

Yisrael became attached to Baal Peor, and the wrath of Hashem flared up against Yisrael. (25:3)

Bilaam was well aware that the moral code of the Jewish People is the foundation of their sanctity. Hashem does not tolerate immorality. In fact (as noted by the *Rambam* in *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:36), the Torah speaks of Hashem's anger as *af*, wrath, only when it is provoked by immorality. Thus, Bilaam counseled Balak to take down the Jewish people by enticing them to act licentiously. The laws of morality are introduced in *Sefer Vayikra* 18. Surprisingly, this chapter is read in *shul* on *Yom Kippur* – the holiest day of the year. Is no other section of the Torah more appropriate for this auspiciously holy day? This conveys the message that the ultimate test of our holiness is the mettle of our morality. It is not how we act in public, but how we conduct ourselves in private. Moral consistency, not deferring to the changing attitudes of a society gone mad, is the barometer of *kedushah*, holiness.

The society in which we live is adaptive in the sense that “everything goes” and change is inherently good. Adjusting to the fluctuating reality of societal values and its perverted understanding of right and wrong is a way of life. The Torah Jew ignores the world's concept of relative morality. Our Torah is constant, its laws immutable, and its Divine Author eternal and unchangeable. It is sad that some of our co-religionists still maintain the apologetic attitude, “Why should we be different?” This world view encourages them to participate with contemporary society in dress, activity and perspective.

Bilaam knew quite well that the idol Baal Peor was the one pagan rite that could destroy the Jewish attachment to its unique moral code. Baal Peor taught and encouraged the human being to divest himself of his humanness. Let the animal in you emerge! It was worshipped by giving brazen prominence to the most bestial aspects of human life. To paraphrase *Horav S.R. Hirsch*, *zl*, “The cult of Peor is a manifestation of the type of Darwinism that glorifies man's descent to the level of the beast, where, stripping himself of his Divine nobility, he comes to regard himself as merely a higher species of animal.”

Klal Yisrael angered Hashem by abrogating the very first prerequisite for its future existence: its sense of morality. As observed by *Horav Eliyahu Munk*, *zl*, the first time the name Yisrael (the name which personifies strength) is used is with regard to our morality: *Ki nevalah asah b'Yisrael*, “For he had committed an outrage in *Yisrael*” (the brothers' reaction to Shechem's violation of their sister, Dinah, *Bereishis* 34:7). Jewish nobility and strength are characterized by distinctiveness, not by imitating those around us. We are archetypes, not facsimiles. By following the prescribed code of the Torah, we set the standard.