

From the Kli Yakar Jacob Solomon

The Parasha opens with G-d praising and rewarding Pinchas for zealously coming forward and striking Zimri in his act of openly and defiantly consorting with Kozbi, the Midianite princess. Pinchas's also killing Kozbi was not enough; G-d also told Moshe to:

"Make the Midianites suffer, because they made you suffer through their craftiness... and in the matter of Kozbi the daughter of the Midianite chief..." (25:17-18)

The daughters of both Moav and Midyan were involved. The Israelites were in Shitim, and the people began to fornicate with the Moavite women (25:1), and later on with the Midyanite women including their Princess Kozbi (25:6,9). Yet G-d told Moshe to make the Midyanites suffer, not the Moavites.

Rashi, as explained by the Siftei Chachamim, suggests that unlike Moav, the Israelites were neither an actual nor even a perceived threat to Midyan. Moav felt physically threatened by the Israelites. Having failed to break G-d's support in hiring Balaam to curse them, they proceeded to place Israel in G-d's disfavor luring them with their daughters (Rashi to 24:14). The Midyanites, in contrast, did not lie near the Israelites' path to the Promised Land. In siding with Moav, they were getting involved in something that was none of their business.

The K'li Yakar pays attention to the opening words of the story: **VAYACHEL HA-AM LIZNOT BIVNOT MOAV (25:1)**. This can be translated as "The people began to consort with the daughters of Moav" or "the people lowered themselves morally, and thus consented with the daughters of Moav". Either way, these opening words indicate that it was the Israelites who took the initiative and made overtures to the Moavite women, and not the other way round. In contrast, the Midyanite involvement was initiated by their own women, not the Israelites. In support, the K'li Yakar emphasizes Kozbi's role. Princesses are not normally accessible to people outside their circle for such purposes.

This explanation implies that the Torah can empathize with people who feel physically threatened whether it is real or not. Indeed, the Torah states: "Do not abhor an Egyptian because you were a stranger in their land" (D'varim 23:3). They felt threatened with their increasing numbers and influence; Rashi explains that even though they drowned your sons in the river, they were your hosts when you were distressed by famine.

In contrast, there is no room for baseless hatred for the Israelites, as exemplified by the command to wipe out Amalek, and also to make the Midyanites suffer.

The Midianites getting involved in attempting to cause the downfall of

Israel is paralleled by Amalek: Amalek came: he fought with Israel in Refidim. Unlike virtually all the other oppressors of the Israelites, the attack had no reason - neither stated not implied. Amalek just came and fought. Again, in contrast to Par'o and later the Canaanites, the Amalekites had nothing to lose in the Israelites leaving Egypt, travelling through the desert and entering the Promised Land. It seems that there was only one reason - hatred for the Israelites, and nothing else.

There are two types of hatred. The first type is for a particular reason - real or imagined. The Egyptians could hardly have been pleased in losing their slaves. The Canaanites could have hardly have been pleased in being occupied by what in their eyes was a foreign power - however justified in the eyes of G-d. The Moavites might well have felt genuinely threatened. And later on in Jewish history it would be fair to say that in most cases when there were anti-Jewish decrees, the Gentiles themselves genuinely, if erroneously, believed that the Jews conducted themselves in such a way as to be a threat to interests of other peoples and/or classes. This does not justify hatred - but at least it does not compare with the second type - *sinat chinam* (hatred of others for no reason) that of Amalek, and that exemplified by the Midyanites at Baal Peor, in Shitim.

The first type of hatred is therefore

regrettable, but understandable. The second type - groundless hatred - is of such a nature that there is no room for it in the Creation. Therefore the Torah, in the broader sense - declares that such behavior must be wiped out... 📖

