

# *Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*<sup>1</sup>

[Wednesday's Study]

**READINGS:**      *Torah Mattot:*                      **Numbers 31:14-24**  
                         *Haftarah:*    **Jeremiah 1:13-19**  
                         *B'rit Chadasha:*                              **Philippians 3:14**

*Moshe was angry at the generals and captains . . .*  
[Numbers 31:14]

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Today's Meditation is Job 15:11-16;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #17B: *Yihyu L'Ratzon [The Expressions] – Part II*

The actual battle of ancient Israel's *Operation Naqam Naqamah* was over just about as quickly as it began. The Holy One choreographed every move of Israel's 12,000 troops. A surgical strike was delivered with precision directly to the heart of the enemy. The hydra-head of Midyani terror was cut off.

Divine restraint was exercised. Not one blow was administered beyond that which the Holy One specifically directed.

There were no human heroes. There was no celebration of death. There was no arrogant gloating over the vanquished foe. Victory belonged to the Holy One alone – and only His glory mattered.

Not one Hebrew warrior fell on the field of battle. The Holy One was our King, our Captain, our Strategist, our Shield, our Armor, and the Lifter of our Head. As David would later report:

*When the wicked came against me to eat up my flesh,  
My enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell.*  
[Psalm 27:2]

Victory is won. Vengeance is had. The Midyani terror machine is disabled for at least a generation.

Now it is time to *give thanks to the Holy One*.

Our *brave young men*, our *Camp*, our *wives and little ones* – *they are all now safe from the hate-filled slander, malicious schemes, and vicious attacks of Midyan.*

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But as wonderful as that is, it is not by any means the end of the story.

### ***Hmmm - What About the Women and Children of Midyan?***

The field commander of Operation *Nakam Nakamah* was Pinechas. He overaw all the battlefield activities. He faithfully fulfilled his charge. His work is now done.

Or is it? Not so fast, Pinechas!

As the son of Elazar, of the tribe of Levi, the man of Zeal, surveyed the death and destruction of the great battlefield one last time he saw something transpire that shook him to the core of his Hebrew identity. Wandering around the battlefield, dodging corpses, frantically calling out the names of husbands and fathers who would never again be coming home, thousands of distraught Midnyani women and children of all ages started to appear. They would search through the bodies of the fallen soldiers of Midyan until they came to one they recognized. Their hopes shattered, they would then fall to the ground in a heap as if struck from above by a great unseen sword. And soon the air would be filled – first with sobbing, then with wailing. Life as they had known it was no more.

Every single woman, as far as Pinechas could see, was now a widow. Every child he now saw – every newborn, every suckling infant, every toddler, all the way up to every pre-pubescent beauty and want-to-be warrior - was now a fatherless waif.

These had been non-combatants in the armed struggle that had played itself out in this field – and yet they were now condemned to suffer far more than had the vanquished.

Individually and collectively these were now hapless refugees of war. Alas, such is the unfortunate immediate aftermath of every battle ever fought – including every holy war.

Pinechas' ears were suddenly overwhelmed. The air reverberated with cries of despair, with groans of mourning, with shouts of anger and outrage, and with pitiful screams for retribution and revenge.

The war was over. The battle was won. But the women and children of Midyan remain.

Making war, it turns out, is one thing. Dealing with the bloody aftermath or war in

real time is quite another.

If Pinechas and his 12,000-man strike force just turned around and marched back to the Camp of the Redeemed, these newly widowed and orphaned sons and daughters of Midyan would either die a horrible death or be forced into slavery by the other residents of the area - the Moavi, the Edomi, the Amaleki, the warriors of Arad, and the Kena'ani. Nothing but cruelty, exploitation, and abuse awaited them if he just turned away and left them in their grief.

So what was Pinechas to do in response to their cries and screams?

What would the Holy One want him to do?

### ***Pinechas Has a Moment of Clarity***

Remember that Pinechas came to our attention as the one man among all the Redeemed Community who actually *felt the very emotions of the Holy One*. These women are not Kozbi and Zimri, blaspheming the Holy One by consorting shamelessly in the Courts of the *Mish'kan* over which he was given responsibility. These are just women and children – human beings in the midst of intense suffering and sorrow.

For Pinechas the choice is clear. He cannot just leave these defenseless women and children to suffer the cruelty, the lust, and brutality of the animal-like peoples of the desert. He has seen on many occasions what kind of spirit controlled the men who traveled this part of the world.

And so Pinechas had his men gather up all the women, the children, the livestock, as well as all the worldly goods left behind by the Midyani warriors who had fallen in battle. He had them all brought back to the Camp of the Redeemed to allow the Holy One – or at least the council of the elders – to decide what should ultimately be done for and with them.

