

With whomever you find your gods, he shall not live. (31:32)

Yaakov *Avinu* made a statement, ascribing a premature demise to the one who had taken Lavan's *terafim*, idols. He was unaware that Rachel *Imeinu* had taken them. As a result of our Patriarch's words – albeit without malice and unwittingly – he catalyzed a tragic impact on his beloved wife. The **Chafetz Chaim** derives from here a compelling lesson concerning the gravity of one's words. Yaakov certainly did not want to harm Rachel, but words, once they exit the mouth, cannot be recanted. They are gone, and, sadly, in this situation, they left an indelible mark.

Yaakov was very careful about which words left his mouth. Imagine, says, **Horav Shlomo Levinstein, Shlita**, that upon hearing the demands the Egyptian viceroy was placing on his sons, Yaakov would have uttered a curse against him. His son, Yosef, would have died! The brothers returned home and related to their father the humiliation which they endured, as they had been accused of spying. Now, the viceroy wanted them to return with Binyamin. Yaakov must have been beside himself with rage at the insolence of this "pagan." One curse – and he would have been gone! He kept his calm, said nothing – and, as a result, Yosef lived out his full life.

David *Hamelech* says in *Sefer Tehillim* 119:62, *Chatzos laylah akum l'hodos lach al mishpatei tzidkecha*, "At midnight I arise to thank You for Your righteous ordinances." Why did David arise specifically at midnight – as opposed to any other time of the night? In *Midrash Rus*, *Chazal* comment concerning the meaning of *mishpatei tzidkecha*, "Your righteous ordinances." *Mishpatim* – the justice (punishments) meted out against Ammon and Moav, and *tzdakos* – the righteous manner that You act with my grandfather, Boaz, and grandmother, Rus. This refers to the encounter at "midnight," when Rus covertly entered the threshing floor where Boaz had retired to bed. Instead of cursing her, he blessed her for coming.

Let us envision the scenario in the perspective of the debauched culture that reigned at the time. Boaz's generation was morally deficient. The threshing floor was a place in which immoral encounters could take place. It was secluded, and the people who spent the night there were not necessarily the community's spiritual elite. Boaz sensed movement in this close proximity. He looked up and saw a young woman. What does a person do in such an instance, under such circumstances? One assumes that this woman is up to no good. His first reaction was to curse her!

Not only did Boaz not curse her, he went as far as to bless her! As a result of this "change of pace," David praised his grandfather for not cursing his grandmother. Who knows, had Boaz reacted in the opposite way, David *Hamelech* may not have been born!

The words that come out of a person's mouth have an element of *kedushah*, sanctity, to them. Under certain circumstances, strong words with dual connotations can have a far from desired – and even a deleterious – effect. An incident occurred during the *hafganos*, protests, in Yerushalayim, concerning the building of a swimming pool which would cater to mixed swimming. Obviously, to establish such a venue that undermines the very underpinnings of *kedushas Yisrael*,

the holiness and morality of our nation, in the Holy City was a knife thrust into the heart of Torah-observant Judaism. People took to the streets to protest this infamy.

One day, *Horav Yehudah Tzedakah, zl*, who was *Rosh Yeshivah* in Porat Yosef, approached *Horav Ezra Attiyah, zl*, the *Rosh HaYeshivah*, with the suggestion that it might be appropriate to send the students of the *Yeshivah* to a *hafganah* that was taking place that day.

Rav Attiyah asked, "Are you not aware that it might become physical and the *mishtarah*, police, will beat the protestors with sticks and truncheons? Is it appropriate to send students to a scene of unrest where they might be hurt?"

"It is worth suffering for *kedushas Yisrael*," *Rav Tzedakah* countered. "Would your response be the same if it were your son who was beaten by the police?" was the *Rosh HaYeshivah's* reaction to his senior lecturer.

That evening, a *hafganah* took place, and *Rav Tzedakah's* son was injured by the police. When they came to inform *Rav Tzedakah* of what had happened, he replied, "I know. I already knew in the morning that this would happen... It is *shegagah ha'yotsei mipi ha'shalit*, "Like a decree that is already issued by the ruler." This was a reference to *Rav Attiyah's* question concerning his son. As soon as the great *tzaddik* uttered the words, "And if it would be your son," it was as if he had foreshadowed its occurrence. The holier one is, the greater his spiritual stature, his words are commensurately valued and rendered significant.