



**“Let each man kill his men who were attached to Ba’al Peor”**

**The Klipah of Peor Dances among Us until This Very Day Taunting Us:  
“If you sin, how do you affect Him,  
and if your transgressions are many, what do you do to Him?”**

In this week’s parsha, parshas Balak, we learn of an enormous chesed that HKB”H performed on behalf of Yisrael. Unbeknownst to them, HKB”H foiled the malevolent plans of Bilam and Balak, who conspired to curse Yisrael. Not only did HKB”H prevent the wicked Bilam from cursing Yisrael, but He compelled Bilam to bless Yisrael.

In this essay, we will examine the tragic event described at the end of the parsha, which was precipitated by the malevolent advice proffered by Bilam harasha (Bamidbar 25, 1):

“וישב ישראל בשיטים ויחל העם לזנות אל בנות מואב, ותקראן לעם לזבחי אלהיהן ויאכל העם וישתחוו לאלהיהן, ויצמד ישראל לבעל פעור ויחר אף ה' בישראל... ויאמר משה אל שופטי ישראל הרגו איש אנשיו הנצמדים לבעל פעור.”

Yisrael settled in the Shittim and the people began acting promiscuously with the daughters of Moav. They invited the people to the feasts of their gods; the people ate and bowed to their gods. Yisrael became attached to Ba’al Peor... Rashi explains that it was the daughters of Moav who prevailed upon Yisrael to follow and worship Baal Peor.

Curiously, the text begins by describing two transgression: (1) Their illicit relationship with the women of Moav and (2) their sacrilegious devotion to Ba’al Peor. Yet, when Moshe addresses the judges of Yisrael, he neglects to mention their indiscretion with the women of Moav; he only addresses the sin of avodah zarah (ibid. 5): “הרגו איש אנשיו הנצמדים לבעל פעור”—let each man kill his men who were attached to Ba’al Peor.

**Moshe Rabeinu Temporarily  
Forgot the Pertinent Halachah**

Let us begin with the plain meaning and interpretation of the text. Concerning Zimri ben Salu, who brought Cozbi bat Zur before Moshe Rabeinu, we learn the following from the Gemara (Sanhedrin 82a): אמר משה, ואם תאמר אסורה, בת יתרו מי התיירה לך. נתעלמה ממנו הלכה, געו כולם בבכיה, והיינו דכתיב והמה בוכים פתח אהל מועד, וכתיב וירא פנחס בן אלעזר. מזה ראה, אמר רב, ראה מעשה ונזכר הלכה, אמר לו, אחי אבי אבא, לא כך לימדתני ברדתך מהר סיני, הבועל ארמית קנאין He (Zimri) grabbed her (Cozbi) by her braided hair and dragged her in front of Moshe. He (Zimri) said to him (Moshe), “Son of Amram, is she prohibited or permitted? If you say that she is prohibited, then who permitted the daughter of Yisro to you?” The halachah—that zealots may kill one who cohabits with an idolatress—temporarily escaped him. The people wept loudly; this is implied by that which is written (Bamidbar 25, 6): “And they were weeping at the entrance to the Ohel Mo’ed.” Then, it is written (ibid. 7): “Pinchas the son of Elazar saw.” What did he see? Rav said: He saw the incident and he recalled the halachah. He (Pinchas) said to him (Moshe), “Brother of my father’s father, did you not teach me upon your descent from Har Sinai: One who cohabits with a Cuthean woman, zealots may kill him? He (Moshe) responded to him, “The one who reads the document, deserves to be the one to execute the verdict.”

In other words, Moshe informed Pinchas that since he was the one who remembered the pertinent halachah, it was fitting that he be the agent to execute the halachic ruling. That is precisely what happened. Pinchas rose from among the people and executed Zimri ben Salu.

