

UNCONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Prayer and Devotion: Unconventional Weapons

The holy tzaddik, Rabbi Moshe of Lelov zt"l (5537-5611; 1776- 1850), was renowned for his great love and deep attachment to the Land of Israel. All his life, R' Moshe yearned to ascend to the Holy Land. Eventually, in 5610/1849, he finally prepared to embark on his journey. His father, R' David'l zt"l, had foretold that intimate bonds would bind his son to the Holy Land, and that one day, when he would merit to "ascend to Tzion with joy," great and secret things would come to pass. Indeed, it was known that R' Moshe had aspirations of hastening the ge'ulah (redemption) and bringing Mashiach on the day he would be given the opportunity to approach the Kosel HaMa'aravi and pour out his heart there before the Almighty.

Sadly, it was not to be. Upon reaching the holy city of Yerushalayim, R' Moshe was so crushed in body and spirit from the difficulties of travel that he was unable to walk to the Kosel on the day of his arrival, as he had aspired to do all his life. Instead, he said, he would make the trip to the Kosel after he had rested for a couple of days and his strength had returned. However, that very day he was overcome by illness, and became bedridden. His pain and distress were unimaginable when he came to understand that from Heaven he was being obstructed from attaining his goal.

Shortly thereafter, R' Moshe felt his end was near. He called the members of his household and told them that he must be taken to the Kosel HaMa'aravi that very day, at whatever price. He asked to be carried to the Kosel on a couch. His sons, R' Yitzchak David and R' Elazar Mendel, bore the couch as they embarked on their fateful journey. They left the house, and turned onto a side street which lead to the Kosel. Suddenly, however, they were assaulted by a barrage of stones, courtesy of the Arab residents of the neighborhood. (Stone throwing, it seems, is nothing new! See Olan Shabbos of this year, parshas Lech Lecha, that this is an inheritance from their zeideh Yishmael.) For a short while, the brothers tried in vain to continue on in spite of the stones, and get to the Kosel at any price. But this was short-lived; soon the torrent of stones became so great that it was a genuine threat to R' Moshe's life. Finally, they had no choice but to retreat, leaving their father's dream of praying at the Kosel unfulfilled. Later on that same bitter day, he took leave of his sons and his students, and his soul ascended upon High. He was 74 years old, and had been in Eretz Yisrael one day for each year of his life. [Ner Yisrael, vol. 4, page 95]

Where did R' Moshe get the idea that his prayer in Eretz Yisrael, particularly at the Kosel, had the

power to bring the ge'ulah and Mashiach? Perhaps it is alluded to in this week's sidrah.

"Then Yaakov called for his sons and said, 'Gather yourselves, and I will tell you what will happen to you in the End of Days (49:1)." Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains that, "Yaakov wished to reveal to his children 'the End of Days,' i.e. the time of the arrival of Mashiach - but the Divine Presence left him." It seems strange, then, if this was no more than a failed attempt to reveal the time of Mashiach's arrival, that the Torah even bothers recording it! Sefarim reveal that although Yaakov didn't succeed in revealing the time of the Final Redemption, he did in fact manage to hint to the things we have to do in order to hasten Mashiach's arrival.

One verse earlier (48:22), Yaakov concludes his conversation with Yosef (during which he had conferred upon Efrayim and Menashe tribal status) by saying, "Behold, I have given you one portion more than your brothers - which I took from the hand of the Emorite with my sword and bow." Targum Onkelos (see also Rashi) explains that "sword" and "bow" are figurative names for the spiritual weapons with which Yaakov acquired the birthright and its blessings from Eisav (the "Emorite" - see Rashi); "with my prayer and with my supplication." Yaakov is revealing to his sons that he did not acquire the birthright (which includes Eretz Yisrael) by means of strength and physical prowess, nor, as it would appear, through trickery. Rather, it was the strength of his prayer and supplication.

Immediately afterwards, the Torah continues: Then Yaakov called his sons, and said, "Gather yourselves, and I will tell you what will happen to you in the End of Days." Just as my right to the Land of Israel did not come to me through warfare nor physical might, but through prayer, so too it will be in the End of Days. When you will gather together in the place that I took from the Emorite with my prayer and supplication, and pour out your hearts there the way I did in my days, you will merit to see the Final Redemption. Perhaps R' Moshe felt that his prayers for "the End of Days" would be especially powerful at the Kosel HaMa'aravi - from where, "the Holy presence has never departed." Alas, it was not to be.

Were it that we had even the smallest inkling of the power of our prayers - especially those who merit to pray at the Kosel! This week, hundreds of thousands of Jews gathered at the Kosel HaMa'aravi, many of them pouring out their hearts in prayer to the Almighty. While we must certainly take the necessary measures to protect ourselves from those who seek to destroy us, and to exact punishment from our enemies, the G-d fearing Jew also remembers that the true "weaponry" of our nation is not the sword nor the bow nor the tanks and machine guns; it is our prayer and devotion.

Have a good Shabbos.

***** *This week's publication was sponsored by Dr. and Mrs. Moshe Slome, in honor of their daughter Tova's wedding to Moshe Biller. May they see lots of Yiddishe Nachas.* *****

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