

## Take vengeance for Bnei Yisrael against the Midyanim; afterward, you will be gathered to your people. (31:2)

*Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 22:2)* teach that, had Moshe *Rabbeinu* wanted to remain in this world for an extended period, he could have just taken his time in carrying out Hashem's instructions that he take revenge against the *Midyanim*. Hashem had stressed that (only) after Moshe had dealt with the *Midyanim* would he leave this world. Moshe *Rabbeinu* responded immediately, however, appointing an army and its leadership to go forth to battle. *Chazal (22:6)* draw a distinction between Moshe and Yehoshua. When Yehoshua, Moshe's successor, fought against the thirty-one kings, the war took a long time, as Yehoshua took his time battling each one individually. Yehoshua said, "If I triumph over them quickly, I will die sooner than I had hoped, just as my *Rebbe*, Moshe, died when his campaign against Midyan came to a conclusion." Hashem's response was, "Since you did this, I will decrease your lifespan by ten years."

It is difficult to accept that Yehoshua, who was Hashem's chosen successor to Moshe, would make a decision for his own benefit. It goes against all the rules of leadership. The nation comes first. How could Yehoshua delay *kibush haAretz*, the capturing of the Land, just so that he could live longer?

*Horav Chaim Kamil, zl*, explains that Yehoshua was acutely aware that, once he and the nation's *zekainim*, elders, would pass on, the nation would suffer a spiritual descent. This happens when the leaders who have inspired and instilled faith and trust in Hashem die, leaving the nation like a ship without its captain. Who would navigate the vessel in the stormy seas? Indeed, his fears were realized, as following the deaths of Yehoshua and the *zekeinim*, the nation turned to idol worship. Thus, Yehoshua understood that, the longer he lived, the longer the catastrophe would be delayed.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* could, likewise, have hypothesized delaying his own death. He knew his impact on the nation would wane once he was no longer present. He could have, but he did not, because he understood that it was the *ratzon Hashem*, will of G-d, that Midyan be punished. As such, Moshe went forward following Hashem's instructions – come what may. It was a choice between the nation's spiritual future and his fulfilling the will of Hashem. We know what he decided. Yehoshua made his decision, which – under the circumstances – was his to make. Hashem showed that performing His will, however, does not take second place to anything.

*Rav Kamil* suggests that the spiritual inspiration which Moshe's decision not to delay the war against Midyan catalyzed impacted *Klal Yisrael* more than his continued presence among them would have. The people knew how much Moshe wanted to continue living – not for personal reasons, but for the nation. Yet, he gave it all up to execute Hashem's command. This taught the nation a powerful lesson: nothing supersedes fulfilling the *ratzon Hashem*. We should have no *cheshbonos/calculations*, because, when one injects his own personal thoughts and feelings into

Heavenly command, he is walking on thin ice. We follow Hashem's will, regardless of our personal feelings.

I related the following story in *Peninim* years ago, but it is so powerful that I felt it prudent to repeat it. A young man had dealt lovingly and nobly with the great illness to which his three-year-old daughter had succumbed. Rounds of treatments, surgery, periods of hope and periods of extreme anxiety: What father would not do everything within his power to help? *Reb Yeruchem* (his name) never waned in his *emunah*, faith in Hashem. He prayed fervently, passionately, pleading with Hashem to allow his innocent daughter to live. Hashem had other plans. He wanted her beautiful *neshamah* close to Him *b'Ginzei Meromim*, in the Heavenly sphere.

During the *shivah*, seven-day mourning period, one of Yeruchem's friends came to visit, to somehow attempt to offer words of comfort. At moments of this nature, it is often best to allow the mourner to talk, to share his feelings of grief. In a way, this can be comforting. Unloading oneself of the heavy weight, the feelings of "could I have done more?" can be consoling. His friend asked him, "Yeruchem, from where did you access the strength, the hope, the faith to endure such a crisis with unstinting concentration, which never waned, even during the most trying times?"

Yeruchem replied, "It was very difficult, but I had help from someone whom I met in the hospital. His words of comfort gave me the strength to go on. It was the night that the doctors met with us and said that, sadly, they had exhausted every treatment known to science. Our daughter's body was not responding. Only a miracle could save her. Naturally, I broke down in copious, uncontrolled weeping. Red-eyed and physically wasted, I walked to the elevator. As I stood waiting, a man came over to me and asked if I would like to talk about it. I opened up with everything I had gone through from diagnosis to treatment to resignation and grief. He said, 'Let me tell you a story which, hopefully, will ameliorate your pain. A friend of mine, a *Rosh Yeshivah* who has returned hundreds to their roots, a *tzaddik* who is one of our people's premier outreach experts, had a *tzarah*, trouble, in his own home. One of his sons had slowly gravitated away from religious observance. Nothing the father could do or say impacted his son. He pleaded; he promised; he was prepared to relinquish everything, so that his son would return. Needless to say, the man who had helped so many was unable to save his own son.

"The father did not give up. He prayed incessantly for his son's return. Hashem listened and said, "Yes." The son returned and became a full-fledged *baal teshuvah*. Shortly thereafter, he met a like-minded young woman, and they married and moved to Tzfas. They were blessed with two healthy children. All was good; life was idyllic, until the birth of their third child, a boy. From the very start, the doctors saw that the infant was plagued with serious health issues. The parents prayed – and prayed. They introspected, thinking that perhaps they had not sufficiently expunged their earlier lifestyle. Sadly, on the seventh day of the infant's short life, he returned his soul to its Heavenly Source.

"*Halachah* states that, in order for a Jew to arise at the *Techiyas ha'Meisim*, Resurrection of the

Dead, he must have a *Bris Milah* – even if it were to be performed posthumously – and he must be given a name. Before the funeral, the *mohel*, ritual circumciser, performed the *bris*, and then turned to the young father and asked, ‘What name will you give the deceased?’ The father broke down in bitter weeping, then collected himself, and said, ‘I name my son, *Ratzon Hashem*, The will of G-d. If this is the will of Hashem, I accept it with love. This is what He has decreed. I accept it because it is the *ratzon Hashem*.’”

The young man understood the message of the story, which served to comfort him, as well as to give him the necessary strength to look to the future with hope.