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THE WAR AGAINST MIDIAN IN ITS TIME IS FOR ALL GENERATIONS *(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)*

It is written, "Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites; afterwards you will be gathered unto your people" (Numbers 31:2). This should be examined a little more closely. What is the connection between the death of Moses and the war with Midian, and why did the Holy One, blessed be He, make one dependent on the other? The commentators have equally looked into the formulation of G-d's command to Moses: "Take vengeance for the Children of Israel," and Moses' transmission of this command to the people: "To inflict the L-RD's vengeance against Midian" (v.3). See also what is written with respect to this in the book Lev Eliyahu.

To explain this, we may say that the Holy One, blessed be He, asked Moses to exercise the vengeance of the Children of Israel against the Midianites because they gave advice to the nations of the world on how to weaken Israel. How could this be achieved? By provoking immodest behavior in the Children of Israel. As the Sages have explained concerning the verse that states, "in the matter of Peor" (Numbers 25:18), they prostituted their daughters to lead the Children of Israel astray and to bring them to follow the worship of Peor (Sanhedrin 106a; Rashi *ibid.*). In this way, the Holy One, blessed be He, would be continually angry against His people, for He detests indecency.

One may ask why there would be reason to get angry at the Midianites, since it was the Children of Israel who were commanded to distance themselves from wicked practices (Leviticus 18),

as well as to establish fences and safeguards so as not to transgress such a serious prohibition (Vayikra Rabba 27:6). Consequently, what are the Midianites guilty of? Why not attribute the sin to the Children of Israel, since they did not pay enough attention to safeguarding themselves?

One must keep in mind that up to that time, the whole world knew, just as well as the Children of Israel, that no one should behave indecently because this is a trait that the Holy One, blessed be He, detests (Sanhedrin 93a, 106a; Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 10:2). Moreover, everyone knew that this sin had provoked the destruction of the world at the time of the flood, as it is written, "The earth had become corrupt" (Genesis 6:11), which the Sages explained as resulting because of "forbidden relations" (Rashi *ibid.*; Sanhedrin 57a). However at present, the Midianites began to sin anew in this area because they knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, would not destroy the world a second time since He had promised, "Nor will I again continue to smite every living being as I have done," and also, "Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood" (Genesis 8:21; 9:11). There would never again be a flood to destroy the earth. And especially after the giving of the Torah, they understood that the Holy One, blessed be He, would not again destroy it. From that moment on, the Midianites again began to commit that sin. Certainly, they knew very well that the Eternal would not let this pass without rebuke, and that He would punish them, however their hate for the Children of Israel

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was such that they were ready to incur death, given that they also sin and they also be punished with death, just as Samson said, "Let my soul die with the Philistines" (Judges 16:30). It was for this reason that the Holy One, blessed be He, ordered that the Children of Israel's vengeance should be taken upon the Midianites.

However Moses, who always defended the Children of Israel, told them to exercise "the L-RD's vengeance." By this he arranged things such that every time the nations make Israel fall into immodesty, the Holy One, blessed be He, would remember in their favor that they had fought Midian to exercise His vengeance, and because of this merit, He would not punish them by the measure of strict justice, but rather with mercy. The Tetragrammaton (which we have translated with the word "L-RD") alludes to mercy (Bereshith Rabba 12:15; Zohar I:180b; III:202b). And since G-d made Moses' death dependant on the war with Midian, when Israel sins by behaving immodestly, G-d will remember in their favor the death of Moses, a man who had given everything for the Children of Israel. G-d will also remember that, far from trying to delay his own death, Moses encouraged them to exercise His vengeance.

It is in this way that one must explain the connection between the war with Midian and Moses' death. The Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses that if he fought against Midian and the Children of Israel avenged themselves on the Midianites because of Peor (that is, because of the advice that the Midianites had given to the nations of the world on how to make the Children of Israel sin), when Israel happens to sin, He will not punish them by the measure of strict justice, but would recall in their favor Moses' death and his devotion towards them. This is the meaning of the phrase, "afterwards you will be gathered unto your people," the death of the righteous constituting an atonement for Israel (Moed Katan 28a; Vayikra Rabba 20:7; Zohar III:56b). Consequently, Moses immediately sent the Children of Israel to war and told them to execute "the L-RD's vengeance on Midian," since because of Peor this war was for all generations.