Now, this particular halachah: “הבועל ארמית קנאין פוגעין בו”—**one who cohabits with an Aramis (a non-Jewish woman), zealots may kill him**—is categorized as a halachah that is not explicitly carried out. As we learn in the Gemara (ibid.): “אמר רב חסדא, הבא לימלך אין מורין לו. איתמר גמי אמר רבה בר בר חנה” **Rav Chisda said: If one comes to seek counsel**—as to whether or not to carry out this halachah by killing the sinner—**they (the judges) do not instruct him to do so. It was also said: Rabbah bar Chanah said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: If one comes to seek counsel**—regarding this halachah—**the judges do not instruct him to do so.** Rashi explains that this halachah only applies to a zealot who acts spontaneously and independently without seeking the counsel of Beis Din. For, if he hesitates and seeks counsel, he is not instructed to kill the sinner; and if he does, his act is punishable.

Let us summarize. Initially, when Yisrael sinned by acting promiscuously with the daughters of Moav, Moshe did not recall the halachah that he himself taught when he came down from Har Sinai—namely, that a zealot is permitted to kill one who cohabits with an Aramis. In reality, even if he had remembered the halachah, he would not have been able to instruct the judges to kill the perpetrators. For, this halachah only applies to a zealot of Hashem, who acts promptly without seeking counsel.

This explains very nicely why Moshe Rabeinu instructed the judges: “**Each of you must execute his men who were attached to Ba’al Peor.**” Although their promiscuous behavior with the daughters of Moav constituted a serious transgression, he could not instruct the judges to kill them. Only Pinchas was permitted to do so, because he reacted zealously of his own accord to avenge the honor of Hashem. Regarding the avodah zarah of Ba’al Peor, however, Yisrael were warned explicitly at Har Sinai (Shemos 20, 3): “**לא יהיה לך—there shall not be unto you the gods of others before Me.** Hence, they rightfully deserved the death penalty for worshipping avodah zarah.

Nevertheless, we must still endeavor to explain the text in parshas Pinchas (Bamidbar 25, 16): “**וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר, צרור את המדיינים והכיתם אותם, כי צוררים הם לכם בנכליהם אשר נכלו לכם על דבר פעור ועל דבר כזבי בת נשיא מדין אחותם המוכה ביום המגפה על Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: “Antagonize the Midianites and smite them; for they antagonized you through their conspiracy that they conspired against you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, daughter of a Midianite prince, their sister, who was slain on the day of the plague, in the matter of Peor.”** Note that HKB”H only mentions the transgression involving Peor.

Similarly, in parshas Vaeschanan, it is written (Devarim 4, 3): “**עיניכם הרואות את אשר עשה ה' בבעל פעור, כי כל האיש אשר הלך אחרי: בעל פעור השמידו ה' אלקיך מקרבך, ואתם הדבקים בה' אלקיכם חיים כולכם. Your eyes have witnessed what Hashem did to Ba'al Peor. For, every man that followed Ba'al Peor, Hashem, your G-d, destroyed him from your midst. But you who cling to Hashem, your G-d, you are all alive today.** Note that once again HKB”H only mentions the transgression related to Ba'al Peor. This clearly deserves further explanation. For, while it is true that the sin of avodah zarah was more serious than the transgression with the daughters of Moav; still, the latter was also a serious transgression and deserved mention. After all, the halachah dictates that zealots may kill those guilty of this sin.

### Had They Eaten Only the Mahn They Would Not Have Worshipped Peor

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing a fascinating insight presented by the great Gaon Chida in Simchas HaRegel on the Pesach Haggadah, in the name of a great scholar, Rabbi Yaakov Sasson, ztz”l. He investigates why the Moabite women invited the men of Yisrael to eat from the offerings to their gods before enticing them to worship the avodah zarah of Ba’al Peor. Recall the passuk cited above: “**They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods; the people ate and bowed to their gods. Yisrael became attached to Baal Peor.**”

To explain the matter, he refers to the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 60b). There, we learn the nature of the avodah zarah of Ba’al Peor: “**הפוער עצמו לבעל פעור זו היא עבודתה**”—worshipping Ba’al Peor involved defecating in the presence of the idol. Now, with regards to the “mahn,” the Gemara (Yoma 75b) teaches

us that it was called (Tehillim 78, 25): **“לחם אבירים - לחם שנבלע”**—**“abirim bread,” bread that was completely absorbed by all 248 limbs.** (Translator’s note: This is the second interpretation in the Gemara; the Hebrew term for limbs is “eivarim.”) As such, no waste was produced and nothing was eliminated from the body.

