

# PARSHAS MATTOS-MASSEI

תש"פ

The parsha is a continuation of the story of Bolok, Bilaam and Pinchas. They all had a major impact on Klal Yisroel's development.

There was a great difference between Moav and Midian. Moav was afraid of Klal Yisroel and went to Midian for advice about how to deal with Moshe Rabbeinu and his people. Even though there were assurances that Klal Yisroel would not conquer their territory, Moav had an irrational fear of being attacked, so they can be blamed only up to a point. Midian had nothing at stake, whatsoever. They not only gave their advice to send girls to seduce Klal Yisroel, they even went so far as to send their own princess to trap Klal Yisroel. They had nothing invested other than the deep hatred and resentment they had for Klal Yisroel's way of life. For this, they deserved to be destroyed. Hashem told Klal Yisroel to strike Midian. This command was already given in Parshas Pinchos. But it is carried out in this parsha.

Chazal give us a very powerful insight into how the Torah defines enemies. Chazal learn from this command to strike Midian that if someone comes to kill you, stand up to kill them first. But Midian didn't try to kill anyone! They didn't send any soldiers – only girls!

It teaches us that enticing a Jew to sin is as severe in halacha as trying to kill him.

The Torah refers to this command to attack on Midian in contradictory terms. One place it says it is "nikmas Hashem", and in another place it says it is "nikmas Yisroel". Which one is it?

The Sifri asks in a different context, "Does Hashem have enemies?" The answer is yes, Hashem's enemies are those who attack Hashem's nation – Klal Yisroel.

What does that mean?

There is a very foolish idea being spread in the world – the notion that anti-Semitism will be eliminated simply by educating people about the Holocaust. It won't help. The hatred comes from the fact that we represent an idea. We represent Hashem's demand for the world to be moral and spiritual. We may not always live up to the demand ourselves, but we still represent Hashem's message to the world. People don't like to hear this message and they want to destroy us in order to stop hearing this message.

You would think that the Black Lives Matter movement cares only about black lives. But interestingly, we find all kinds of anti-Israel sentiments on their platform. Why? They are against what we stand for. They want to murder, riot, destroy and loot without any restraints – to abolish the police – complete anarchy. We Jews stand for a moral and spiritual society with limits and absolutes, and so they hate us as well. It is part of what Chazal say that it is a well-known and firm principle that Eisov sonei Yaakov. Until the entire world accepts the kingdom of Hashem there will always be hatred for Jews.

Hashem told Klal Yisroel that Midian tried to destroy you for no other reason than the fact that you represent spirituality and absolute morality in this world. They tried to destroy you by involving you in avoda zora and znus. This gave Midian a din of rodef and the response is to treat them like a rodef who actually wants to kill you. You must kill them first.

The Rambam in Peirush Hamishnayos applies this din lehalacha – to those Jews who try to seduce other Jews to sin.

We then read from the pesukim that each Shevet gave a thousand

members to the military campaign against Midian. The midrash says there were really three thousand from each shevet – one thousand to fight, another thousand in reserves helping with the supply chain, and then another thousand – who would daven for each fighting soldier to be safe and succeed. The victory over enemies only comes if the soldiers recognize that Hashem is fighting their battles for them. Chazal are teaching us – and really this is explicit in the pesukim in Shoftim and Ki Seitzei – that only when Klal Yisroel maintain a high level of kedushah in the camp, and have complete trust that Hashem's Shechinah is right there with them helping them win the battle, do they succeed. This isn't just theory and hashkafah. It is all very practical.

The pesukim report that Klal Yisroel completely wiped out Midian and killed Bilaam by the sword. Why does the Torah add this detail? Rashi explains that it was ironic that Bilaam tried to use Yaakov's weapons of tefillah and ruchniyus against him. So Klal Yisroel took Eisov's weapon of the sword and killed Bilaam with it. So, while it is true that Yaakov's power to succeed comes from his tefillah and his kedushah, but to actually kill the enemy, they had to use physical weapons.

When the soldiers came back victorious, they brought the women and children back alive to become slaves. Moshe was very upset at this – but why? After all, the soldiers were not instructed to kill these women. There was no halacha to kill them. But Moshe was disappointed because he expected that the Jewish soldiers would naturally be disgusted by these women – it was the very population who were responsible for bringing 24,000 Jews to worship baal peor and be killed in the plague. They should have slaughtered them on their own initiative as bitter, sworn enemies. There should have been a gut, visceral hatred for those who caused Klal Yisroel to be corrupted and destroyed by aveiros.

Some people want to be liberal, sympathetic and open-minded. But we have to know who our true enemies are. We can't afford to have mercy on them. There are so many liberal Jews who come from all over the world to show sympathy for the poor Palestinians. They have no sense of who their enemies are – Islamic terrorists who would kill them in a second if they had the chance. But that there should be one place on the planet that represents some sense of decency and morality? This cannot be tolerated by these liberal Jews. They somehow find sympathy and tolerance for everyone but those who stand for Torah values and spirituality.

The women of Midian who were moser nefesh to publicly seduce Jewish men in order to destroy them, should have been the first ones to be killed by the Jewish soldiers. They were the true enemies and the army should have learned from Pinchas' example.

Moshe then instructed the soldiers to kill all girls who were mature enough to cause a Jewish man to sin. How could they know? Rashi explains that they were made to pass by the tzitz and whoever was capable and willing to have relations was identified.