We may also explain in another way why Moses restated G-d's command as "the L-RD's

vengeance on Midian." The Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses that the Children of Israel should avenge themselves of the Midianites without cease, meaning that they were never to allow themselves to be led to sin in the area of forbidden relations. Moses used the expression, "the L-RD's vengeance" because he feared that the Children of Israel, despite everything, would fall into sin because of the evil inclination that lies in wait for man at every instant. It does so in order to make a man transgress, particularly if he is a Talmid Chacham (Sukkah 52a). This is why, up to the present, we must still exercise "the L-RD's vengeance"; we must continue to avenge ourselves on them, as the book Lev Eliyahu explains. In this Moses showed himself to be a good advocate, and through this war he managed to arrange things such that G-d's vengeance is upon the peoples that make the Children of Israel transgress in every generation. It is against them that the Holy One, blessed be He, will vent His wrath, rather than on us, similar to what is stated in the expression, "The Holy One, blessed be He, has poured out His wrath on the wood and the stone" (Lamentations Rabba 4:15).

This is the lesson that we should learn from the war of Israel against Midian. At every instant, there is reason to wage real war against those who sin and make others sin. This is in order that they not continue to act in this way, that others not continue to learn from their behavior, that G-d's punishment not fall upon the community of Israel, and that the latter not be punished for its silence.

It must also be reasoned, a fortiori, that if G-d ordered that the peoples which made Israel sin be punished, how much more will the punishment of a Jew be greater if he causes another Jew to sin! This is because he knows the gravity of sin, he received the Torah at Sinai, and yet despite everything still caused another Jew to sin. Now it is written, "One who sins and causes the public to sin is not allowed to repent" (Sanhedrin 107b; Avoth d'Rabbi Nathan 40:3). One must obviously fight against this person and reprove him, as it is written, "You shall reprove your fellow and do not bear sin because of him" (Leviticus 19:17).

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

RABBI MOSHE AARON PINTO

On Wednesday Elul 5, 5746, after a long and painful illness that lasted three years, the Tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aaron Pinto, the “Light and Pillar of the World,” passed away in Ashdod at the age of 73.

Rabbi Moshe Aaron Pinto was the son of the saintly and venerated Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan, and the descendant of the great Tzaddik Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, author of the book *The Rif on Ein Yaakov*, and of Rabbi Yaakov Pinto, author of the book on the Zohar entitled *Mikdash Melech*.

Rabbi Moshe Pinto was among the Tzaddikim Nistarim (Hidden Righteous). He did not wish to be known, and forbade people from talking about him. Yet on the day of his passing, people testified to the miracles performed because of the Tzaddik’s blessings. His students gathered his writings together to make a book. His miracles are innumerable. And yet, even after the passing of Rabbi Moshe Pinto, people were still able to benefit from him, for as our Sages say, “The Tzaddikim, even when dead, are alive.”

A neighbor of Rabbi Moshe Pinto was medically declared infertile since the age of 12. Two and a half months before the passing of the Tzaddik, she came to see the Rebbetzin in order to beg her to allow her into Rabbi Moshe’s room without speaking or bothering him. In entering, Rabbi Moshe Pinto, despite his illness and pain, gave a friendly signal towards this woman and smiled to her. Fifteen days later, she was pregnant. The doctors couldn’t understand anything.

Rabbi Moshe Pinto suffered from many illnesses, most notably from gangrene. Doctors at the famous Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem wanted to amputate both his legs. He always refused, however, saying that no descendant of Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto had ever suffered from mutilation. He always reminded the doctors, “I came into this world with two legs, and with two legs I will leave this world.” In saying this, he would raise his hands towards the sky and invoked his great grandfather, Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol. The day in which he was finally to be operated, the doctor told the Tzaddik’s entire family that he would try one final treatment. If that failed, he would be forced to amputate his legs or else Rabbi Moshe’s life would be in danger. The miracle occurred. That same day there was a marked improvement in his blood circulation, and the operation was no longer necessary. Once free of the gangrene, Rabbi Moshe said, “It is now that my sufferings will begin!”

From that point on, his state became increasingly worse. He lost his ability to speak, to hear, and to see, and he was subject to heart attacks. Each time, he

raised his hands towards the sky and kissed them as a sign of joyous submission.

The Admorim and Rabbanim that came to pay him visits during this time noticed two things: Each time that he touched his head, it was to ensure that his kippah was in place, and every time that he made a gesture, it was to have people wash his hands.

And yet medically, his brain had ceased to function. Despite everything, he bathed in the light of Kedusha and his spirit was always with his people, for whom he never stopped praying. When his children would bring him his Tallit and Tefillin, he took them with his right hand, held them firmly to his heart, and began to gently cry. He cried because he was no longer able to perform the holy mitzvah of Tallit and Tefillin.

Other tears flowed for several moments just before his passing. These were not tears of physical suffering, but rather tears from the ultimate spiritual suffering of not having witnessed the advent of the Messiah during his lifetime.

