

WE'RE NOT THERE YET

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week's parsha, Ki Saitzay, begins with a very strange law pertaining to our going to war. Before we deal with that law, let's get some background from last week's parsha. Upon our drawing close to battle, the following announcements were made: "Any man who built a house but didn't yet live there should return to his home. Any man who planted a vineyard... Any man who engaged a woman... Any man who is fearful (either of the battle itself or of sins he might have committed) should return home (20: 5-9)." Who was left to fight the battle!?

The story is told that students of the Brisker Rav complained bitterly that the Yiddish Theater was making fun of the Torah and its values. They angrily told him of a play performed with the stage filled with soldiers going out to battle. The announcements of those able to leave were made and the crowd of soldiers gradually thinned out. When the last announcement was made, sending home all of those who were afraid, only the actors playing the Vilna Gaon and the Shaagas Aryeh were left. The two actors argued who should shoot the first bullet as the curtain dropped to the laughter of the audience. The Brisker Rav didn't understand the indignation of his students. The play is accurate but they forgot the last scene... The last scene is that they win the war!

Our wars were fought with a very different outlook than what's prevalent today. There was absolute clarity that our victory was solely in the hands of Hashem. Any sinners were sent home as they wouldn't be the vehicles through whom Hashem would act. A victory of a few tzaddikim against a full army was an obvious conclusion.

With that in mind, the beginning of our parsha becomes even more difficult to understand. "*Ki saitzay lamilchama* - When you go out to war... *v'shavisah shivyo* - and you take captives. And you'll see amongst the captives a beautiful woman and you'll desire her and you'll take her as a wife (21:10-11)." The Torah then details the process through which she can be married. What is going on here?!

Rashi explains that the Torah is taking into account a person's desires. "If Hashem wouldn't allow the soldier to marry her in the prescribed permitted fashion, he would take her in a forbidden way." Who would!? The Vilna Gaon!?!? The Shaagas Aryeh!?!?

This teaches us some very fundamental lessons. We can never feel we are there. We've reached a certain level and now we no longer need to worry. These things are beneath us. They are behind us. We're past that now. Once a person feels that he can rest on his laurels and he no longer needs to be on guard, that he no longer needs to be working on these things, that's when the yetzer harah

(evil inclination) strikes in full fury and jolts us back to reality. Yes, even these tzaddikim, might take the beautiful woman in a forbidden manner if the Torah didn't allow for a permissible method.

At the same time, this needs to be a chizuk (source of inspiration) for us. How often do we slip up and feel really down on ourselves? We question our self worth. We wonder if all of the strides that we thought we had made were really strides at all. At such times we must remember this parsha. Yes, even the greatest tzaddikim have their vulnerable moments and may stumble. That doesn't take away from all that they had accomplished in their lifetimes. It just teaches us that we must always be on guard.

At times we feel that we are not able to follow the laws of the Torah in a given situation. It just seems too difficult. Again, our parsha needs to be a source of chizuk in such situations. The Torah was given by Hashem for all times and all situations. If, as in the case of the soldiers going to war, the Torah allows some otherwise forbidden acts, that shows that when the Torah doesn't allow any deviation, we clearly do have the ability to keep its laws and teachings.

The Ohr HaChaim gives us a glimpse of a deeper level of this parsha. "When you go out to war" - when your soul leaves the spiritual world to enter the 'war-zone' of this physical world. "*V'shavisa shivyo*" - and you will recapture some of those captured by the enemy. Some of the people who have been captivated by the pleasures of this world, forgetting why they were sent to this world. Or even, a part of ourselves which had fallen under the control of the enemy. "And you'll see amongst the captives an '*aishes yefos to'ar*', a beautiful woman" - a beautiful pure neshama, sullied by mistaken choices. "And you'll take her into your house and she'll cry for her father and mother" - once the neshama is cleansed from the rebellion against Hashem (the father) and Yisroel (the mother), it can now become a partner of the physical body (the house). "As a wife" - in the harmonious marriage of body and soul, with each contributing its unique potential and abilities toward their mutual goals.

Amongst the many mitzvos included in this weeks parsha is the commandment of '*kan tzipor*' - the nest of the bird. "When one encounters the nest of a bird... with the mother on her young... send away the mother and only then may you take the children (22:6-7)."

The Mishna in Megilah teaches that if one pleads with Hashem saying, "You had compassion on the nest of the bird (*kan tzipor*), Hashem, have compassion on us", we silence him. The gemara (25.) explains that such a t'filah is strongly discouraged because by praying in such a way, one is making Hashem's laws into acts of compassion and in fact they are decrees. What is meant by this?

Rav Leib Chasmon explains that to learn from this mitzva that Hashem is compassionate is missing the point. Hashem being compassionate doesn't change me. It doesn't improve me. On the contrary, it makes me think that I can get what I want, since a compassionate Hashem won't have the 'heart' to turn me down. Instead of motivating improvement, it encourages stagnation.

It is in fact a decree. A decree from the All Knowing that our actions affect us. By doing acts of compassion we will become compassionate individuals. If we will show compassion, even to the nest of a bird, how careful and sensitive will we be when dealing with human beings.

The events of the past few days here in Israel have been tragic. The frequency of these horrors tend to desensitize us to the value of human beings and their lives. Last Wednesday two Jews were murdered just outside the nearby village of Abu Gosh. At first it was assumed to be the work of terrorists. It was soon revealed that it was simply Israeli underworld crime. That's okay. If a terrorist kills Jews, we are in a state of uproar. If a Jew kills another Jew, that's hardly newsworthy.

May our adherence to the Torah, affect and change us, transforming us into individuals with proper values and sensitivities. May we speedily witness the end of all of these tragedies through Moshiach tzidkenu, bimhaira b'yamainu, amain.

Good Shabbos
Yisroel Ciner

Copyright © 1998 by [Rabbi Yisroel Ciner](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

The author teaches at [Neveh Tzion](#) in Telzstone (near Yerushalayim).
