



Shoftim 5773

August 10, 2013

A Taste of Torah Fighting a Different Battle

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

How do you win a war? With more troops? Superior technology? Devoted soldiers, or maybe brilliant generals? To be honest, I don't have much of an opinion on the matter, as I am wholly ignorant of the subject. But I can share what the Torah has to say about winning wars.

In this week's parsha, the Torah discusses how to approach a war. "When you go out to war against your enemy, and you see horse and chariot - a people more numerous than you - you shall not fear them, for Hashem, your G-d, is with you, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt. It shall be that when you draw near to the war, the Kohen shall approach and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel, today you are coming near to the battle against your enemies; let your heart not be faint; do not be afraid, do not panic, and do not be broken before them. For Hashem, your G-d, is the One Who goes with you, to fight for you with your enemies, to save you.'" (Devarim 20:1-4)

Rashi (ibid.:3) points out that the usage of the term "Hear, o Israel" at the start of the Kohen's speech to the soldiers alludes to the twice-daily recitation of Shema, which begins, "Hear, O Israel". The implication, explains Rashi, is that the merit of reciting Shema is sufficient grounds for the Jewish army to achieve victory.

This idea needs some explaining; why is the recitation of Shema singled out more than any other mitzvah? Are there no other mitzvos of equal, if not greater, significance?

The S'fas Emes (Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter [1847-1905]) gives

us a new perspective on the entire discussion. A horse and chariot, he points out, provides transportation for combatants in battle. While not actually part of the soldier, they are a means for the troops to overpower the enemy. A human being is constructed in a similar fashion. The soul is sent down to this world to achieve perfection through performance of G-d's Will. The body is the means for the soul to move about in this world and perform what needs to be done. Thus, the relationship between body and soul mirrors that of horse and warrior.

King David stated in Psalms (20:8), "Some with chariots, and some with horses, but we - in the name of Hashem, our G-d, we call out." The simple meaning of the verse states that while others rely on their military prowess and weaponry, we rely on G-d. On a deeper level, though, King David is conveying that while the rest of the world relies on the physical, the body - the horses and chariots - to win the war, we focus on abnegating the body and making the soul our primary existence. Once we have overcome the body, realizing that the physical is merely an illusory existence, and that G-d ultimately calls the shots, we can rely on Him for victory. Thus, when the Torah speaks of going out to war and seeing the horses and chariots and a huge army, it refers to the physical advantages possessed by the enemy. But the Torah tells us not to fear the physical component of the war, for our battle is ultimately a spiritual one.

When does the nullification of self to G-d's omnipotence occur? When Shema is recited. Shema declares that

Stories For The Soul

A Lesson in Humility

The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan [1838-1933]) was once walking in Radin, the town where he resided, when he heard some people making fun of the "town fool". Apparently, the poor fellow had traveled quite a ways to get to Aisheshuk, a large city, and had returned with nothing but some snuff. "Can you imagine," they laughed, "this fool traveled all the way to Aisheshuk, and came back with nothing but a packet of snuff!"

The Chofetz Chaim, disturbed by the way these people were speaking about another, gently reprimanded them.

"The truth is," he said, "that your soul made a much longer journey to get to this world. And what a pity it would be if your soul returned to Heaven with nothing to show for its trouble! And here you are, spending your time mocking another Jew, a serious transgression. Take heed that you utilize the opportunity of life in this world to acquire as many mitzvos as you can!"

In this week's parsha, the Torah commands that a Jewish king must keep a Torah scroll with him at all times, and must constantly learn from it, to ensure that he will fear Hashem and observe the Torah. And while a king, who can easily grow arrogant and forget Hashem, requires a special reminder, all of us need to constantly remember why we are in this world, and not become haughty due to our apparent material success.

continued on back

Kollel Happenings

A DEEPER LOOK

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights 7:40-8:30 pm at Kollel, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at Aish Denver 8-9 pm.

PARSHA ON THE MALL

Wish you could learn more about the weekly parsha? Looking to add some Torah study and inspiration to your busy day? Join Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher as he explores several parts of the weekly parsha at this exciting and intriguing class. Wednesday from 1-2 pm in downtown Denver at 910 16th St., 2nd floor. Refreshments are served.

LEARN 2 LEARN

You have long dreamed of acquiring the tools to achieve proficiency in learning Gemara on your own. But how? The Denver Community Kollel offers a comprehensive, step-by-step, level-by-level program crafted for people just like you. All you need is the ability to read Hebrew; we will teach you therest. For more information, contact rmf@denverkollel.org.

Interpersonal Issues

The Laws of Lashon Hara (Slander)

If one observed another person engaged in an act that appears to be forbidden, but can equally be construed in a positive light, the observer is obligated to judge the perpetrator favorably.

Ask the Rabbi Seeing Stars

From: Saul Behr in Johannesburg

Dear Rabbi,

Somebody recently came up to me, and gave me unsolicited information about astrology. From a reliable source, with a good history of accuracy, he gave me some tips on the stock market. Am I allowed to act on that information?

Dear Saul,

There's no problem with acting on this unsolicited advice. However,

one should not actively seek out such advice. Rather, a Jew should go about life trusting that G-d will "be there" for him, and not feel the need to know the future.

Note that ultimately, astrology has no bearing on the life of a Jew because "ain mazel b'yisrael ~ the people of Israel transcend astrological influences."

Sources:

Yoreh Deah 179:1

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there is no other power in the world besides G-d Himself. It is the power of Shema that allows the Jewish soldier to hand himself to G-d, and thus be successful in battle.

When all is said and done, Jews don't win at war with great armies and the latest weaponry. Yes, we need to make the necessary natural efforts to

fight a war, but it is through spiritual achievements that G-d grants success to the military exploits of the Jewish People. And when there are Jews providing the spiritual firepower necessary to succeed, we can hope that G-d will be with us. If that is demolished, the outlook is bleak, indeed.