As the young zealot and his band of warriors approached the Camp with the Midyani women, children, and goods in tow, Pinechas' uncle Moshe, his father Elazar, and a delegation of leaders from the various tribes of Israel came out to meet them.

Pinechas presented to all the leaders of the Redeemed Community both the report of the great victory the Holy One had wrought and all the human and material spoil they had taken from Midyan.

All the news seemed good. Each and every soldier sent forth by Israel had returned with Pinechas safe and sound. Elazar has his beloved son back in his arms. Every clan and every tribe of Israel was about to be restored to wholeness.

This should have been cause for great rejoicing.

But all eyes fell upon Moshe.

We have seen what Pinechas would do with the women and children of Midyan. We have seen what he thought the Holy One would do concerning them. But we had yet to see what would be *Moshe's reaction?*

One might have thought Moshe would have stopped, lifted his eyes toward Heaven, and given thanks to the Holy One for the great victory.

One might have hoped Moshe would have gone to the Tent of Meeting to seek counsel from the Holy One as to what should be done with the widows, children, and treasure of Midyan.

But neither of those things is what happened. Instead, Moshe's reaction was much more like that we saw when he saw an Egyptian overseer beating a Hebrew slave, or when he returned to the camp at Sinai to see B'nei Yisrael cavorting with the image of a golden calf, or when he screamed 'you rebels' and violently struck the Rock at Merivah.

In short, what happened when Pinechas and the warriors of Israel returned to the Camp with the spoil of Midyan was that Moshe had yet another 'moment'.

### ***Moshe Has a Different Kind of "Moment"***

To our surprise when the 12,000-man special force of Hebrews under Pinchas returned to camp with its amazing news – and the refugees of Midyan - Moshe was far from pleased. Here is how Torah records the aging prophet's reaction when our 'special forces' team returned to camp with Midyani captives and spoil in tow.

***Vayiktzof Moshe al pkudei hechayil sarei ha-alafim v'sarei ha-me'ot***

*Moshe was angry at the generals and captains,*

***ha-ba'im mitzeva ha-milchamah***

*who were the officers returning from the military campaign.*

***Vayomer alehem Moshe ha-chiyitem kol-nekevah***

*Why have you kept all the women alive?' demanded Moshe.*

***Hen henah hayu liv'nei Yisra'el bid'var Bila'am***  
*'These are the ones who were involved with Israel at Bila'am's instigation,*

***limsor-ma'al b'Adonai al-dvar Pe'or***  
*causing them to be unfaithful to the Holy One in the Peor incident,*

***vatehi ha-magefah ba'adat Adonai***  
*and bringing a plague on the Holy One's covenant community.*  
[Numbers 31:14]

Be careful, Moshe. We have seen your anger before. It has never turned out well for you or for us.

Oh great prophet, and time friend of the Holy One - have you learned to *be angry, and sin not?*

Have we? Will we ever?

Ah, Beloved, some women are made widows by swords of war; others have their homes destroyed and their lives shortened by tirades of anger and judgment. And some children are rendered fatherless by exploding missiles; others by careless words spoken by people who are called and commissioned to bless, not to curse.

### ***Vindication of the Holy One's Name – And Beyond?***

All the instructions of the Holy One regarding the battle with Midyan [see **Numbers 25:17-18 and 31:1-4**] have thus far been followed to a tee.

The triumphant return of the 12,000-man special Israeli force under the direction of Pinchas to camp testified of a great victory wrought by the Holy One to vindicate His Name.

All the men of Midyan were dead. The only remnants of the once great nation of Midyan were *women and children*.

So why was Moshe so upset?

He saw that the women and the children of Midyan . . . and he just 'lost it'. And he barked out an instruction that should send a shiver down all of our spines to this day. His first instruction – not prompted by any '***Vayadaber YHVH el-Moshe, emor***' [i.e. *And the Holy One spoke to Moshe, saying . . .*] preface, you will note - was:

***V'atah hirgu chol-zachar bataf*** [Kill every male child!]  
[Numbers 31:17(a)]

Wow! The last time someone gave an order to kill all the male children of an entire race of people was . . . well, *back in Egypt*.

And if memory serves me correctly the man who gave this particular order – Moshe – just happened to have, long ago, been one of the male children to whom the last decree of man-child genocide was applicable.

How is it possible that Moshe - once a victim of such a decree – would issue one just as deadly?

Did the Holy One direct such a massacre? If so, why does the text of Torah not inform us of it? Why is there no ‘*Vayadaber YHVH el-Moshe, emor*’ [i.e. *And the Holy One spoke to Moshe, saying . . .*] preface?