This raises an obvious question. If no waste resulted from the consumption of the “mahn,” how did Yisrael worship the avodah zarah of Ba’al Peor? Therefore, the daughters of Moav cleverly invited them to first feast with them and partake of the sacrifices offered to their gods. After consuming normal food that was not absorbed by their limbs, they produced bodily waste and: **“ויצמד ישראל לבעל פעור”**—they were able to worship the avodah zarah of Peor. This is his beautiful insight.

It behooves us to mention the question the Gemara poses (ibid.). If the “mahn” was thoroughly absorbed in their limbs, why was it necessary to command them (Devarim 23, 14): **“ויתד תהיה לך על אזנך”**—**you shall have a shovel in addition to your weaponry . . .** and you shall cover your excrement? This clearly indicates that they did excrete bodily waste. The Gemara answers: **“דברים שתגרי אומות העולם מוכרין אותן להם”**--they also consumed food **items that the merchants of the nations of the world sold them.** We learn from the Gemara that in addition to the “mahn,” Yisrael ate items that they purchased from travelling merchants. That being the case, they could have worshipped Ba’al Peor even without partaking of the Moabites’ feast to their gods.

### **HKB”H Sent Mahn Down to Yisrael to Sanctify Them and Save Them from Ba’al Peor**

We will now attempt to reconcile the explanation of the tzaddik cited by the Chida. First, we will suggest a novel rationale regarding the “mahn,” which HKB”H provided for Yisrael in the midbar. It is written (Shemos 16, 4): **“ויאמר ה' אל: משה הנני ממוטיר לכם לחם מן השמים, ויצא העם ולקטו דבר יום ביומו למען”**—**Hashem said to Moshe, “Behold! I will rain down for you bread from heaven; and the people shall go out and gather enough for each day, so that I may test him, whether he will follow My Torah or not.”**

We can posit that HKB”H witnessed the power of the tumah of Ba’al Peor that the Moabites employed to bring down Yisrael prior to their entering Eretz Yisrael. Hence, HKB”H provided

them with a remedy before they encountered the affliction. He provided the “mahn” for Yisrael, which was absorbed entirely in their limbs, not resulting in any bodily excrement. Seeing as it was bread from the heavens, from the source of the supreme kedushah, anyone who consumed it, sanctified his entire body in the process. As a result, he would be able to withstand the klipah of Ba’al Peor, whose worship required the excretion of bodily waste. This applied even to the food they purchased from the merchants of the other nations.

The daughters of Moav, however, intended to cause Yisrael’s downfall with the avodah zarah of Peor. Therefore, they cleverly fed them from the feast to their gods, which contaminated them with a tumah akin to the tumah of the dead, as it is written (Tehillim 106, 28): **“ויצמדו לבעל פעור”**—**they attached themselves to Ba’al Peor and ate the sacrifices of the dead.** Thus, they corrupted the kedushah imparted by the “mahn”; consequently, they worshipped the avodah zarah of Ba’al Peor. This then is the meaning of the passuk: **“They attached themselves to Ba’al Peor.”** So, why didn’t the kedushah of the “mahn” protect them? The passuk answers that it is because they: **“Ate the sacrifices of the dead.”**

Now, in parshas Pinchas, Rashi teaches us (Bamidbar 26, 13): **All of the 24,000 that perished (in the plague) were from the shevet of Shimon.** Accordingly, we can comprehend why all of Yisrael, with the exception of shevet Shimon, maintained their kedushah and refrained from worshipping Ba’al Peor. Due to the consumption of the “mahn,” they were not seduced or enticed to eat from the feast to the gods of Moav. This enabled them to maintain their level of kedushah. Shevet Shimon, however, followed the example and advice of their prince, Zimri ben Salu; they were persuaded to partake of the feast to their gods; thus, they fell prey to the avodah zarah of Peor.

