

# Recapture the Flag!

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The Jewish people have never lacked enemies. Just as we are attacked today by terrorists, so too, in the days of Moses, our enemies constantly schemed and planned our destruction. However, in the days of Moses, our nation was one worthy of prophecy – ours was a nation that witnessed the Ten Plagues in Egypt and the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Because of our elevated spiritual status, our enemies were not brazen enough to attack us in a conventional way, but were cunning enough to realize that they must threaten the spiritual core of our people.

“The God of the Jews despises *zima* (immorality)” (*Sanhedrin* 106a). The Midianites were intelligent. They understood that the trademark of the Jew – *brit milah* – demonstrates the holy nature of our people. We are a people who cherish life, who use our sensual desires to promote family life. Sensuality is the strongest drive we possess; by focusing this in a kosher and dignified way, we sanctify our greatest passion before God. This area of holiness is our spiritual battlefield.

The Midianites, like most of our enemies, had little self-regard for their own. They sent out their daughters as harlots to seduce Jewish men. Zimri ben Salu, one of the princes of the Tribe of Simeon, was discovered together with the king's daughter, Kozbi. The Midianites' hatred was so great that they were willing to use the king's daughter to entrap us!

We were deeply wounded in battle; the enemy captured our flag. But God never abandons us. When we left the spiritual waste pit of Egypt, we were counted. After the sin of the golden calf, we were counted. Now, too, God commanded Moses, "Take a head-count of the entire assembly of Israel ... all of those who go out to the army of Israel." God was teaching us how to be inducted into the army of Israel and how to reclaim our spirit: We must count every single Jew, we must find what makes each one of us special.

By reading the Torah, we could mistakenly think that our ancestors were bad people. God forbid! Generally speaking, they were great Tzaddikim, much greater than us – but the Torah is teaching us to realize that we all err, and we all fall. But we can change and grow; we can defeat our enemies.

Each of us has tried so many times to change, only to fall right back down a short time later. The reason we are stuck is because we judge ourselves negatively. Our lack of progress and constant retreats confuse us into seeing our essence as bad and flawed. Our actions and thoughts are a mixture of good and bad, but our essence, our *neshamah*, is completely good and pure.

The secret to change is learning to identify ourselves by our *neshamos*. We have to realize who we really are. By discovering our good points and thanking God for them, we begin the process of finally transforming ourselves.

Dramatic progress is almost never experienced immediately. Therefore we need to find the little things, the things we

might make light of, and feel happiness because of them. That smile that we shared with someone ... those few words of prayer that we concentrated on saying ... that temptation that we pushed away even for a few seconds. These are reflections of our *neshamah*. We must recognize them, identify ourselves with them, and feel great joy and gratitude for them. Rebbe Nachman said, "A little bit of light dispels a lot of darkness." By connecting to our good and our *neshamos*, we are capable of restoring our dignified selves and recapturing our flag.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Nesiyat Kapayim 5:14*

*A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!*

***Image***

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