But wait – Moshe is still not through. He follows up the order to put every one of Midyan’s male children to the sword with the following equally stunning directive:

***V’chol-ishah yoda’at ish l’mish’kav zachar harogu***

*Do the same to every woman who has been involved intimately with a man!*

[Numbers 31:17(b)]

***Can we believe our ears? Is Moshe really telling us to slaughter helpless women and children? Is not this the way of our enemies? Is not this the way of the Midyani? Is this not the counsel of the ungodly?***

What are we to make of the things Moshe told us to do with the Midyani women and their sons? How are we to incorporate it into our national consciousness?

Talk about ‘*collateral damage*’! This is a stunning development indeed!

***Are the Seeds of Holocaust Being Sown At Moshe’s Stern Command?***

Moshe was our ancestors’ duly appointed leader. They will, in this case, do what he commands. They will *follow our leader’s orders to commit holocaust*.

But what will be the result?

Will doing what Moshe now instructs tip the delicate scale of Divine Justice against us?

Will the extra death blows we are being told by Moshe to strike even after the Holy One concluded His Vengeance on the field of battle wind up rebounding upon our own heads?

Will we, or our children, or our children's children, one day reap exactly what we have sown this day?

Only time – the narratives of Judges 6, the prophetic poetry of Psalm 83, and the chronicles of history – will tell.

***The Question We Owe It To Ourselves to Ask –  
But Only in Reverence and Humility***

Dare we ask ourselves the obvious question: Were the instructions that issued from the lips of Moshe in anger that day - instructions to put all Midyan's male children, widows, and post-pubescent daughters to the sword – have been given at the Holy One's direction?

Are these curse-of-death instructions a part of *the perfect Torah of the Holy One, designed to convert the soul* – or are they instead the fleshly and imperfect 'law of Moshe'?

Did the Holy One truly say that our men, after prevailing in battle, were to commit such atrocities in cold blood? Or was this just more of Moshe's infamous fleshly Levitical anger talking? Did he see in these women and children the faces of Shechem, the Egyptian taskmaster, drunken fools dancing around a golden calf, rebellious opportunists like Korach, and the bloodthirsty raiders of Amalek, Arad, Sichon, and Og?

Or was this harsh and distasteful decree something *Moshe came up with out of his own heart and mind* – drastic steps he deemed necessary once, and once only, for practical reasons of expediency?

The Holy One had supernaturally enabled the specially selected 12,000 man Israeli force to totally wipe out a vastly superior army. Was it really *the Holy One's will* that all the Midyani women and male children be slain as well?

Or was the wholesale slaughter of the women and male children of Midyan just something Moshe in his own mind felt was necessary to make sure the 'sin of Ba'al Peor' never happened again?

***Always Look For the 'Vayadaber YHVH el-Moshe'!***

As mentioned above, one can look in vain in the passage under consideration for the now-familiar 'cue' for people who are learning to *sh'ma* the Holy One's words – *Vayadeber Adonai el-Moshe l'emor* [And the Holy One spoke unto Moshe, and said . . .].

We must therefore ask ourselves – *Did the Holy One really* say that all the male children of Midyan – not to mention all sexually active women - had to be executed? Was the post-battle execution of Midyani women and children something that Moshe directed in obedience to the Holy One’s specific command – *or* did Moshe ‘do it *his way*’?

The purpose of asking these questions is not, in any regard, to ‘disrespect’ or ‘judge’ Moshe. Moshe is *the most humble man that ever lived*. **Numbers 12:3**. He is the chosen prophet of the Holy One. **Exodus 3:10**. He is the faithful shepherd and teacher of the Holy One’s covenant people. He is the man who is described in Scripture as ‘*faithful in all of the Holy One’s house*’. **Numbers 12:7; Hebrews 3:2, 5**.

Moshe is therefore the Holy One’s to judge, and the Holy One’s alone. But the questions are still legitimate. They are, you see, not really about Moshe. What he has done is done.

The questions are legitimate because they are really about *you and me*, Dear Reader.

The questions are legitimate because in every generation, in every circumstance, we will sometimes be tempted to – or think we have reason to - behave cruelly.

In such situations, as the Holy One’s ambassadors on earth we absolutely must be constantly aware of the vast difference between the *directions of the Holy One* on the one hand, and *the thoughts and intents of our own hearts and minds*, on the other hand.

We must follow the former without wavering - whatever other men, or indeed our own consciences, say. And we must at all costs abhor the latter, no matter how many voices – or what leaders of our people - echo the same sentiments or expound the same arguments.

The lifestyle to which we are called, as the Holy One’s chosen people, and as the ‘*light to the nations*’, you see, is not to either follow our leaders or follow our hearts. We are not to act according to our own reason, to behave ‘morally and ethically’ as other people define those terms, or even to do ‘*what we think is right*’ in a given situation.

We are never to seek to justify or defend unjust behavior on the grounds that we were ‘just following orders’.

What we are called to do is to *sh'ma* the words of the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven.