### **Moshe Rabeinu Was Buried Opposite the Temple of Peor to Abolish It with His Kedushah**

It is with great pleasure that we can use this information to explain why the “mahn” fell for Yisrael on account of Moshe Rabeinu. As the Gemara explains (Ta’anis 9a): **“שלשה פרנסים טובים עמדו לישראל, אלו הן, משה ואהרן ומרים, ושלוש מתנות טובות ניתנו על דם, ואלו הן, באר וענן ומן, באר בזכות מרים, עמוד ענן בזכות אהרן, מן בזכות משה.”** **Three preeminent leaders arose for Yisrael. They**



This highlights the great humility of HKB”H. Despite these reshaim’s total disregard for the honor of HKB”H, He tolerated the affront. The avodah zarah of Peor wished to demonstrate the same degree of humility; its worshippers could defecate and relieve themselves in its presence, and it did not mind. This, however, was a false display, because the klipah does not possess true humility. On the contrary, it is proud and wishes to show that it, too, possesses humility.

Therefore, HKB”H buried Moshe in the gorge opposite the temple of Peor. For, as the Torah attests, Moshe Rabeinu was the paradigm of humility (Bamidbar 12, 3): **”והאיש משה עניו מאד מכל—now, the man, Moshe, was exceedingly humble—more so than any other man on the face of the earth!** Thus, his kedushah and true humility subdued the false humility of Ba’al Peor. Hence, when Ba’al Peor sees Moshe’s grave, it retreats and sinks back into the earth.

### The Imminent Danger of Ba’al Peor in Every Generation

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to elaborate on his sacred words. It is vital that we comprehend the threat the avodah zarah of Ba’al Peor poses in each and every generation—so much so that we require the presence of Moshe’s gravesite to rescue us. Let us return to the passuk: **”ויגבל צור ישועתו”—and he degraded the Rock of his salvation.** Rashi comments that this passuk alludes to the vision the malach showed Yechezkel—people with their backs facing the Heichal of Hashem, defecating and dishonoring Hashem. It behooves to explain why HKB”H saw fit to mention the absurd behavior of several demented individuals.

Nevertheless, with the utmost reverence and devotion, let us suggest a tenable explanation. In truth, this passuk alludes to every Jew who falls into the clutches of the yetzer hara, chas v’shalom. Due to its unholy influence, a Jew fulfills his heart’s desire instead of the will of HKB”H. In Likutei Amarim (end of Chapter 24), the author of the Tanya describes how the divine soul enters a state of galus when a Jew sins:

**It (the divine soul) remains faithful to the Blessed One, even at the time when the sin is committed, except that it is then in a state of veritable “galus,” as it were, within the animal soul of the forces of evil, which causes the body to sin and drags it down with it into the depths of hell, far**

**down beneath the defilement of the forces of evil and the klipah of avodah-zarah—may G-d save us! What greater exile can there be than this—it is a plunge from a high roof to a deep pit . . . It is analogous to one who seizes the king’s head, pulls it down and dips his face in a lavatory full of feces. For, there is no greater outrage, even if he does it only for a moment. For, as we know, the klipos and the forces of evil are called “vomit and feces.”**

According to our sacred sefarim, when a person serves Hashem, he is described as facing towards HKB”H, as it is written (Eichah 2, 19): **”שפכי כמים לבך נוכח פני ה’—pour out your heart like water before Hashem.** Conversely, when a person acts in opposition to the will of Hashem, he is described as turning away from Hashem, with his backside toward Hashem. Thus, when he satisfies his heart’s desires with forbidden things—described as “vomit and feces”—it is comparable to exposing his backside to HKB”H, may G-d help us!

