

And (he) they buried him in the valley, in the land of Moav, facing Beis Peor. (34:6)

The *Talmud* (*Sotah* 14a) explains that Moshe *Rabbeinu* was buried opposite the Peor idol in order to atone for the sin of Peor. What does the Peor idol have to do with the Jewish People? Indeed, if it had been Heavenly decreed that Moshe would be buried opposite Peor, could there not have been a more positive way of describing the location? Secondly, why was our quintessential *Rebbe* and leader buried in such an ignominious location opposite such a degenerate idol? *Chazal* seem to be addressing these questions when they say that Moshe was buried there in order to atone for the Jews who had sinned egregiously there. *Tosfos* comment that, on the anniversary of the Jews' sin with Peor, a spirit ascends to Hashem with the sole purpose of casting aspersion on the Jewish People – once again. When it sees Moshe's grave, it stops short and moves on. We still do not know how Moshe atones for the sin.

Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita, explains how this atonement works, but, first, it is necessary to understand the how and why of the Peor service. *Chazal* describe the depraved manner of worshipping Peor. The worshippers would defecate in front of this idol. While idol worship at its best is beyond the parameters of normative rationale, defecating as a form of religious service breaks all of the rules of reason. Why on earth would these pagans have chosen such a disgusting manner of service?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that this service was their way of resolving the age-old question of human identity. What are humans? *Homo sapiens* have intelligence with an animalistic base – a physical body and a spiritual soul. Thus, they want it all. They seek fulfillment and satisfaction for their physical desires; yet, they want to connect to spirituality with its attendant concepts of transcendence, lack of limitations, and somehow link up with something bigger and greater than themselves. It is difficult to have it all. In this battle of cognitive dissonance, one rises to the top, while the other is defeated. There is one way – the way chosen by the Peor worshippers: simply denigrate the soul to the point that it is left bereft of honor and esteem. A dishonored soul will produce a soulless person who can now have a human identity without the “soul crisis.” By defecating in front of an idol – the symbol of their perverse religion – they demonstrated that one can descend to the nadir of depravity and revulsion and still be acceptable! This act put the body on top in control of the soul, because now physicality without honor was all that mattered.

The Jewish way is totally contrary to the Peor rite. Rather than reduce and negate the soul, we believe in elevating the body, sanctifying the physical and mundane. Thus, the body serves as the true vehicle for the soul's elevation. No one achieved this plateau to a greater extent than Moshe *Rabbeinu*. Thus, he was best suited to atone for the gross infraction of the Peorite. Indeed, *Chazal* teach that, when it came time for Moshe's soul to depart from his body, after one hundred and twenty years, it complained. The *neshamah* said to Hashem, “You created bodies. Is there a body purer than that of Moshe? (He sanctified his body through his service to Hashem). I do not

want to leave it.”