

Take vengeance for Bnei Yisrael against the Midyanim. (31:2)

The Torah is commanding *Klal Yisrael* to initiate a campaign of vengeance against the *Midyanim*, in order to put a stop to their pernicious influence on the Jewish people. Noticeably, the Torah uses strong language in issuing this command: Take vengeance. The *Midyanim* sent their young women to pervert the Jewish men. This action provoked a zealous and violent response by Pinchas. *Klal Yisrael*, as a nation, had never previously retaliated when subjected to physical aggression. We fought back, but never acted in vengeance. We acted passively, withdrawing from the fray. We neither seek -- nor approve of -- violent confrontation. Instead, we fortify ourselves in case the enemy strikes.

This was the first time in our nation's history that we took punitive action – vengeance. *Horav Eliyahu Munk, zl*, attributes this atypical response to the danger that Midyan presented to our nation's morality, which stands at the core of our religious affiliation. Other nations have persecuted and murdered us, but it was Midyan who attempted to destroy our moral compass. Their despicable act of leading us to sin deserved no less a response than complete, unforgiving vengeance.

When Shechem violated Dinah bas Yaakov, the Torah refers to it as a *nevalah*, an outrage, committed in *Yisrael* (*Bereishis* 34:6). *Rav Munk* notes that the first struggle for Hashem to which the name *Yisrael* is connected is in defense of the sacred ideal of moral purity. The first responsibility of those who are members of *Bnei Yisrael* is to safeguard the ideals of moral nobility and purity. These ideals elevate us above those whose moral compass is characterized by perversion and degeneracy.

Pinchas ben Elazar zealously stood up to Zimri's act of debasement. His reward was *Kehunah Gedolah*, the High Priesthood. The reward was not only for Pinchas; it was for his family as well. Eighty *Kohanim Gedolim* served in the First *Bais Hamikdash*, and three hundred served in the Second *Bais Hamikdash*. All were descendants of Pinchas (*Zevachim* 101b, *Tosfos* commentary). What relationship exists between morality/*tznius*/moral modesty and *Kehunah Gedolah*?

We are well aware of the *Chazal* (*Yoma* 47a) which states that Kimchis had seven sons, each one of which served as a *Kohen Gadol*. When she was asked to what she attributed the merit to have such unprecedented *nachas*, satisfaction, she replied, "Never did the walls of my house see my uncovered hair." In other words, Kimchis was extremely careful in preserving her moral modesty. Even in the privacy of her own home, in her own room, she went out of her way to adhere to strict modesty. This is wonderful! Surely such a woman deserves to be rewarded, but why *Kehunah Gedolah*? What relationship exists between the mandated *tznius* of a woman and *Kehunah Gedolah*?

Chamudei Yitzchak quotes the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Klei Hamikdash*, 7), who says, "The *Kohen Gadol* should have a house for him near the Sanctuary; thus, he will not leave the environs of the

Sanctuary. His glory and honor are such that he leaves the Sanctuary only at night and then goes home.” The Jewish woman should not go about unrestrained, because such behavior does not conform to the rigors of *tznius*. The queen does not run around. Neither should the Jewish woman, because she, too, is a queen. The *Kohen Gadol* should remain under wraps, away from the public eye. His place is in the Sanctuary – not the street. Thus, the reward for one who acts modestly is *Kehunah Gedolah* because both roles contain inherent demands concerning public life.

One critical lesson to be derived from *Chazal* is: *tznius* begins at home. Children most often emulate their parents’ example. Styles change, and the way society reacts to lifestyle changes should not impact the Jewish home. *Horav Shlomo Levinstein, Shlita*, offers amazing criteria by which to live. I take my writer’s license to alter his message slightly to conform to my readerships’ sensibilities. In a lecture to a large group of women in Bnei Brak, he presented an image of *Techias ha’Meisim*, Resurrection of the Dead, in conjunction with the advent of *Moshiach Tziddkeinu*. An announcement is made throughout the Land that “tomorrow” Sarah *Imeinu* is returning to life. Everyone is welcome to greet our First Matriarch, the mother of the Jewish People, the next day at *Meoras HaMachpeilah* in Chevron. Who would not want to attend this life altering event? Thousands of busloads of women from all over the world converge on the little town of Chevron – all with one primary focus: to greet their “mother.” Great! Wonderful!

What does one wear to the event? This is not a wedding at a hotel or fancy hall. This is not a gala *bar mitzvah* or a school or *shul* social event. This is a once in a lifetime unprecedented opportunity. Everyone thinks twice when making her decision. Who does not want to make an appropriate impression? Each and every attendee ruminates over and over in deciding what to choose from her wardrobe. This is how we should live on a constant basis. Who knows when *Moshiach* will arrive? Are we prepared? Do we have the proper attire with which to greet him? This is a powerful lesson which presents much food for thought.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita relates a story which underscores the outstanding *chinuch*, education, a young girl had growing up in a home steeped in Torah. This girl, in turn, became a grown woman and the mother of *Horav Eliezer Palchinsky, zl* (brother-in-law of *Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zl*). As mentioned earlier, parents must realize the impact their behavior has on their children. “Do as I say, not as I do” is the sad state of affairs in some homes. *Rav Eliezer Palchinsky’s* father was tested by the venerable *Ohr Sameach*. While I do not know the subject or subjects on which he was examined, one thing is certain: the *Ohr Sameach* did not test just anyone. This must have been an extraordinary achievement. We now have an idea of the scholarship of *Rav Eliezer’s* father. The story, however, is about his mother. When she was a young girl, *Rav Eliezer’s* mother was sent by her parents to the *Ohr Sameach* with a *shaaleh*, *halachic* query, concerning an egg (it had been cooked in a dish). *Rav Meir Simcha* rendered the egg not kosher. He then turned to the young girl and asked, “What will you do with the dish?” (Since, if the egg was prepared in it, the same ruling would apply to the plate.) The girl’s response indicates her righteous upbringing and the reason she merited a son who was to become a *gadol baTorah*. After thinking for a moment, she said, “I will put it away until I become engaged, and

then I will give it to my future mother-in-law to break at my *tenaaim*, betrothal.” When the *Ohr Sameach* heard her answer, he remarked that it was obvious that she was the daughter of a Torah scholar. She, too, would merit to raise her children to become distinguished erudite scholars. Children learn from their parents. Hopefully, what they learn will be constructive.