

“AND HASHEM SAID TO ME, ‘DON’T DISTRESS MOAV AND DON’T PROVOKE WAR WITH THEM...’” (DEVARIM 2:9)

Would Moshe have started a war on his own initiative?

HASHEM CAUTIONED MOSHE to not wage war with the nation of Moav, since Rus and the dynasty of Dovid HaMelech were destined to descend from Moav. The Gemara (Bava Kama 38a) asks: Why was this warning necessary? Would Moshe have started a war on his own initiative, without Hashem’s explicit command? Even without a warning, there wouldn’t have been any war. The Gemara answers that Moshe made a *kal v’chomer* – a logical deduction – that war with Moav was appropriate: If we were commanded to destroy Midyan, who merely assisted Moav with their plan to have the Jews sin with Ba’al Peor, then certainly we must destroy the Moabite nation that hired Bilaam and set the whole plan in motion! Therefore, Hashem needed to give this warning to counteract this deduction. Tosfos, however, raises a difficulty with this understanding: This warning to not battle Moav was given well before they even hired Bilaam. Moshe could not have made this *kal v’chomer* yet! So why did Hashem prevent a *kal v’chomer* that wasn’t yet possible? Tosfos answers that Hashem knew that Moshe would make that deduction in the future. In order to preempt Moshe’s reasoning, Hashem made the matter clear even before it was necessary.

Hashem, however, has no such concerns

Why would Hashem need to preempt Moshe’s reasoning? Granted, human beings might need to anticipate the need and make a statement earlier, because mortal, flesh and blood people can never be certain they will be available, or even alive, at a later point when it becomes necessary to correct a flawed reasoning. Hashem, however, has no such concerns; why couldn’t He wait, since He would always have the chance to tell Moshe later when the *kal v’chomer* became a reality? We must answer that Hashem warned Moshe beforehand so that he could accept the prohibition more firmly and thereby reject any later questions based on this *kal v’chomer*. (Once a concept is already accepted as fact, it is easier to deflect any challenges that may later arise.)

Perhaps a tiny shred of doubt would linger in Moshe’s mind

Still, our question persists: Even if Moshe hadn’t been told earlier, would we possibly think that Moshe would wage a war against the word of Hashem? Is it possible that Hashem will tell Moshe to not battle Moav and Moshe will think that his logical reasoning outweighs that word of Hashem?

Obviously, Moshe would have listened to the command of Hashem. However, perhaps his acceptance of that command would not have been as complete as it should be. Perhaps a tiny shred of doubt would linger in Moshe’s mind as he contemplates his *kal v’chomer*. Hashem wanted to avoid that miniscule touch of doubt. Hashem felt it worthwhile to go out of His way to avoid that infinitesimal lack of wholeheartedness in Moshe’s mind.

This is a very cogent lesson for us in the importance of foreseeing future situations and addressing potential spiritual temptations. If Hashem made a special point of warning Moshe early, just to enable him to accept the prohibition more perfectly, how much effort must we exert to avoid pitfalls and minimize our *neshama’s* exposure to negative influences? As we travel down the highway of this world, let us scan ahead for road hazards, and steer clear of them before we get too close and require more drastic measures. In this manner, we can increase our odds of successfully completing our life’s journey and arriving safely at our ultimate and true destination – the World to Come.