was connected with executing vengeance against Midyan. The *Yalkut Shimoni* tells us that Hashem was apparently aware of Moshe's distress over his "inability" to respond to Zimri's blatant desecration of Hashem's Name, as well as his own personal humiliation. Hashem told Moshe, "By your life, you will not leave this world until you will see their vengeance." We may infer that the degradation of a *gadol*, *Torah* leader, is a grave sin. It cannot be passively overlooked, like so many other transgressions. To disgrace a *gadol* is to denigrate *Torah*. Hashem Himself will seek vengeance for this iniquity.

Moshe's response to Hashem is noteworthy. He suggested that Midyan was not concerned with us as a people. We would not affect their lives in any way. They hated us for one reason - our belief in Hashem. Midyan's war against the Jews was actually a war against the Almighty. They would do whatever possible to sever *Klal Yisrael's* relationship with Hashem. In their spiritual war, they chose to undermine our fidelity to Hashem by encouraging licentiousness and idol-worship. We are but pawns in the battle. Moshe asserted that Midyan was waging war with the Almighty. It was actually "*nikmas Hashem*," a vengeance for Hashem. Moshe's perception was correct: Midyan's conflict was with Hashem. One who is antagonistic to Judaism is by inference hostile to the Almighty. Moshe's vengeance was the Almighty's vengeance.