Moshe also instructed that all the male Midianites be killed. Not just those who were involved in the fighting. This teaches us a very important non-liberal, unpopular idea. The Torah teaches us that if all members of a nation who share a single identity and have a single ideology go to war against Klal Yisroel, it means their national purpose is entirely evil. All the members of that nation are the enemy. They all have a din rodef and can be killed. That means that as long as the civilian population supports a war, they are valid military targets. They also have a status of rodef.

The Torah often runs counter to what people think is moral and just in times of war.

Towards the end of the Second World War, the Allied forces carpet-bombed the entire city of Dresden, Germany – even civilian targets. Not a building was left standing in the entire city and tens of thousands of Germans were killed. People today condemn it as needless brutality. But the truth is that it was justified. Why? Because the German war effort required the entire population of Germany – even the civilians – to give support and supplies to the German army. They are just as valid a military target as any soldier on the battlefield.

People complain after Israel bombs Palestinian targets and civilians get killed. But they don't realize that these civilians voted the terrorist government into power in the first place. If these civilians didn't approve of their own government's terrorist activities, they wouldn't let them stay in power and make them into targets.

So too, the entire nation of Midian had the din of rodef. Their entire national effort was to get Klal Yisroel to sin and destroy themselves.

Klal Yisroel brought back enormous amounts of spoils of war from Midian. Before Jews can use these pots and utensils, they had to be koshered and immersed in a mikveh. I can understand that kashering them was necessary to eliminate non-kosher taste and residue. But why teviloh in a mikveh? There is a very deep idea behind it. Any vessel that we get from a non-Jew has to be made fit for Jewish use. This is how we make a clear distinction between how we approach food and how non-Jews approach food. For us, eating is a derech avodoh. It does not resemble how non-Jews eat. Anything that comes in contact with our food has to be elevated and brought into a realm of taharah. I have to immerse all my non-Jewish made utensils in a mikvah to make it fit for a Jew to use. It has nothing to do with kashrus. It is an elevated approach to eating food. Toiveling keilim sends a very powerful message.

Then we read about the division of the spoils. A certain percentage has to go to Hashem – to the Mishkon, Kohanim, and Leviim. Why? It was nikmas Hashem. It was Hashem's battle and He won it for them, and it is only right that they pay Hashem a tax from the spoils.

Because of all these spoils, Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuvain had massive wealth. Two pitfalls that Klal Yisroel routinely fall into are money and znus. Last week's parsha discusses the problems with znus, and this parsha discusses the problems with wealth.

All of a sudden these two shevatim become exceedingly wealthy and they naturally want to stay put in Ever haYarden. But wait! They are supposed to be on the way to Eretz Yisroel proper – which has the highest level of kedushoh. This was the destination they were traveling towards for forty years! But all of the sudden, Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuvain get a windfall of these massive flocks of animals and they want to stay. Ever haYarden has some level of kedushoh, but doesn't have the same as the rest of Eretz Yisroel. But it doesn't matter. They now need the best grazing lands for their flocks which is right here.

The message they are sending is very clear. Our elevated levels of wealth here in Ever HaYarden are worth trading away the elevated

level of kedushoh of Eretz Yisroel. Just being wealthy and comfortable by transporting or selling these spoils and settling in a portion inside Eretz Yisroel isn't enough. We want to maintain the higher standard of living we have right here. This is the first message.

The second message was given when Moshe challenged them about discouraging Klal Yisroel from fighting the Canaanim because they are staying behind and not fighting with the rest of Klal Yisroel. Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuvain responded that they will build corrals for their flocks and fortified cities to protect their children, while the men go off to war alongside the rest of Klal Yisroel until the conquering is finished. Moshe realizes the order they said – putting their flocks before their children – was totally backwards, and hinted to them that they had their priorities all messed up.

Now think about it: which Jewish parent would come out and say openly that he values his money over his children? But even though people don't say it, this is exactly what they do with their actions. Actions speak louder than words when we prioritize our careers and our businesses over the chinuch of our children and the ruchniyus of our families.

Once we are willing to settle for second-rate kedushoh for money, we show we are capable of doing anything for it. When the dream of making money and achieving wealth and status gets a hold of a person, it takes over everything else. It dominates all of his thoughts and colors all of his relationships with other people. It becomes all about money.

Then we then have a parsha of orei miklot. Rashi points out a very strange thing. The total number of orei miklot is six. But they are not spread proportionately among the shevatim. The main part of Eretz Yisroel which contains 9 ½ shevatim only get three while Ever HaYarden with only 2 ½ shevatim get the other three? Rashi quotes Chazal which explain that in Ever HaYarden there will be more murderers. But how does that work? And we are talking about people who kill beshogeg. How can a piece of land produce more accidental murders?

The answer is the moment you allow money to dominate your life and you are willing to settle for second-level kedushoh, it shows you are sloppy in your priorities. You aren't careful about what is important in life – your neshomo, your ruchniyus. If you don't value your own life and you value money more, you won't value other people's lives as well. You will inevitably be careless in matters of safety and cause more accidental deaths.

Then we find something very interesting. Moshe also sends in half of Shevet Menashe to settle in Ever HaYarden as well. Why? The Netziv explains that Moshe Rabbeinu was so concerned that these two shevatim were so dominated by money, they needed the influence of Shevet Menashe – who was dedicated to limud Torah. But the tragedy is that they became influenced by Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuvain instead of the other way around. They too fell into the trap of materialism, rejecting the higher kedushoh of Eretz Yisroel, and were the first to enter golus.

There are a lot of lessons to be learned from this parsha, and we need to take them all very seriously.