

A Taste of Torah

Talk of War

By Rabbi Mordechai E. Fleisher

Looking at the situation in which the Jewish People find themselves today, I am reminded of the fledgling Jewish Nation at the time of the Exodus, as they stood at the Sea of Reeds. With the Egyptian army pursuing them from behind, and the sea in front of them, they were truly stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Once again, we find ourselves caught between two impossible options. To attack those who wish to annihilate us? To sit and wait for the inevitable? Whichever way you spin it, it isn't going to be pretty.

The Jewish People, though, have a unique weapon with which to extricate themselves from impossible situations: prayer. Faster than a speeding missile, more powerful than a nuclear warhead, able to leap straight to the heavens, prayer has always been the weapon of first resort. And the origins of this unparalleled weapon appear in this week's parsha.

Yaakov is commanded by his mother, Rivka, to disguise himself as his wicked brother Eisav and to receive the blessings (which were rightfully Yaakov's, as he had purchased the birthright from Eisav) that his father, Yitzchak, intended for Eisav. As Eisav was a rather hairy individual, and Yaakov was more smooth-skinned, the disguise consisted of goat's skin (hair included), stuck on his arms.

When Yaakov approached his father and spoke to him, Yitzchak, who was blind, requested that Yaakov approach

him so that he could feel his skin. Upon feeling the hair on his arms, Yitzchak declared, "The voice is the voice of Yaakov, and the hands are the hands of Eisav."

Our Sages view this statement as the declaration of the *modus operandi* of Yaakov and Eisav for all time. Yaakov's power lies in his voice; prayer is his primary weapon. Eisav (whose *weltanschauung* is carried on by the Western world) finds his power in his hands; that is, in standard warfare and weaponry.

Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner (1749-1821) takes this idea a step further. It is not merely that Yaakov and Eisav possess an inclination towards this style, he explains, but, rather, this is the only way for Yaakov and Eisav to meet with ultimate success. If the Jewish People rely on standard warfare, and abandon prayer, they will falter; conversely, Eisav is doomed to failure if he attempts to succeed through prayer.

When the Jewish People stood caught at the Sea of Reeds, our Sages tell us that "they grasped the profession of their forefathers" - prayer. With their backs to the wall, Klal Yisroel set the tone for the rest of Jewish history - our success hinges upon our connection with our Father in Heaven. And while we are certainly obligated to expend effort in the political and military realms to advance our interests, it is incumbent upon us to remember that ultimately, our attempts will only bear fruit due to our accomplishments in the spiritual realm.

Stories For The Soul

A Lost Soul Returned

On his way out of shul in Jerusalem, Dan approached a young man in dungarees and a backpack. "Good Shabbos. My name is Dan Eisenblatt. Would you like to eat at my house tonight?"

"Yeah, thanks. My name is Machi," said the boy.

A few minutes later they were standing around Dan's Shabbos table. Dan noticed his guest leafing through his songbook. "Is there a song you want to sing?" asked Dan.

The guest's face lit up. "Yes, but I can't find it. What was it called? Something 'dodi.'"

"You mean Lecha Dodi," said Dan. "Wait, let me get you a siddur."

Once they had sung Lecha Dodi, the young man resumed his silence until after the soup, when Dan asked "Which song now?"

"I'd really like to sing Lecha Dodi again."

Dan was not really all that surprised when, after the chicken, the boy said, "Lecha Dodi, please."

Later Dan asked, "Where are you from?" The boy said softly, "Ramallah."

Dan gasped. "I'm sorry, I'm a bit confused. And I haven't even asked your full name."

"Machmud Ibn-esh-Sharif."

Dan was speechless.

"I was born and grew up in Ramallah," explained Machmud. "I was taught to hate my Jewish oppressors, but I always had my doubts. I started asking my father questions, and he threw me out of the house. I decided I was going

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Interpersonal Issues Bal Tolin

A subcontractor does not usually expect payment from the contractor immediately. There is therefore no bal tolin if the contractor waits a short period of time before paying.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi Right Shouldering

Harold Crandus from Illinois wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

When the Torah is removed from the Ark and carried through the synagogue, over which shoulder should it be carried and why?

Dear Harold Crandus,

The Torah scroll is held with the right hand against the chest and right shoulder. This shows honor and love

of the Torah, as expressed in the verse in Song of Songs: "His right hand embraces me." Carrying it in the right hand is also reminiscent of the verse "From His Right Hand, He gave a Law of fire to them."

Sources:

Shulchan Aruch 134:2, Mishneh Berura 14

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Stories for the Soul

Continued from front

into the house to get my things. My mother caught me and I told her that I wanted to go live with the Jews, and maybe I would even want to convert.

"You don't have to convert. You already are a Jew," she whispered. "In Judaism, the religion goes according to the mother. I'm Jewish, so that means you're Jewish. I made a mistake by marrying an Arab man. In you, my mistake will be redeemed."

"My mother dug out some old documents, like my birth certificate and her old Israeli ID card, so I could prove I was a Jew. My mother hesitated and then said, 'You may as well take this. It is an old photograph of my grandparents taken when they went visiting the grave of some great ancestor of ours.'"

"Do you have the photo here?" Dan asked.

The boy's face lit up. "Sure! I always carry it with me."

When Dan read the gravestone inscription, he nearly dropped the photo. The inscription identified it as the grave of the great Kabbalist Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, author of "Lecha Dodi."

Dan's voice quivered with excitement as he explained to Machmud who his ancestor was. He then extended his trembling hand and said, "Welcome home, Machmud. Welcome home."

It looked for some dark moments as though our forefather Yaakov would be denied his heritage, but, when something is meant to be, Hashem will move heaven and earth in the most remarkable ways to make things right.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.