



THE HARRY H. BEREN TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel

Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Parshas Shoftim

August 25, 2017

A Taste of Torah

Fighting for Yourself

by Rabbi Chaim Yeshia Freeman

To fight a war, you need soldiers. While the Torah makes it clear that Hashem battles for the Jewish People, we are nonetheless required to put in our effort and assemble an army. In this week's parsha, the Torah discusses who must go to war and who stays away from the battlefield. There are three groups of people listed who are exempt from going to battle because of upcoming life events: someone who betrothed a woman but did not yet complete the marriage; someone who planted a vineyard and did not yet eat the fruits of the fourth year (the first three years' fruit after a tree is planted are forbidden due to the *orlah* prohibition, but the fruits of the fourth year are to be consumed in Jerusalem or redeemed onto money and consumed anywhere); and someone who built a house and did not yet live in it.

Why are these things a valid reason to abstain from going to battle? The Ramban explains that when a person is emotionally preoccupied with dreaming of his future, he cannot be expected to focus on the battle at hand. Rashi, though, explains that the Torah does not want to place a person in a position where he may never live to see his nearly-fulfilled dreams come to fruition.

What is often overlooked is the idea expressed by the Torah as it describes the reasoning to exempt these three groups. The verse says that there is a concern lest the person die in war and another man will take his place in finalizing one of these three life goals. This is a strange notion; why is the Torah describing the worry of someone

else enjoying this person's efforts as opposed to simply focusing on this individual himself not being around to enjoy his upcoming experiences?

There are two ways to resolve this problem. The first approach is that the Torah is teaching us the lowliness of a human being. This is inferred from the fact that despite the imminent danger to a soldier's life, coupled with the disappointment of never realizing the goals that are close at hand, the thing that occupies a person's thoughts above all else is that somebody else will take what should have been his. The Torah is taking note of the reality of so many people; the default human condition is that we will not enjoy life when others take what we perceive as ours.

The second approach is the exact opposite; the Torah is showing us the loftiness of a human being. Rabbi Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) points out, based on a Talmudic passage (Sotah 6a), that the "another man" mentioned in the verse refers to someone who will not use these possessions or build a family in a way that the Torah desires. Despite the fact that this person is in danger of dying and never living his life's dreams, his focus is only that his family or possessions end up in good hands and not in the hands of someone who will not properly utilize them in the service of G-d.

These two approaches are both true. The natural tendency of humans is to be focused largely and primarily on themselves and only themselves. People often have a hard time with others outside of their personal circle

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Stories For The Soul

One-Liner

A learned miser once came to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1809) with a halachic question regarding the permissibility of a certain business transaction. Rav Levi Yitzchak ruled that the proposed business transaction was forbidden, much to the man's chagrin. He immediately began arguing the ruling, offering all sorts of reasons why it should be permitted.

Rav Levi Yitzchak cut the man off and told him, "Our Sages teach us that the Hebrew word for a bribe, *shochad*, is a contraction of the words 'shehu chad,' 'that they are one,' for the two men (the giver and the recipient) are linked through the bribe. Thanks to the bribe, the judge identifies with the litigant so strongly that even if the man is in the wrong, he will not see it - he is simply incapable of seeing the truth. "That is what has happened to you!" continued Rav Levi Yitzchak. "You are so infatuated by your money, you identify with it to such a large extent, that it does not allow you to see the wrong from the right! Anything that will affect your wealth will cause you to insist it must be fine, even if it means permitting all types of prohibitions!"

The Torah tells us to appoint judges in our gates, and that they, among other things, cannot accept a bribe of any sort. The commentators point out that the judges discussed allude to a personal obligation of ensuring that we judge our actions, - and part of that obligation is avoiding that which sways our personal judgement, as well.

Kollel Happenings

SYMBOLIC FOODS PLATTER FOR ROSH HASHANA

There is a widespread Rosh Hashana custom to eat simanim, foods that symbolize a good year. The Denver Community Kollel is proud to offer a simanim platter containing 10 items presaging a sweet, new year. For more info, or to order yours for just \$25, email info@denverkollel.org, visit the Kollel website at www.denverkollel.org, or call 303-820-2855. Be sure to leave method of payment and contact information. **Order deadline: September 10th.**

LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING THIS LABOR DAY

Start your day off on the right foot with Torah study! Join the Kollel for learning at three locations around Denver: At the Kollel West Denver Bais Medrash and Aish Denver, shacharis at 8 am followed by breakfast and learning, and at EDOS, shacharis at 7:30 followed by breakfast and learning.

RULES OF WARFARE ENGAGEMENT AT SEP. 6TH TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Chaim Shmuel Stitzer, Captain, United States Air Force, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they fight for the truth the Torah offers for proper wartime conduct. September 6th, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: Many details of Shabbos follow themes of twos and/or doubles. Can you name customs of twos?

A: 1. The two challahs used for *hamotzi* at each meal. It is interesting to note that if one eats extra non-required meals on Shabbos or Yom Tov, two challahs are still used for each meal (Rema Orach Chaim 291:4). 2. Although not halachically

required, a minimum of two candles are customarily lit on Friday evening (Orach Chaim 263:1). 3. There is a kabbalistic custom, based on a Gemara (Shabbos 33b), to use two twigs, or two bundles, of *hadas* (myrtle) on Friday night.

This week's question: Can you name items of doubles associated with Shabbos?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel – the Mordechai Part IV

After destroying the Jewish community of Rottingen, Rindfleisch and his mob went from town to town attacking Jewish communities. The new emperor was not powerful enough to put down the mob, and the local populace usually did little or nothing to stop the marauders.

The murderous mob attacked Nuremberg, but the Jews there sought refuge in the local fortress. Local Christians there sought to assist the Jews in defending themselves against the onslaught, but Rindfleisch overpowered them. The Rindfleisch mob offered the Jews their lives if they would accept Christianity, but, as was almost always the case in medieval Germany and France, the Jews chose death over conversion. 628 heroic Jews were slaughtered by the bloodthirsty mob on August 1st, 1298 (22 Av). Among the murdered were Rabbi Mordechai, his wife Zelda and their five children.

Rindfleisch had begun his reign of terror

in the German region of Franconia; it spread to Bavaria and Austria, wiping out 146 Jewish communities.

Another notable martyr of the Rindfleisch massacres was Rabbi Meir ben Yekusiel HaKohein of Rothenburg, a peer of Rabbi Mordechai and fellow student of the Maharam MiRuttenberg. Rabbi Meir is the author of the *Hagahos Maimonis* (glosses on the Rambam's *Yad Hachazakah*).

In Bavaria, the Jewish communities of Regensburg and Augsburg escaped the slaughter thanks to protection from the magistrate of their area.

Albrecht eventually defeated Adolf in 1298 and was chosen as king by the nobility. Albrecht ordered an end to the massacres but was initially too weak to enforce his declaration. Later, he did put an end to the massacres, and it is alleged that Rindfleisch was hanged for his crimes.

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having things they themselves do not. However, with proper dedication and focus on improving one's morals, a person can be transformed to focus on more spiritual ideals. Even without completely uprooting one's natural drive for selfishness, simply focusing on spiritual matters rather than

being caught up in this physical world can naturally transform a person. Striving to become the second type of person we have described, living with a greater focus on the spiritual, will allow us to live a much more pleasurable life.

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