

WAR-N OUT

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

When you go out to war against your enemy, and Hashem, your G-d, gives him over to your hand, and you take a captive ... (Devarim 21:10)

So begins the mitzvah of the *yafes to'ar*, the captive woman. *Pshat* is as it sounds: the soldier, in a time of war, during which the yetzer hara has free reign, is attracted to a non-Jewish female captive, and desires her for a wife. The rest of the parshah outlines the procedure to make her into a "kosher" wife, and *Rashi* points out the potential horrible results of doing so.

On a deeper level, the war is a psychological and spiritual one, against the yetzer hara itself, and the fact that the verse says that it is G-d that conquers it for us is reminiscent of the Talmudic dictum:

If G-d didn't help him [a person], he could not overcome it [the yetzer hara]. (Kiddushin 30b)

However, there is seemingly an inconsistency in this understanding. If G-d has just handed the yetzer hara over to the man, then why did he take a *yafes to'ar*? If anything, the man should have been able to resist temptation and reject the captive non-Jew, and not fall prey to her (that's right, fall prey to her, because, though he may have captured her, it is she who smote his heart).

The answer is a fundamental concept in the ongoing battle against the *yetzer hara*. One might think that once a battle is waged against the *yetzer hara*, and victory is achieved, that the war is over. Wrong, dangerously wrong! This is what the verse hints: ... *And you see a female captive of beautiful form, and you desire her ...* (Devarim 21:11)

In other words, the man went from one war to another. Even though he was successful in the first battle, his eyes dragged him right into the next. In fact, the victory of the first battle set the stage for the second one. Such is life, for one really never has rest in This World, if one is intent on living in the next one, as the Ramchal points out:

Man was therefore created with both a yetzer tov and a yetzer hara. He has the power to incline himself in whichever direction he desires ... The Highest Wisdom decreed that man should consist of two opposites. These are his pure spiritual soul and his unenlightened physical body. Each one is drawn toward its nature, so that the body inclines toward the material, while the soul leans toward the spiritual.

The two are then in a constant state of battle ... (Derech Hashem 1:2:1-1:3:2)

This is also the result of Adam's sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. As the Talmud points out, and *Shlomo HaMelech* echoed, even righteous people make mistakes, as a result of the spiritual "filth" the original snake imposed upon man. Our job is to reverse the effect by locating our weaknesses, and then overcoming them during our lifetime.

According to the Arizal, this means working on spiritual growth and not getting absorbed into a materialistic lifestyle. The more one feels a pull in the direction of *gashmius* (materialism), the more one is said to be "courting" the *yetzer hara*, and binding with it.

Eventually, every individual will have to completely rid himself of the effects of the snake, but for many this doesn't occur until after death and burial. However, at that time, it is a painful process, apparently, and righteous people take care of as much of this as possible during their lifetimes. As the saying goes, "you can pay us now, or you can pay us later." But as all of us know, everyone pays something "extra" for being able to push off payment for as long as possible.

Elul is here. It is time to get real with life.

Shabbos Day:

If a bird's nest happens to be before you along the way in any tree, or on the ground, [with] young ones or eggs, and the mother is sitting upon the young or the eggs, then you must not take the mother with the young. You must send away the mother, while the young you may take for yourself, so that it may be good for you and you may prolong your days. (Devarim 22:6-7)

"This excludes that which is already at hand." (Rashi)

There are different kinds of mitzvos, and according to the Arizal, there are even male and female mitzvos! However, the mitzvah of "*shiluach haken*" (sending away the mother bird) is one of the rarer and more unusual mitzvos, comparatively-speaking. It is not the easiest mitzvah to perform, simply because coming across the mitzvah involves a certain element of chance, or, pardon me, *Hashgochah Pratis*.

What makes this even more interesting is the fact that one of the rewards for doing this mitzvah properly is "*arichus yamim*," prolonged days. Now, who wouldn't want prolonged days, and go out of his way to achieve it?

To begin with, the *Kli Yekar* explains that such a powerful reward for such a seemingly simple mitzvah is because it has the ability to connect up a person with G-d. By acknowledging that the young are the product of the mother, one demonstrates that everything that exists has a source, and

that source has a source, until the Ultimate Source of all: G-d, Himself. This makes this mitzvah a faith-strengthenener, and fortifies one's belief in a Creator of the Universe.

I would like to add something to this, in light of, or, should I say in "dark," of what happened last week, namely, the solar eclipse.

One article that I happened to "chance" upon was from NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration), which was providing background information to solar eclipses in general, and about what to expect of this one in particular. At the end of the article, the following was added:

"It has often been asked if the similarity of the Moon's and Sun's diameters can be simple coincidence. In the absence of more data about the statistical distribution of sizes of stars, planets, and moons in solar systems other than our own, it would seem that the most likely answer is 'yes.' Nevertheless, it is a fortunate coincidence for the denizens of Earth."

Why does this question come up? Because the sun is roughly 400 times the size of the moon, which means that, in front of the sun, the moon should be unable to block out very much of the sun at all (kind of like putting a ping pong ball in front of a truck). So why a solar eclipse then? Because, "coincidentally," the sun happens to be about 400 times farther away from the earth than the moon is, making the moon and sun appear to the human eye the exact same size.

And, to add coincidence to coincidence, this is only true about earth, the moon and the sun, making earth "the only planet with spectacular solar eclipses."