### ***Blessed Is He Who Is Not Offended***

Sometimes, Dear Reader, the Holy One's decrees and judgments may seem too *lenient* for our tastes. He loves to forgive. We, like Yonah [Jonah], will often be offended by His longsuffering and mercy toward our enemies.

Other times, His decrees and judgments will strike us as far too *harsh*. Like Shaul, we will insist on finding a reason to do what we want to do instead of what He says to do.

Our father Avraham knew this difficult aspect of walking with the Holy One very well. Go back and re-read passages like Genesis 18:20-32 [where Avraham tried to bargain with the Holy One over the imminent judgment of S'dom], and Genesis 21:8-13 [where Avraham became 'greatly distressed' at the decree banishing Yishma'el and Hagar from the covenant community] if you do not know what I mean.

Moshe often experienced this internal struggle as well – see Exodus 32:9-14, and 33:12-15 if you want to get a sense of what I am talking about.

It is time we learned how to deal with this as well. When it comes down to it, you see, it is a question of trust.

When tough decisions have to be made in your life, *in what standard do you put your trust, Dear Reader?* Do you, at such times, put your trust in your own – or your society's - perception of what is 'moral' and 'ethical' behavior?

Do you put your trust in your own – or your leaders' - sense of what is 'right and wrong'?

Do you put your trust in your own – or some other man or group of men's - ability to judge what is 'prudent', 'necessary' and 'expedient' conduct in a given situation?

Or are you able, in tough situations, to lay all those aside, to ignore all the other voices, and to *put your trust in the eternal words of the Holy One of Israel, and in those words alone* – no matter who it offends, and no matter what the cost?

The latter is what it means to be an *ambassador of the Holy One* in this world.

## *Questions For Today's Study*

1. When Pinechas and the 12,000 men of Israel who had been selected for the campaign against Midyan returned to the Camp of the Redeemed:

[A] Who greeted them?

[B] What do you think was the response of Elazar the Priest [Pinechas' father?]

[C] What do you think was the response of the leaders of the various tribes, all of whom received 1,000 of their men back from war without a single injury?

[D] Why do you think Moshe was angry?

[E] Do you think Moshe's instructions to put all the women of childbearing age and all the sons of the Midyani to the sword, after the fighting had stopped, was the Holy One's idea, or Moshe's idea?

[F] What did the combatants have to do to be cleansed after the bloodshed?

[G] What had to be done to the material possessions of the Midyani before they could be brought into the Camp of the Redeemed?

[H] What three groups of people shared in the spoil of the battle with the soldiers?

2. Today's haftarah reading from the book of Yirmayahu [Jeremiah] continues the Holy One's Hands-on training of the young prophet to the nations. A second time the Holy One asks the young man He had just called as a prophet "*Mah atah ro'eh*" [i.e. *what do you see?*].

[A] What exactly did Yirmayahu see this time [see **Jeremiah 1:13**]?

[B] Which direction was the object that Yirmayahu saw facing? What does that direction symbolize in general, and what countries/nations does that direction refer to elsewhere in Biblical prophecy? [**Hint**: Read Proverbs 25:23, Song of Songs 4:13, Isaiah 41:25, and Jeremiah 46:10-24.]

[C] What did the Holy One tell Yirmayahu the vision he had been shown meant prophetically?

3. In today's assigned verse from the Brit Chadasha, Shaul of Tarsus [often called Paul] speaks like a man on a great quest, saying:

*I press toward the goal  
for the prize of the upward call of God in Messiah Y'shua.*

[Philippians 3:14]

[A] Look up the words "press", "goal", and "prize", as used in this verse, in Strong's Concordance. Write the Greek words and their definitions.

[B] What Hebrew concepts is Shaul expressing by using each of these Greek words?

[E] Imagine you were asked to write a newspaper article about your spiritual life. Write an article, entitled “***Called Upwards***” and include three paragraphs, with the following three headings: (i) what I have attained in my spiritual life; (ii) how I am walking in line with what I have attained; and (iii) what is the “rule” by which I live my spiritual life.

*May the Holy One’s Word and His Will for your life be your passionate desire,  
and may you not be led astray, by the lusts of your hearts and eyes,  
to settle for things less valuable.*

### ***The Rabbi’s son***

## ***Meditation for Today’s Study***

**Job 15:11-16**

[the words of Elifaz the Temanite, rebuking Iyov (Job)]

*Are the consolations of God too small for you,  
Even the word that is gentle toward you?*

*Why does your heart carry you away?  
Why do your eyes flash,  
That you turn your spirit against God,  
And let such words go out of your mouth?*

*What is man, that he should be clean?  
He who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?*

*Behold, he puts no trust in his holy ones;  
Yes, the heavens are not clean in his sight:  
How much less one who is abominable and corrupt,  
A man who drinks iniquity like water!*