We can now appreciate the profundity of Rashi’s comment related to the passuk: **”וישמון ישורון ויבעט שמנות עבית כשית ויטוש”**—**אלוק עשהו ויגבל צור ישועתו.** He said that this passuk is alluding to the vision the malach showed Yechezkel—the vision of people turning their backs to the Heichal of Hashem. For, in truth, this passuk is talking about every Jew that abandons the ways of the Torah. By so doing, he is turning away from HKB”H and turning his backside toward the Heichal; it is as if he is exposing himself indecently to HKB”H.

**“If you commit a sin, how do you affect Him?  
And if your sins are many,  
what are you doing to Him?”**

Following this line of reasoning, let us delve deeper into the subject. It is written (Iyov 35, 6): **”אם חטאת מה תפעל בו, ורבו פשעיך: אם חטאת מה תתן לו או מה מידך יקח”—if you commit a sin, how do you affect Him? And if your sins are many, what are you doing to Him? If you are righteous, what do you give Him? Or what would He even take from your hand?** According to these pesukim, the defect does not affect HKB”H whatsoever. In a similar vein, the divine poet, in the Shir HaYichud (Tuesday) proclaims: **”כל טינופת לא יטנפוך”—no filth will defile You.** This, however, poses a risk. For, if a person’s sin has no ill effect on Hashem, he might think that there is no reason for him to refrain from committing an aveirah.

This, however, would be a terrible mistake. Yes, the Almighty, King of Kings, cannot be harmed or blemished. Yet, it is His will that we observe all of the mitzvos for our own good. Therefore, if a person does not act according to His will, it constitutes a huge blemish and insult to Hashem's honor. As we have learned in the Mishnah (Avos 6, 12): "כל מה שברא" הקב"ה בעולמו, לא בראו אלא לכבודו, שנאמר כל הנקרא בשמי ולכבודי בראתיו יצרתיו אף עשיתיו." **All that HKB"H created in His world, He created solely for His glory, as it states** (Yeshayah 43, 7): **"All that is called by My name, indeed, it is for My glory that I have created it, formed it and made it."** The Mishnah teaches us that while it is impossible to harm HKB"H Himself; nevertheless, it is forbidden to tarnish the honor of Heaven by violating His will.

We can now begin to comprehend the amazing connection between the sin of worshipping Ba'al Peor and the sin of promiscuity with the daughters of Moav. The act of defecation in front of the idol Ba'al Peor is aimed at creating the false belief that a true, humble god does not care if a person behaves like an animal—satisfying his heart's desires that represent vomit and excrement. It does not matter if he turns away from Hashem and turns his backside toward the Heichal of Hashem. After all, all the filth in the world cannot sully Him.

Thus, we can appreciate why HKB"H mentions primarily the avodah zarah of Peor. For, it is the source and essence of all the transgressions throughout the generations. As it is written: **"Is the sin of Peor not enough for us, from which we have not been purified to this day?!"** Due to our countless sins, this avodah zarah still frolics among us. The yetzer hara disguises itself as the avodah zarah of Ba'al Peor to deceive man into thinking that he can do whatever he pleases. To prove its point, it distorts the message of the passuk: **"If you commit a sin, how do you affect Him? And if your sins are many, what are you doing to Him? If you are righteous, what do you give Him? Or what would He even take from your hand?"**

Therefore, HKB"H provided a remedy ahead of the ailment; He preempted the influence of Ba'al Peor by burying Moshe Rabeinu opposite its site of worship. As the agent of HKB"H, he transmitted the Torah to us. In it, Yisrael were commanded to sanctify themselves by performing all of the 248 mitzvos aseh and observing all of the 365 mitzvos lo ta'aseh. As such, it is within his power to prevail over Yisrael in every generation not to be tempted or misled by the false doctrine of Ba'al Peor.

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