

THE JOB OF THE AV

by Rabbi Label Lam

And they journeyed, and the fear of Elochim was on the surrounding cities and they did not pursue the Children of Jacob. (Breishis 35:5)

The Children of Jacob are new settlers in the Land of Canaan. Shimon and Levi destroy an entire city to defend the honor of their sister Dina and miraculously they are not attacked by their neighbors. They are intimidated, not by their military might but by the fear of G-d! How did that happen? How did they dodge that bullet? We don't need too much guess work for this one. It's actually a pretty basic concept with a profoundly practical application.

A few years ago, I was getting ready to take a three week trip to Israel in January in the middle of the winter season. For years I had been going during the summer. I was used to taking light clothing. I knew I might need a sweater, but my wife insisted I take winter boots. I refused! I reasoned, "Who needs to carry those clunky things around? There's only so much room in my suitcase. I know it's the rainy season. What use do I have for boots?" So I didn't pack them!

The first week I was there, Jerusalem was hit for the first time in many decades with eighteen inches of snow. The city was paralyzed and it was beautiful beyond words but everyone was ill-prepared and under-equipped for the reality on the ground. As it turned out, my wife, bless her soul, without my knowing had tucked my fur-lined rubber insulated winter boots into a side pocket of my suitcase. My feet remained dry and warm and I was extremely grateful for her active concern and foresight!

The Torah records that when Avraham first set out on his journey, "...And they went out to go to the Land of Canaan and they came to the Land of Canaan, and Avram traversed until the place of Shechem to Alon Moreh." (Breishis 12:5-6) Rashi comments on why he had zeroed in on that place: "To pray for the Children of Jacob when they would come to battle in Shechem". Amazingly, Avraham did not even have any children at that point. All he had was a pocket full of promises, albeit from The Almighty. Yet, he intuitively felt future needs and prays for their welfare before the moment of emergency. From this practice of Avraham the Talmud Sanhedrin teaches, "A person should always pray before problems arise. For had it not been that Avraham had prayed prior to the problem, between Beit El and Ai, no survivors or remnants of Israel would remain." The Jewish Nation confronted 36 casualties in the city of Ai but who knows how much worse the losses might have been had they not had the protection of Avraham's prayers in advance. The same was true with Shechem!

Two practical points emerge from this. The Talmud says, "A person should always cry for the future and gratefully acknowledge the past!" 1) Whatever success or survival we enjoy, as a nation or as individuals, is most probably due to the protective prayers of prior generations. It is likely not in the insufficient merit of our own goodness that the malevolent machinations of our numerous enemies are more often than not frustrated. 2) We as parents of future generations have a duty to pray for the health, welfare, and spiritual success of our children and grandchildren born and not yet... After all this is what Avraham, our common father, had done. That's what makes him an Av- a father.

The caring parent prepares and packs away for the future that which is needed for his children to find safety in world of unforeseen danger. So too the loving father casts a blanket of prayer to cover his sleeping children, shielding them from the cold winter night of exile, in ways they could never know, and that has always been **the job of the av!** Check out www.beyondbt.com to join Rabbi Lam and others blogging on matters close and personal to BT's...Soon Hundreds of Rabbi Label Lam's audio classes will be made available at the audio section of Torah.Org - TorahMedia.com

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