

A Storm of Lies

Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

We read in this week's parsha (31:3) that Moshe Rabbeinu addressed the Jewish people on the need to gather men for an army to exact revenge against Midyan. Rashi shares with us that although Moshe's death was intertwined with this battle, he happily undertook it without delay.

This was no simple matter-of-fact undertaking, for as the Medrash (22:2) teaches, had Moshe desired to live longer, he would have postponed this war. Hashem told Moshe to avenge Midyan for what they had done to Am Yisroel and then he would pass from this world. The Medrash says that Moshe is deserving of praise, because instead of delaying the battle to live longer, he immediately spoke to the people and began assembling a fighting army.

Rav Meir Soloveitchik asked why this conduct of Moshe earns him praise. Does anyone suspect that Moshe would delay carrying out Hashem's command out of personal interest? Of course, Hashem's word takes precedence over selfish desires.

He explained that what was praiseworthy about Moshe's quick mobilization effort was not because personal interest would have held him back, but because his main concern was always the betterment of Am Yisroel.

As he was approaching death, his concern was not about himself, but about what would happen to Klal Yisroel after he passed. This is evident when Hashem tells Moshe to climb Har Ha'avirim and that his soul would leave him there. Moshe immediately begins to pray for Hashem to appoint a proper leader for the Jewish people. His primary concern was for the people, not for himself.

In Parshas Vayeilech, we find that Moshe said that he knew that following his passing, the people would veer from the proper path and begin to sin. This indicates that as long as Moshe was alive, his presence helped prevent the people from sinning. When he would leave them, there would be such a great spiritual decline and gap that it would cause the people to sin.

This was shown when Moshe left the people to receive the luchos. They decided that he was delayed in his return and began to sin without anyone standing up to them and trying to stop their wrongful acts. It was only when Moshe returned and called out, "Mi laHashem eilay," that the Bnei Levi rallied around him to squash the evildoers. In his absence, nobody thought of battling them.

Not only that, but as long as Moshe was alive, there was a living example of the heights to which man can reach. The people had an image of how high they could push themselves to reach much higher levels of avodas Hashem. Additionally, just the fact that a person as holy as Moshe was among them raised the holiness of the Jewish people.

The Brisker Rov was once discussing the difficulties involved in acting on a certain pressing matter. A student of the Chofetz Chaim was present during the discussion and asked how the Chofetz Chaim would have addressed the situation. The Brisker Rov answered that if the Chofetz Chaim were alive, they never would have come to this situation, because his holiness would have raised the generation and the transgression would have been prevented.

Moshe was the teacher of Klal Yisroel. He brought us the Torah from Sinai and spent his time teaching it to his generation. He ensured that it would be properly passed down to future generations by writing the entire Torah Shebiksav and passing on the halachos leMoshe miSinai, among other things.

Knowledge of Torah and greatness in Torah are accomplished through the mesorah of Torah from rebbi to talmid. Moshe was the first and ultimate rebbi; all the Torah we have is traced back to him. Had he been able to live another ten or twenty years, he could have taught hundreds and thousands of additional talmidim, who would have then gone on to teach talmidim, widening the scope of greatness and Torah knowledge.

Moshe's postponement of the war against Midyan would have tremendously enriched Klal Yisroel, and he could have easily justified it. Therefore, the Medrash praises him for carrying out Hashem's command immediately, for our obligation is to follow Hashem's directives without compromise or delay.

There is a story that the Brisker Rov would tell about a woman named Blumkeh, who assisted the Shaagas Aryeh and took care of his needs when he lived in Minsk, where he headed a yeshiva. When he was forced from the city, the Shaagas Aryeh wanted to express his appreciation to the woman for her dedicated assistance. He asked her what type of brocha he could offer her. She responded that she did not need anything, so the saintly rov blessed her that she would merit to construct two shuls, one in the area in which she lived and one in Eretz Yisroel.

She immediately constructed a large shul in Minsk, which was named "Blumke's Shul" and went on to earn much fame until it was destroyed in the Holocaust. A few years after that shul was established, Blumkeh set out to travel to Eretz Yisroel to construct the second shul the Shaagas Aryeh said she would build.

On the way to Eretz Yisroel, she went to Volozhin to receive the brocha of the gadol hador, Rav Chaim Volozhiner. He told her that if she wished to go, then she could go, but if she were to ask him if she should go, he would advise her not to. "The brocha of the Shaagas Aryeh has to be fulfilled, and you will merit to build a shul in Eretz Yisroel, so why do you care to live another few years and then go to build the shul?" Needless to say, the blessed woman accepted the advice of Rav Chaim and postponed her journey.

I inject the story as an interesting aside. There was no command or mitzvah for Blumkeh to build the shul in Eretz Yisroel in any time frame, so Rav Chaim Volozhiner advised her to postpone

the project so that she would be guaranteed years of life. But when there is a mitzvah or a halachic obligation to carry out, we do not make outside considerations.