From the depths of man’s despair, the hope exists that our much beloved Rabbi Moshe Aaron Pinto, with his legions of Israel’s holy ones, will intercede on our behalf and precipitate the arrival of the Messiah. Amen and Amen.

In 1984, before his illness, he gave his children two suggestions:

1. They should put into print commentaries on the book *The Laws of Teshuvah* by Ramban (Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon). This being done, the publication should be freely put at the disposition of synagogues, schools, and community centers.

2. That the Sefer Torah of the very great Tzaddik, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, written about 360 years ago, should be shown throughout the Jewish communities of the world. This was because, in his opinion, that Sefer Torah had a segula for the destruction of Avodah Zarah, which brings the advent of the Messiah closer, an event that he had waited his entire life for.

Rabbi Moshe never left his home. Our teachers say that this was because his father had asked him to make a vow to remain enclosed for 40 years. He stayed for 30 years in his home in Mogador and 10 years in Casablanca.

He had built inside his home a synagogue and a study hall, and he received thousands of people who came from all over to receive his blessing.

Once his vow had been accomplished, 40 years having passed, he went to reflect and pray by the grave of his venerated great grandfather and asked him for permission to go and settle in Israel.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

A teaching of the Maggid of Dubno

Arm men from among yourselves for the legion, that they may be against Midian to inflict the L-RD's vengeance against Midian" (Numbers 31:3).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites" (v.2), and Moses said, "the L-RD's vengeance against Midian"?

The Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses, "It is you people that have suffered the damage for which I punish you." Moses replied, "Master of the world! If we had been uncircumcised or we had rejected your mitzvot, we would not have been hated by others. We are persecuted precisely because of the Torah and the mitzvot that You have given us. This is why vengeance belongs to You." Hence Moses replied, "the L-RD's vengeance against Midian."

The Maggid of Dubno explains this Midrash to us with the following parable.

Let us imagine that a man enters the store of a wine merchant and asks to be given a certain type and quantity of wine. The merchant descends into the cellar and comes back up with the type and quantity requested, and he puts it on the table in front of them. While they are talking, a drunk staggers over to them and, while trying to get away with the wine, he spills it all to the floor. Furious, the merchant then takes a stick and hits the drunkard, saying to him, "You wretch! Look at what you've done! See how much money you've cost me!"

This scene turned the buyer mute with shock. He wondered what could possibly be going on inside the head of the merchant that he could hit someone like this. Was it because of the financial loss that the drunkard incurred to him? In that case, the merchant was not demanding anything from the poor buyer. Yet perhaps the buyer thought that he himself would still have to pay for the wine, in which case the merchant was striking

the drunkard for the wrong he did to the buyer, as if to exercise vengeance on his behalf.

The buyer was still asking himself some questions when the merchant's son arrived in the store. The buyer asked him, "Ask your father why he's beating this drunkard with such vehemence." In this way, the buyer would know right away what the merchant had in mind. If the merchant told the boy, "My son, why are you surprised? Didn't you see what this drunkard did to me? Didn't you notice how much I lost?" the buyer would understand that the merchant wanted nothing from him. However, if the merchant told the boy, "My son, don't you understand the enormous loss that he incurred to this buyer?" it was a sign that the merchant had every intention of making the buyer pay for the wine, and that the beating he gave to the drunkard was only to appease him.

Moses our teacher knew that the Midianites deserved beatings and punishments, however he did not know if it was because they had caused Israel to sin or because they had incurred damage to the holy Torah, in which case he had to exercise Hashem's vengeance on them. Moses was still asking himself the question when Hashem told him, "Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites," consequently the Children of Israel had to "pay" everything (because of their sin for having worshipped at Baal Peor). The need to exercise vengeance on the Midianites, since they were the cause of such a horrible loss, was only to appease the Children of Israel. It was on this point that our Sages taught: The Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses, "It is you people that have suffered the damage for which I punish you. It is you people who will have to undergo the punishment for your sin. It is you people who were wrong. Why then do you say, 'the L-RD's vengeance'?"

This perfectly explains the statement of the Holy One, blessed be He.

ADVICE FROM RABBI NACHMAN OF BRESLOV

When a person begins to enter the paths of devotion, G-d tells him, "I know that your desire and your will are to serve Me, but what guarantee do I have that you will not abandon Me tomorrow? Therefore how can I bring you closer to Me simply because of your desire? How can I now reveal hidden things to you? What you should do, rather, is to begin by simply loving Me, by performing My mitzvot, even if you don't understand the wisdom found within. Serve Me in simplicity, without complexity. In doing this for a time, I will have faith in you and will reveal to you the reason and the wisdom that exist in everything. I will bring you closer to Me though all types of ways, for the time that you remain devoted to me will constitute a true guarantee that you will not leave Me."