

THE WEIGH TO THE REAL WAR

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

A woman should not wear a man's belonging a man should not wear women's clothing because it is disgusting to Hashem your G-d to do this. (Devarim 22:5)

The parshah begins with laws dealing with a man who has gone to war against a physical enemy, and has become attracted to a non-Jewish captive. However, as Rashi and the Kli Yakar point out, the real war referred to in this week's parshah is the individual one against the yetzer hara, the inclination to do evil. How does one battle the yetzer hara? Answers the Talmud, G-d said: *I made the yetzer hara, and I made Torah as its spice.* (Kiddushin 30b)

In other words, Torah channels the energy of the yetzer hara in a positive direction (which would explain Parashas Ki Seitzei has the most amount of mitzvos of any parshah). As the Vilna Gaon points out, the goal is not to obliterate the yetzer hara, but to use it as source of energy to accomplish meaningful goals. True, the goal of this war is to conquer the "enemy," but it is also to make the enemy a loving, loyal ally of the king.

One such mitzvah to keep the yetzer hara in check is from the posuk quoted above, and the truth is, this mitzvah is not as straightforward as it seems. First of all, Onkeles says that the Torah, when it refers to a "man's belonging" is talking about war implements (i.e., a woman should not be in the habit of carrying weapons the way that men do; obviously when one's personal security is an issue, the halachah is different).

Rashi explains that this mitzvah comes to avoid possible situations which might lead to illicit intermingling of the genders, which, G-d forbid, can lead to adultery or similar. As far as the man is concerned, it means not dressing as a woman in order to "fit in" among them, again, because it will lead to illicit relationships. According to some, this means that a man should not shave bodily hair that normally is considered a feminine thing to do.

The Sefer HaChinuch elaborates and says that the law extends to include a woman wearing any clothes that is the custom of men in that location to wear. However, when it comes to a man, the Sefer HaChinuch adds that the prohibition includes being unduly concerned about one's appearance, in a way that is usually associated with women. Examples of this: pulling gray hairs out

of one's otherwise black hair or beard, and dying one's hair.

The reasons for this mitzvah are obvious. The Torah has commanded us to be holy and to stay far away from immorality. It is well-known that even people, seemingly "respectable" people with the best of intentions have failed the test when placed in situations of "mixed-company." Must the test be made even more insurmountable by dressing and acting in such a way as to give the impression that there are no boundaries?

It is Society's attitude that dictates the level of morality at which it will live. We know from the Torah and from experience that what we wear makes an incredible impact on how we view ourselves and the world around us. If our clothing suggests that no boundaries exist in life between things that are obviously different from each other, then how can one determine the boundaries between what is permissible and not permissible when it is not so obvious?

When I was in line at a Passport Check once, I was behind someone I thought for sure had to be a female. The hairstyle and hairband (yes, hairband) were so feminine that it never crossed my mind that she was a he. And since the clothes these days also give little indication of who's who, it was all that much more difficult to determine the gender of the person ahead of me.

That is until he turned around. Then his face revealed what previously, from the back, was hidden. It turned out that the other (clearly) female was not just a friend, but in fact, his girlfriend. I guess I should have known this by the fact that only one ear had an earring, and not both. Then again, maybe the other earring was the one in his tongue ...

One of the prophecies about the period just prior to Moshiach's arrival is that men will dress as women, and vice versa. If so, then Moshiach may be much closer to coming than we think. Certainly when the boundaries of life begin to dissipate, then how much longer can society survive anyway?

Shabbos Day:

You will surely send away the mother and the young you make take for yourself. (Devarim 22:7)

If someone says in his prayer, "Have mercy on us, for You are the Compassionate One, since Your mercies extend [even] to a bird's nest," he is to be silenced. (Brochos 33b)

The mitzvah to send away the mother bird before taking its young might seem like an act of mercy. Everyone knows that a mother, in just about any species, is greatly pained when she sees her young endangered. So, therefore, it would seem, that when the Torah commands us to spare the mother bird the torment of watching her valued eggs taken from her nest, it is a commandment to be merciful.

However, the Talmud is quick to point out that this is not the reason for the mitzvah. On the contrary, says the Sefer HaChinuch, the basis of the mitzvah is something altogether different:

At the root of this mitzvah is the goal of setting in our hearts that the watchful care of G-d, Blessed is He, is over the human species individually-as it is written, *"For His eyes are upon the ways of man ..."* (Iyov 34:21)-and for the other kinds of living creatures, over the species in a general way. In other words, His desire, Blessed is He, is for the endurance of his [man's] species. Therefore, no species among all the kinds of creatures will ever become extinct; for, under the watchful care of the One who lives and endures forever, Blessed is He, about the matter, it [every species] will find enduring existence through Him ...

What this means is that, by permitting the young, G-d is sending two messages to man. The first is that He is concerned about man's well-being, and the second message is that, He will see to it that the species of the world will survive. This is the reason why the Talmud silences the one who uses this mitzvah as an example of G-d's mercy; for though G-d is All-Merciful, that is not what He is trying to convey about Himself here. On the contrary:

... Of something like this the rabbis, may their memories be blessed, would apply the expression of "measure-for-measure" (Shabbos 108b). For, if man comes to realize that his continuing existence and well-being are through the providence of G-d in all matters, and from no other source, he will merit that G-d should then do good for him, by maintaining him. As a reward for this mitzvah ... a man merits to have sons (Devarim Rabbah 6:6) ... They have deduced the matter from the words in the Torah, "You will surely send away the mother and the young ..." [that is, sons] " ... you make take for yourself." (Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 545)

The Rambam seemed to disagree with this, even stating that the above Talmudic statement is only one side of an argument that we don't hold of. We, on the contrary says the Rambam, hold that there is a reason for every mitzvah, the reason for this one being:

"It is because animals have great anxiety when they see the suffering of their young, just as human beings do. For the love of a mother for its young is not something dependent upon logic; it is, rather, one of the results of the mental powers found both in animals as in man." (Moreh Nevuchim 3:48)

The Maharal has a way to bring both opinions together:

It is possible to explain that G-d made His decrees so that man should not become insensitive; the intention of the rabbis of the Talmud was to make it clear that it was not because G-d had mercy on the mother bird that the mitzvah was given ... (Tifferes Yisroel, Chapter 6)

In other words, though it is true that mitzvos help to refine us and make us sensitive to others like G-d Himself-and this is true of every mitzvah-there is another, more prominent reason for this mitzvah, as the Sefer HaChinuch teaches.

