

Yisrael settled in the Shittim and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moav. (25:1)

Bilaam tried acting out the façade of the righteous prophet who “could not” curse the Jewish people. In the end, his evil advice to have them stray after the pagan women was tragically successful. Bilaam’s wicked intentions willed out. The façade was over.

The *Talmud Sotah* 22b relates that King Yannai was a scion of the *Bais Chashmonaim*, who had served both as *Kohen Gadol* and *Melech*. He became a *tzeduki*, massacring the *chachamim*. As a result, he was reviled by the *Perushim*, who were faithful to the *chachamim* and meticulously upheld the Torah – both Biblical and *Rabbinic*. He told his wife that she had nothing to fear from the *Perushim*. They were truly decent, righteous men who would not retaliate against her and her sons out of revenge against Yannai. The *tzedukim* were his allies and just as vile as he. She did, however, have to worry about the *tzevuim*, who looked like *Perushim*, but were actually as evil as the *tzedukim*. These chameleons were truly factitious, fakers who played by their own rules. They were wicked like Zimri, yet sought the honor accorded to Pinchas. Sadly, *tzevuim* are not a thing of the past. They thrive in every community, in every generation. Some people want to have their cake and eat it too. One is either Zimri or Pinchas. The two worlds are incompatible with one another.

One would be given to understand that *tzevuim* are individuals who externally present themselves as righteous and observant, while privately reflecting a completely different persona. Behind closed doors they act immorally, with evil intent and malice. This seems to be the implied exposition, based upon *Rashi’s* understanding of *tzevuim*. The *Brisker Rav, zl*, has a more “contemporary” take on *tzevuim* (I use the word “contemporary” by design. The *Brisker Rav* had lived through the effects of the modern day *tzevuim*.) He explains that *tzevuim* represent a third approach to Jewish religious posture. They seek to compromise between right and left – between the *Perushim* and the *Tzedukim*. Thus, they think they deserve a reward similar to that received by Pinchas. Just like Pinchas saved the Jewish People in his time, they, too, feel that they are the savior of the Jewish People. Compromise and flexibility are terms which they use due to their lack of moral and spiritual posture, reflecting nothing more than spiritual weakness. They lack the fortitude necessary to say, “No!” to decry the outrageous behavior of the *tzedukim* who seek to modernize Torah dictate, so that it is more equitable with the mores of society and so that it can appeal to a larger milieu of people.

Was Zimri any different? Bilaam advised Balak that Hashem had no tolerance for immorality. Moral turpitude was (and continues to be) an anathema to Judaism. Bilaam encouraged the Midyanite women to avail themselves to the Jewish men. This would ultimately take down the nation. The Midyanite women were not satisfied with a mere sinful liaison. They wanted to include idol worship into the equation. They would liaison with the Jewish men in return for a commitment to idol worship. It started with inter-faith relations and ratcheted up to immoral behavior, which ultimately

led to worshipping the Peor godhead.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* rendered his verdict concerning those who had turned to Peor: execution. One hundred and eighty thousand sinners were executed. Zimri came to Moshe with his heathen Cosbi and said, “Moshe, why should our people go to the Midyanite camp where they will end up worshipping idols? Let us compromise and bring the females into our camp. Then the men will only sin morally, but they will not commit the ultimate transgression of idol worship. People began to support Zimri, because, after all, who does not like a *pesharah*, compromise? This way everybody is happy. The sin of the Jewish men was mitigated from idol worship to intermarriage. Wow! They were saving Judaism! The groundswell of support for Zimri must have been similar to what was evinced in Germany when the German Reform condemned thousands of years of Torah Judaism into the dung heap of history.

Suddenly, Pinchas jumped into the fray. Pinchas, the “extremist,” they must have cried, “the one who is unwilling to adjust and make concessions.” Pinchas declared, “No *pesharos*! The Torah is from Hashem. It is not ours to do with as we please. It is immutable.” We are not allowed to make alterations to the Torah. Compromise is alteration! Adjustment denies the Divinity of the Torah.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, relates that at a rabbinical conference which took place in St. Petersburg, one of the noted *maskilim* (they called themselves enlightened, but, in truth, they were free-thinkers who were far from enlightened) turned to one of the distinguished *rabbanim* and said, “Why are you unable to make some changes within the context of religious observance? For example, why can you not eliminate the law of *chalitzah*? (Under the Torah’s system of levirate marriage known as *yibum*, *chalitzah* is the process by which a childless widow and the brother of her deceased husband may avoid the duty to marry. On the surface, the procedure comes across as humiliating – but, on an esoterical plane, the humiliation and entire procedure is important.) *Chalitzah* seems a bit antiquated. Can we not simply do away with such laws?”

Overhearing the *maskil*’s assault on tradition, *Horav Tzvi Hirsch Rabinowitz, zl*, *Rav* of Kovno, rose from his seat and said, “This is a noteworthy suggestion, but our conference is not the venue for discussing the *chalitzah* issue. This should be discussed at a medical conference, where physicians can attempt to figure out a way to prevent people from dying. Once death is a thing of the past, *chalitzah* will hardly be an issue, as nobody will be dying!”

The *maskil* looked at the *Kovno Rav* as if he had become unhinged: “You understand, of course, that death is something no one can prevent. It is an inherent part of life.”

“It is, likewise, with the Torah,” countered *Rav Rabinowitz*. “There is no room for change concerning the Torah. It is immutable.”