

## Take vengeance for Bnei Yisrael against the Midyanites; afterward you will be gathered unto your people. Moshe sent them - a thousand from each tribe for the legion, them and Pinchas...to the legion. (31:3,6)

We find two commands regarding the Midyanites. In the previous parsha, immediately following the tragic plague that resulted from the Midyanite's advice which caused the Jews to sin with the daughters of Moav, *Klal Yisrael* was commanded to despise Midyan as enemies of the Jewish people. In this *parsha*, Hashem instructs Moshe to seek vengeance for the grave sin that Midyan catalyzed. Two *mitzvos* are presented: to hate and to avenge. Pinchas was chosen to lead a select group of soldiers in battle. *Chazal* say he was the one who initiated the *mitzvah* when he slew Zimri and Kosbi; he should be responsible to complete the efforts on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*. We must endeavor to understand the nature of this vengeance. Does Hashem need vengeance? Furthermore, did not Pinchas achieve the "covenant of peace" when he killed Zimri? Hashem commended Pinchas for his act, which stimulated a peaceful conciliation between Hashem and His people. Why is there a resurgence of vengeance? Last, why is Pinchas necessarily the one to lead the people? Was the underlying objective of this war a goal that only Pinchas could achieve?

*Horav Gershon Liebman, zl*, begins by first focusing upon the nature of an individual who has rejected a materialistic lifestyle, who has decided to absorb himself in the "*koslei ha'yeshivah*," walls of the *yeshivah*, to devote himself to *Torah* - and *avodah*, its service. Ostensibly, such an individual must manifest an incredible amount of *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, resolution and determination in order to make this decision. Must such a unique individual be a *kanai*, zealot, for *Torah* when he sees an incursion against it? Must he take a stand, go out of his way to quell any infraction against the *Torah*, or can he just devote himself to a life of holiness and purity?

We see that the *shochad*, bribery, infatuation with his past lifestyle, is so overwhelmingly intense that nothing short of zealousness will protect him from reverting back. *Chazal* tell us that one who sees a *sotah*, wayward wife, in her degradation should become a *nazir*, prohibiting himself from drinking wine. He sees the results of intoxicants; he sees the licentious lifestyle it encourages, he must run away from it. *Chazal* understood how absorbed an individual can become in materialism. Consequently, one must distance himself even from those behaviors that under normal circumstances are permitted, for they can catalyze inappropriate behavior.

Pinchas' nature, his zealousness, rendered him the right person to lead that battle against Midyan. He was not blemished. He overcame the blandishments of the Moavite women as he slew Zimri and Kosbi, returning dignity to the Jewish people. His zealousness for Hashem was pristine - untainted by personal agenda or vested interests. Indeed, out of an entire army of available Jewish men, only one thousand men per *Shevet* were selected. Moreover, Moshe was criticizing even these righteous individuals. This indicates the critical need to sever all relationships with those

areas of the past that can conceivably draw one back into the tentacles of his previous *shochad*, bribery.

We see this constantly. One can be absorbed in *Torah* study. He may be doing well in a *yeshivah gedolah*, school of higher learning; yet, if something arises that raises his ire, that is in contrast to the way he has been accustomed to live; it can be the springboard for impeding his spiritual growth - completely. Indeed, he might go to the other extreme, rejecting all those who had previously helped him. We now may comprehend the motivating factor behind these *kanaim* who pounce upon anything that might disturb the tranquility of their *Torah* lives. They do not rely upon themselves. They understand the stress of dealing with the past. For them, the best and safest approach is the extreme.