

## WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?

### PARSHAS MATOS-MASEI

The **Talmud** (Kiddushin 81A) brings a fascinating story.

*Rabbi Amram the pious, arranged to redeem Jewish women who had been captured (see **Rashi**). The women were brought to Rabbi Amram's attic. The ladder to the attic was removed to protect the women from men climbing up to them. **Ben Yehodaya** says that while Rabbi Amram was learning Torah the Satan caused a light to shine from the skylight. The **Talmud** continues that Rabbi Amram looked up and saw the form of one of the captive women. Rabbi Amram felt a desire for her. Although the ladder to the attic was so heavy that it took 10 men to move, Rabbi Amram, in the heat of passion, grabbed the ladder himself and began climbing. When he was halfway up the ladder, he regained control over his passion and screamed out loud, "There is a fire in the house of Amram." The sages heard the shouts and came running. By drawing the sages to his house, Rabbi Amram wisely saved himself from the Satan's entrapment.*

***Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel** zt"l, former Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir was being brought to a doctor's appointment in Manhattan. He was helped out of the car and put in a wheelchair. He had Parkinsons disease and movements were difficult. Despite that, he painstakingly lifted his hands to remove his glasses while he was pushed the few blocks to the doctor's office. Once inside, he put back his glasses. He wanted to protect himself from seeing any inappropriate sights.*

Using Bilaam's very elaborate plan the Moavites and Midianites enticed Bnei Yisroel to sin. As a result, 24,000 Jews died in a plague. Following Hashem's command, Moshe Rabbeinu sent an army to battle the Midianites to punish them. **Rashi** (25:18) explains why Moshe was not commanded to also go to war with the Moavites. It was to save a future descendant of Moav. Rus the Moavite, would be the foremother of the dynasty of King David. Only 12,000 Jews actually went to battle. (Others were sent to daven and to be in charge of supplies.) The Jews were victorious. In addition to taking booty, the Jewish soldiers took thousands of Midianites as prisoners of war. **Rabbeinu Bachya** says that considering the large number of prisoners taken, one can imagine how many adult Midianite males fought in this war. Even though there were so many more Midianite soldiers than Jewish soldiers, the Jews won the war! **Rabbeinu Bachya** says that this was a remarkable miracle. In fact, he says that it may be considered one of the greatest miracles amongst all the miracles which were performed for the Jewish people ever.

*"And they [the army officers] said to Moshe. 'Your servants have taken a census of the soldiers who went out to war and not one of us is missing. We have therefore brought an offering for Hashem....'"  
(Bamidbar 31:49-50)*

After the battle, the military officers told Moshe, "Your servants have counted the heads of the warriors entrusted to us and not a single man is missing." (Bamidbar 31:49). Thousands and thousands of Midianites were killed. Yet, the Jews did not sustain even one single casualty!

**Rashi** (31:3) says that the reason why this miracle occurred was that every

one of these 12,000 soldiers was a righteous individual.

**Gur Aryeh** adds that these men had *Yiras Elokim*, fear of Hashem.

The officers brought an offering to Hashem consisting of the booty that they had captured. "Any man who found a gold article; an anklet or a bracelet, a ring, earring or clasp [has dedicated it for Hashem]." (Bamidbar 31:50).

When Moshe heard that not one soldier was killed, he asked the officers why they specifically brought an offering to Hashem. The **Talmud** (Shabbos 64A) explains that Moshe asked them if the reason that they brought this offering to Hashem was because they sinned with the women of Midian. It was the custom among the

gentiles that when they went to war, the women would adorn themselves and would attempt to entice the opposing army. Moshe wondered if these Jewish soldiers succumbed to temptation. According to the **Talmud**, the officers answered, “*not one of us is missing*”. They were saying that that not one of them was guilty of a sin.

So, why did they bring an offering to Hashem? They told Moshe that it was to atone for impure thoughts. These soldiers were so righteous that they withstood the temptation to sin with the Midianite women. However, their thoughts were not totally pure since they had thought of sinning with these women. Therefore, they wanted to bring an offering to Hashem as an atonement. We can learn from this something important about human nature as well as what Hashem expects from us. The allure of women can be so strong that even a righteous person is not immune from possibly harboring sinful thoughts. No human is above this. This is the reason for the law of *yichud*, that a man should not be alone in a room with a woman. One must always be very careful not to be in situations where the very strong *yetzer hara* will try to entice him to sin. Just as important, if not more so, we see that a sin is not limited to actions. We are so holy and pristine that even inappropriate thoughts are also considered sins! In fact, sinful thoughts may even be worse in the sense that when one harbors sinful thoughts, they often don't do away so quickly. Thus, this sin is magnified as it continues the entire time that one has these thoughts!

There are other thoughts that are also not permitted. Some examples are prideful thoughts, heretical thoughts, jealous thoughts, harboring a grudge, desiring

something that someone else has, and not trusting in Hashem. Isn't it very hard to control our thoughts? Yes, it certainly is! Is it impossible? Certainly not! Hashem never expects something from us that we cannot do! Our job in this world is to take ourselves, imperfect people, and perfect ourselves as much as we can. The reward for our efforts is immeasurable! We may not always be successful. We may fail at times. Yet, Hashem values our efforts in attempting to do the best that we can.

**Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Rotenberg**, the first rebbe of Gur, in his commentary, **Chidushei haRim**, (as quoted in Talelei Oros by Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rubin) points out something very interesting. The Torah does not record the offerings that the officers brought as soon as they returned from their victorious battle. Rather, the Torah records it later, after the soldiers were instructed how to *kasher*, to purify, the vessels that were taken as spoils of water. Why did the officers wait until this point to bring their offerings and not immediately after returning from battle?

**Chidushei HaRim** says that initially they did not think that they had to bring an offering to atone just for having sinful thoughts. They only realized it after Moshe commanded them to purify the vessels that had belonged to the Midianites. The Midianite vessels were clean, and no prohibited food was noticeable. Yet, the vessels had to be purified from the taste which was absorbed inside. Now the officers realized that although they had not actively sinned, their insides also had to remain pure. Since they had sinful thoughts, their insides needed to be purified. That is why they brought their offering to Hashem at this time.

**The Satan is constantly attacking us to entice us to sin. We can strengthen ourselves, somewhat, when we become aware of some of the Satan's wiles. One of his tricks is to try to inflame our passions for inappropriate relations with women. If we overcome those difficult challenges, then the Satan tries to get us to visualize each step of the sin. Thinking inappropriate thoughts is also a sin! We have to work very hard to protect ourselves from the Satan. May Hashem give us the wisdom and the strength to do so.**

Sponsored In Memory of: Mindel Adina bat Natan Zvi; Shmuel ben Eliezer Lipa; Shirley Shaindel Yaffa bat Yehuda Shmuel; Hadassah bas Yaakov; Faiga bat Pinchas; Yaakov ben Yeshayahu; Gershon ben Hillel; Gita bat Gershon; Rav Chaim Dov Weissmandl ben Rav Yoseph; Shraga Fayvel Leb ben Shmuel Abraham; Moshe ben Yitzchok; Sarah Vital bas Avrohom Yitzchok; R' Yisroel ben R' Yaakov; Risha Toiba bas R' Gershon, Zichronam Livracha.

*Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.*

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