We are meant to follow the mitzvos as laid out in the Torah and not introduce calculations that, in this instance or in such a case, the Torah would agree that it is okay to transgress a mitzvah. We do not invent our own theories and say that for kiruv we can look aside from issurim, or that the need for funds to support Torah is so great that we can engage in activities that aren't totally proper to obtain financing. Our duty is to follow halacha and not to deviate from it, as legitimate as the reason seems to us.

One compromise leads to another, one pragmatic move leads to the next, and before you know it, you are as corrupt and hypocritical as the rest of the generation.

We live in a time when lies are accepted as truth, obfuscation as clarity, and incompetence as ability. We must do all we can to remain separate from hypocritical people and those who peddle fiction.

Over the past week in this country, a sitting president was basically pushed out of his position and forced to announce that he would not be running for reelection, despite having won the primaries and actively campaigning for the position. His party and the media widely and loudly praised him for his heroism in giving up his position for the greater cause of democracy.

Of course, it was all a lie. The very people who praised him so publicly had engaged in a bitter struggle with him to force him out. The media had been praising him since his nomination for the presidency and was propping him up for the past three years as he failed time and time again. Suddenly, after his disastrous debate performance against Donald Trump, the media saw the light and stopped peddling their nonsense that he was a strong, astute leader. Days after praising his brilliance and sharpness, they turned on him and began bashing him for being incompetent and senile.

Then the very party leaders who praised him upon his exit presented him with an ultimatum to either quit the race on his own or be forced out by the vice president and cabinet voting to enforce Constitutional Amendment 25 that he was unworthy of performing his duties. A letter was issued in his name, hours after he told his assistants that he was not leaving, stating that he wasn't going to be running after all. No reason was given. On Wednesday night, in a prime-time broadcast, he made his way through a statement that didn't shed much light on the matter. It didn't matter anymore. He's done. He's yesterday's news, and nobody cares what he says or does.

Everything they said and did was a lie. Then they anointed his vice president to be the candidate. Until that time last Sunday, she was viewed almost universally as a vapid, imbecilic person who had accomplished little. But as soon as the button was pressed, she was endowed with all the gifts a person could strive for. She became bold and energetic, a woman of steely

resolve and deft diplomacy, authoritative but personal, a highly accomplished leader who would lead this country out of its malaise and into a bright new utopian period.

The endorsements quickly poured in, along with the money. Over \$200 million was raised faster than you can say, "Where did all that come from?" They said that it was mostly from small donors who had never previously given. Out of nowhere, 100,000 volunteers signed up to work for this woman's election.

The woman who had been getting negative coverage for the past decade is running a totally scripted campaign, reading speeches off a teleprompter and not answering reporters' questions.

The path has been paved for her to take over not only Biden's candidacy, but also his presidency and campaign. There is nothing about her that is authentic, yet the polls have already swung in her favor as an unprecedented propaganda campaign sweeps the nation, peddling lies as quickly as her past record is swept clean, lest people find out what she really thinks and what is in store for them should the election propel her into the White House.

We got a hint of what it would really be like last week when she shirked her position as president of the Senate and skipped town rather than preside over Binyomin Netanyahu's speech to a joint session of Congress. She was signaling her anti-Semitic followers that when she is in the saddle, Israel will not have a friend in the White House.

The next day, she met Netanyahu, posed for a couple of pictures, and had a rough meeting during which she reportedly showed a lack of knowledge of the facts and her distaste for Israel. After the meeting ended, her people issued a cold and harsh statement that was disrespectful of Israel and its people.

The lies continue to be spread daily on every topic and subject, without too many people having the courage to publicly proclaim the truth.

Regrettably, we know that what happens in the rest of the country can have a corrosive effect on us. Jews have been stating for centuries, "Azoi vi es kristalt zich, azoi es Yiddelt zich." This is true in all areas, and we need to exercise special caution these days not to allow our moral compass to falter and our levels of kedusha to slither downward.

Even during the summer, when we look to dial things down a couple of notches, we must remember that we are an am kadosh. We hail from students of Moshe Rabbeinu and his Torah. On matters of halacha and morality, we do not compromise. We seek to live up to the example they set, and although we don't have the Chofetz Chaim and the other holy Yidden of past generations living amongst us, we have their seforim and teachings and have studied from students of their students. We know what is expected of us and what types of lives we should be leading.

There are lots of temptations out there and lots of excuses to veer just a little and then just a little more from where we know we belong.

We all have the strength and ability to hold on a little longer until Moshiach announces that he is here among us, ready to take us all to where we belong, b'vinyan Bais Hamikdosh bimeheirah beyomeinu. Amein.