

Behold! A man of Bnei Yisrael came and brought a midyanite woman near to his brothers...And they were weeping at the entrance to the tent. (25:6)

The *Midrash* states that when Zimri brazenly brought the pagan woman before Moshe, he asked him, "*Ben Amram, is this woman permitted to me -- or forbidden?*" "*She is forbidden,*" replied Moshe. Zimri countered, "If she is forbidden, who permitted you to marry your wife, since she is the daughter of a Midyanite priest?" Moshe did not respond. This caused the people around him to begin weeping. Moshe did nothing to counter Zimri's brazenness. Surprisingly, he did not even implore Hashem to put a stop to Zimri's insurgence. The *Midrash* adds that Hashem inquired of Moshe, "Where is the wisdom you demonstrated when Korach rebelled against you? Your response to him brought about his death, as the earth swallowed him up. Then you acted, and now you seem lethargic!"

Chazal teach us that Moshe forgot the *halachah* regarding one who publicly violates the *Torah* prohibition against cohabitation with a gentile. Hashem made him forget, so that Pinchas would act accordingly and be worthy of reward. Why did Moshe not pray to Hashem for help? Why did he just stand there? Second, what connection is there between Moshe's reaction to Korach and his non-reaction to Zimri? Did his reaction to Korach represent the zenith of Moshe's career as leader? What about the Egyptian that he killed in Egypt before he became leader of *Klal Yisrael*?

Horav Betzalel Ha'kohen, zl, M'Vilna, explains that under normal circumstances, Moshe would have ignored Korach. He responded only after Korach ridiculed *halachah* and said, "You, Moshe, were not commanded by Hashem to transmit these laws--you made them up!" This statement compelled Moshe to respond. We may tolerate the foolishness that comes forth from those who have alienated themselves from the *Torah* way of life. When they ridicule *Torah*, when they spout forth heresy and deny the origin of *Torah*, no room for forgiveness exists. *Kefirah*, heresy, is not something we can ignore. This is what Moshe taught us. Korach went too far; he passed the point of no return.

We understand now what Hashem was asking Moshe. Was Zimri any less of an *apikores* than Korach? He also was denying the integrity of *halachah*. So, why did Moshe fail to respond? We suggest what might be a pragmatic reason for Moshe's inaction. When Zimri posed the question directly to Moshe "Who permitted you to marry your wife?" -- Moshe was in a quandary. There was no question that his case was different, since he had married Tziporah before the *Torah* had been given. Moreover, she had converted to Judaism. Yet, was he acting out of religious zealotness or because he was personally affected? Furthermore, what would the people think? They might say that he was covering up his own error. This enigma prevented Moshe from taking decisive action. Perhaps this is why Hashem turned to Pinchas to take charge.