

Yisrael became attached to Baal Peor. (25:3)

The attachment of *Klal Yisrael* to the *Peor* idol is described by *Chazal* (*Talmud Sanhedrin* 64a) as *k'tzamid pasil*, "Like a lid clings to a jar." They become one with the pagan god. This is highly unusual and something which we would never expect from an intelligent people. The worship of *Peor* was carried out by degrading oneself in its presence, such as relieving oneself in front of the idol. Is there anything more humiliating for the idol than this? A Jew who worshipped *Peor* in such a manner was liable for the death penalty. What kind of person would do this? How could members of the holy nation act with such vulgarity as to "attach" themselves to the idol?

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, suggests that the vulgarity was a ploy conjured up by the Midyanite women, who convinced the Jews that they were humiliating and degrading their god. They were not worshipping it; they were performing a *mitzvah*! Thus, the Jews became so attached to the idol, because they foolishly thought that they were acting appropriately. These women employed guile and deceit to ensnare the unsuspecting Jewish men, thus luring them into sin.

With this idea, *Rav Schwab* illuminates what seems to be a difficulty in understanding the prohibition of *Bal Tosif*, do not add to the *mitzvos*. The Torah (*Devarim* 4:2,3) says: "You shall not add to the word that I commanded you... your eyes have seen what Hashem did with *Baal Peor*, for every man that followed *Baal Peor* – Hashem – Your G-d destroyed him." The commentators wonder what the connection between adding *mitzvos* and worshipping the *Peor* god is. In light of the *Rav's* explanation of the sin of *Peor*, we have a new perspective on sin. Not all sin begins as such. The sin of *Peor* was originally, in the minds of the perpetrators, a *mitzvah*! They thought they were doing a good thing – only to find out later that they had been duped into worshipping an idol. Thus, those who wished to add to the *mitzvos* by saying that it was a *mitzvah* to denigrate *Baal Peor*, ended up transgressing the cardinal sin of idol worship.

This is perhaps the most difficult form of sin to escape from the grip of the tentacles of the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination. The average "sinner" does not seek out a path towards sinful behavior. He is lured into a trap with the notion that he is performing a *mitzvah*. Likewise, the person who is "convinced" that he must add to the Torah, thus making it more perfect, is already on the road to infamy. The Torah is Divine and, therefore, by its very nature, the essence of perfection. To add to the Torah is to blemish its exquisiteness.

Interestingly, the one who thinks that he is degrading *Peor* is actually venerating it, since this is its manner of worship. Similarly, the one who is adding *mitzvos* thinks he is enhancing the Torah, when, in fact, he is impugning its integrity and demeaning its perfection. When people "play G-d," they demonstrate how far removed they are from anything Divine.