

TO BE EXALTED - NOT HALTED

by Rabbi Label Lam

When you go out to war against your enemy, and you see horses and chariots - a people more numerous than you - you should not fear them---for HASHEM your G-d, is with you, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt. (Devarim 20:1)

How can the Torah legislate emotions here? What does the Torah realistically expect of us? Are we to just shut down the raging river of emotions we feel at a given moment? Isn't it only reasonable to expect that someone who confronts a ferocious looking enemy should experience fear?

Years ago I was learning early in the morning Chovos HaLevavos. A statement we read penetrated my heart. Maybe it was the clarity of thought that comes with the morning hours or maybe it was the strong coffee, "Nobody can help you or hurt you unless it comes directly from HASHEM!" HASHEM is One and there is no other. There are no independent forces in the universe. In an inspired instant I sensed the world to be one seamless block of reality.

Later that same day I went to the Bronx to meet a lawyer for the purpose of learning some Talmud. In the shadow of Yankee Stadium on the Grand Concourse near by the ever so busy criminal courthouse I attempted to find a parking place. Blocks away I finally found parking. However every building was burnt out like a war zone. The only other car on the block was hoisted onto milk crates, missing wheels and many other vital parts, like a carved turkey. I was nearly late and since my car was not so nice I took a calculated risk and parked right there.

As I stepped out and headed down the street with my big Talmud in hand around the corner turned three tough looking hoodlum types. I saw them seeing me seeing them seeing me seeing them. I thought to go back but I was already too far from the car. I knew that they instinctively smell fear. I thought to casually cross the street but they might think I had money or diamonds. That too would be in an invitation. I had no choice but to keep going forward. I suddenly flashed back to the morning session. "Nobody can help you or hurt you unless it comes directly from HASHEM". HASHEM is One! HASHEM is my shepherd. There is none other. I found myself in the most sublime state of mind.

As the sound of their voices rapping, rapidly approached, I was ready for anything. Gemora in hand, I felt ready to surrender my life and even fantasized about Rabbi Akiva and the good company I might find myself amongst. As they passed, not only did nothing happen but I could hear clearly a brief snippet of their live-jive, with a staccato-Spanish cadence, one was saying to the others, "If G-d don't want something to happen to you, man, it's not gonna happen!" Wow! Where did that come from?

The Baal Shem Tov writes, "All the fears that a person experiences even of wild animals are directed by HASHEM to frighten the person so that he should remember to fear HASHEM and if the person is wise he will meditate on this and nothing he fears will harm him..." The verse does not say to nullify or squelch a fear, rather it says, "You should not fear them! Such feelings are to be exalted not halted! Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.