

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

The Torah seems to underscore the number of soldiers involved in the war of vengeance against Midyan. It then makes a point to detail how much booty was taken after the war. Veritably, numbers do not seem to play a role in the *parshios*, other than the *parshios* which deal with the census of the Jewish nation. In this case, however, the size of the army and the amount of booty apparently maintain a significant position in the *parsha*. **Horav Arye Leib Heyman, zl**, suggests that the key to the role of numbers in the *parsha* is to be found in a statement made by *Rashi* concerning Bilaam's visit to Moav to collect his reward for causing the deaths of twenty-four thousand Jewish men. The hatred that the Midyanites harbored for *Klal Yisrael* was so intense that they counted each Jew whose death they caused. Such animus is unreal and not found anywhere else in the Torah. They celebrated each and every death.

Furthermore, the war against Midyan is called the vengeance of *Bnei Yisrael*. It was neither a war for land, nor a war to defend themselves. It was a war designed for the sole purpose of exacting vengeance for the tremendous pain Midyan had caused. Thus, after Bilaam made a point to count out twenty-four thousand Jewish deaths, Hashem sent twelve thousand Jewish soldiers, with Pinchas *HaKohen* at the helm. Pinchas is equal to them all. Thus, twenty-four thousand Jewish soldiers went out to attack, to avenge the twenty-four thousand untimely Jewish deaths which Midyan had caused. Likewise, when it came to an accounting of the booty that was taken in, the Torah counts the amount meticulously. The *Midyanim* were exact in the war of hate which they waged against us. We will, likewise, play the numbers game, so that our vengeance will conform with their hatred.

Rav Heyman draws a parallel to the war of hatred waged against us by the accursed Germans. The hatred that the Nazis manifested towards us was so intense, so diabolical, that they reveled in every Jewish soul whose death they succeeded in catalyzing. They meticulously kept an accounting of how many Jewish lives they destroyed, by tattooing their victims with numbers. We were no longer human beings – we were numbers! Their punishment was specific sentences which coincided with their evil. It was all about numbers: years, months, weeks; they kept “score.” So does Hashem.

This was no simple war. It was a *nekamah*, vengeance, for Hashem and for *Klal Yisrael*. The payback had to coincide with the evil. With this in mind, Rav Heyman explains a somewhat ambiguous passage in the *Talmud Bava Kamma* 38A. *Klal Yisrael* is admonished not to initiate a war with Moav. The *Talmud* wonders: Would Moshe *Rabbeinu* take it upon his shoulders to initiate a war? Our leader never made a move without Hashem's instruction. Why would destroying Moav be any different? *Chazal* explain that Moshe (could have) made a *kal v'chomer*, a *priori* logic: Although Midyan only joined Moav to help them with the Jewish problem, Hashem said take everyone against the Midyanim. In that case, Moav who initiated the evil, for sure should be

destroyed. Hashem responded to Moshe's query: My thoughts are different. I have two *preidos*, good birds, to extract from them (Moav and Amnon), Rus *HaMoaviah* and Naamah *Ha'Amnonis*. Because of these two women, Moav will be spared!

Rav Heyman does not view Hashem's response to Moshe as a reason for sparing Moav. Indeed, if Midyan deserved vengeance, so certainly did Moav and Amnon. Their vengeance, however, was unlike the vengeance exhorted against Midyan. What greater vengeance can there be against Moav than for them to realize that the Jewish kings of the stature of Shlomo and Rechavan would descend from them? If these evil people who sought to destroy the Jews would have realized that specifically they would be responsible for their enemies' ultimate triumph, they would have gone insane. What a fitting punishment it would be to know that, not only did you lose the war, but you catalyzed your enemies' ultimate enduring triumph!

I remember vividly the funeral of my mother A.H. She had survived the entire World War II years as an inmate in various concentration camps. She suffered greatly, but the Nazis could not destroy her spirit. She passed away from this world a proud woman- proud with *nachas*, spiritual satisfaction, proud in the knowledge that her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren were all observant and committed, with many disseminating Hashem's word to future generations. I asked that her *aron*, coffin, be carried out by her grandsons, all of whom are *Bnei Torah*. As her *aron* was being carried out by my sons and nephews, an elderly survivor who had known my mother for most of her life commented, "She just had her *nekamah*, vengeance, on Hitler, y.m.s." Our vengeance is not by raising our fist in defiance, but by delving into our *Gemorah*. Our vengeance is an enduring Judaism that will be transmitted to the future generations. Hitler sought to make a "museum to an extinct race." We have shown them that, as long as we embrace Hashem, we are far from extinct.