

§4 **צָרַר אֶת הַמִּדְיָנִים – “OPPRESS THE MIDIANITES AND SMITE THEM; FOR THEY ARE OPRESSORS TO YOU, ETC.”**

The Midrash expounds upon the reason for this command:

לָמָּה – God told Moses, “Oppress the Midianites and smite them. Why?” – “כִּי צָרִים הֵם לָכֶם” – *For they are oppressors to you.*^[8b]
 From here the Sages derived: If someone comes to kill you, anticipate him to kill him first.

The Midrash cites a related teaching:

R' Shimon – ר' שמעון אומר: מִיָּן שֶׁמִּתְחַטֵּא אֶת הָאָדָם יוֹתֵר מִן הַחֹרֵגוֹ says: From where do we know that one who causes a person to sin is worse than one who kills him, שֶׁהַחֹרֵג הֹרֵגוֹ בְּעוֹלָם – for one who kills, kills him in this world and [the victim] has a portion in the World to Come, וְיֵשׁ לוֹ חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא – whereas one who causes him to sin kills him in this world and in the World to Come

1

מִדְיָנִים כְּכֹכֶם

2

ר' חיים פלטיאל במדבר פרשת פינחס פרק כה פסוק יז

צָרַר אֶת הַמִּדְיָנִים. תלמודא דריש מהכא גדול מחטא האדם יותר מההורגו, ונראה דהא דהקפיד על המדיינים יותר ממואב משום דמואבים עשו כדי להציל עצמם אבל מדיינים נתעברו על ריב לא להם.

3

הזקוני במדבר פרשת מטות פרק לא פסוק טז

דבר בלעם למסר מעל שהרי מתוך דבריו של בלעם שאמר לא הביט און ביעקב למדו להחטיאם.

4

And the meaning of *through their conspiracy* is as I have explained previously (above, on 25:1), i.e., that it was the elders of Midian who devised this evil plot, – כמו שאמר “וַיֹּאמֶר מוֹאָב אֶל זִקְנֵי מִדְיָן” – as [Scripture] stated concerning Moab’s reaction to the impending Israelite threat, *And Moab said to the elders of Midian* (above, 22:4), – which indicates that [the Moabites] initially consulted with the elders of [Midian]. And [the Midianites] gave this

advice to Moab, viz., that their daughters should act promiscuously with [the Israelites], and thereby cause them to become attached to Baal-peor, – even though [this] detail is not mentioned there, in Scripture’s account of that episode.⁹

[Ramban notes that our verse provides further grounds for Midian’s culpability:]

And Scripture adds further that they are liable because they themselves dispatched their king’s daughter to [the Israelites] to commit harlotry with them. – And this is the import of the phrase, *in the matter of Cozbi, daughter of the leader of Midian, their sister*, – for if [this] had not been done with the knowledge and consent of the Midianite royal counselors, – what would an “honorable, indoor princess”¹⁰ of Midian be seeking in Shittim, in the plains of Moab, going into the encampment of another nation? – For the Israelites at that time were encamped in the plains of Moab, in Shittim,¹¹ – and from where¹² should this Midianite woman come there? – It must be, however, that [Cozbi] was of exceedingly beautiful appearance, – and the elders of Midian dispatched her there, – for they said among themselves, “By the appearance of a beautiful woman many have been destroyed” (Yevamos 63b, from Ben Sira).

Ramban
 כְּכֹכֶם
 י"ב

5

1. כלי יקר במדבר פרשת פינחס פרק כה פסוק יז

צרור את המדינים וגו'. ולא צוה לצרור המואבים לפי שנאמר (במדבר כה א) ויחל העם לזנות אל בנות מואב, מהו ויחל אלא כך פירושו שישראל היו המתחילין ותובעים את בנות מואב והלכו להם לאוהליהם ותובעים את הנשים ומפתים אותם, לכך נאמר ויחל העם כי העם היו המתחילין ולא בנות מואב, לכך נאמר אל בנות מואב ולא נאמר עם בנות מואב אלא שבא להורות שישראל הלכו אליהם אבל מואב לא שלחו נשותיהם ובנותיהם אל ישראל, על כן לא נתחייבו מואב כי המתחיל בקלקלה הוא העיקר ובו תלוי החטא. אבל במדינים היה הדבר בהיפך, שאדרבה המדינים הפקירו את בנותיהם שתבעו את ישראל לזנות.

6

"If I say: My foot slippeth, Thy mercy, O Lord, holdeth me up" (Psalms 94, 18). When Israel received the Torah, the nations of the world were envious. They said, why have they been privileged to come closer to God than all the other nations? The Holy One blessed be He silenced them by saying: Bring Me your family trees. Bring to the Lord the families of the peoples (cf. Psalms 96) the same as My children bring, as it is said: "And they declared their pedigrees after their families . . .". Therefore He numbered them at the beginning of the book after he gave them the commandments: "These are the commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel in Mount Sinai" (Leviticus 27, 34). They merited the gift of the Torah

only on account of their pedigrees. "A garden shut up is my sister, my bride . . . My dove . . . is but one" (Song of Songs 4, 12; 6, 9). When the nations heard (of the purity of Israel's family life) they too joined in the praises. But when the Israelites came to Shittim "And the people began to commit harlotry" (Numbers 25, 1) the nations rejoiced, saying: Gone is that crown which they possessed, gone is that attribute for which they were praised. They are equal to us. When they (the Israelites) came to their downfall, the Omnipotent lifted them up, as it is said "If I say: My foot slippeth, Thy mercy, O Lord, holdeth me up". The Omnipotent smote all who committed misconduct and then restored them to their former purity.
(Yalkut Shimoni)