Interestingly enough, this year's solar eclipse promised more bang for the buck, because the sun was also approaching its predicted maximum, the height of an 11-year cycle of solar activity. Also interesting is the fact that the lunar year is shorter than the solar year by eleven days, and there is a very Kabbalistic reason for that, tied to the concept of sublime Torah knowledge and the Jewish mission on earth.

"Right, whatever that means ..."

Well, in any case, this is why the Jewish people are compared to the moon, as we have discussed many times in the past, and why the first mitzvah upon leaving Egypt (while still in Egypt) was that of sanctifying the new moon. This year's eclipse happened to occur before the last day of Av (August 11), when G-d finally forgave the Jewish people for their involvement in the golden calf episode. With more time, we could talk about the role of eleven in that whole fiasco, or, at least, the lack of it.

I'm sure we could find more symbolism in all of this, and that many have already. However, what interests us is the fact that scientists are compelled to answer their own question and observation with a "yes":

"... In the absence of more data about the statistical distribution of sizes of stars, planets, and moons in solar systems other than our own, it would seem that the most likely answer is 'yes.'"

But what about the fourteenth verse of Bereishis:

"G-d said, 'There shall be lights in the heavenly sky to divide between the day and the night.' (Bereishis 1:14) --and the Midrash that says that, in the beginning, both the sun and the moon were the same size (Bereishis Rabbah 6:6)? Even though the moon's light was subsequently reduced because of a little "dispute," we see from here an inherent relationship between the sun and the moon, and the effect they are supposed to have on man. From a Torah perspective, there is no such thing as "chance," even when it comes to the apparent size of the sun and the moon from earth.

So, then, what about the mother bird and her young? That is a mitzvah that depends upon chance, or, tremendous Divine Providence. And, if it depends upon tremendous Divine Providence, then what kind of mitzvah is it?

"The reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah." (Pirkei Avos 2:1)

And, likewise, the reward for not believing in chance is a mitzvah that cannot be planned, but which can only be a function of Divine Providence. And, as the *Kli Yekar* explains, by doing the mitzvah, one demonstrates his belief in the concept that all things in the physical world are born from a spiritual source--the Spiritual Source, G-d, Himself.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

You must have a perfect and just weight, and you must have a perfect and just measure, in order that your days be prolonged on the earth which Hashem, your G-d, is giving to you. For, all who do these things and all who do unrighteous things are repulsive to G-d. Remember what G-d did to Amalek along the way when you left Egypt ... (Devarim 25:15-17)

Seemingly, they are two different messages: the first being to keep fair weights and measures for business purposes, and the second, a mitzvah to never forget what *Amalek* did to the Jewish people just before arriving in the Sinai Desert, and how G-d avenged the Jewish people. However, as we discussed last year, the two sections are actually connected to each other, and this year we will discuss another one of those connections.

If we recall from *Parashas Beshalach* and the attack of *Amalek*, to which this parshah makes reference, we read:

G-d told Moshe, "Write this as a memorial in the Book, and repeat it carefully to Yehoshua. I will completely eradicate the memory of Amalek from under heaven." Moshe built an altar, and called it "Ado-nay-nissi" [G-d-is-My- Banner] saying, "The Hand is on G-d's Throne. G-d will be at war with Amalek for all generations." (Shemos 17:14-16)

It seems that G-d took Amalek's attack on the Jewish people quite personally (so-to-speak). For, He

does not take such an oath regarding any other group of anti-Semites, including *Yishmael* and *Eisav* himself, elsewhere in history. Perhaps, in this week's parshah, the connecting verse explains why:

"For, all who do these things and all who do unrighteous things are repulsive to G-d."

That is, *Amalek* is repulsive to G-d. Why? Because, he does *"these things"* and acts unrighteously. However, that hardly seems like the reason to hate *Amalek* above and beyond all other enemies of the Jews. After all, what nation hasn't had its share of cheaters and thieves?! There are some nations, it seems from the Midrash, whose entire philosophy centered on dishonesty, and *Amalek* wasn't mentioned among them. Furthermore, those nations didn't even make the top two Divinely-despised list!

This is why, as always, the answer must be sought on deeper levels, especially when it comes to fully understanding *Amalek's* philosophy (which we must do), and its insidious effect on the Jewish psyche.

The Hebrew word *"da'as"* means "knowledge." But it is a generic term that can have more specific meanings as well. For example, in Kabbalah, it is a term that denotes balance, the harmonization of two opposites and extremes. In a sense, it is a knowledge born out of a balanced perspective, and therefore in the sefiros it follows *"Chochmah"* and *"Binah."*

Amalek, whose Hebrew name adds up to the Hebrew word *"safek,"* which means doubt, comes to de-stabilize man's, and particularly the Jew's, perspective. He has many methods, and they change with the generation and even with the seasons. But the result is always the same: an imbalanced perspective that denies the mind's eye a clear and accurate perception of reality--from G-d's perspective.

That is why, in the end, *Amalek* doesn't really care whether a Jew is religious or secular, just as long as his perspective is out-of-kilter--and it can happen in either world. Frighteningly enough, there is such a thing as a *"frum"* (i.e., religious) *yetzer hara* too, who uses Torah-like reasons to avoid facing the truth--the ultimate truth, which may involve life changes and reponsibilites the person does not want to confront. As a religious Jew, I can speak for myself: I have vices too.

Warning! *Amalekians* lurk in the dark shadowy areas of imbalanced perspectives.

Fortunately, Elul has arrived, and with it, the blowing of the shofar. As the Rambam teaches, we blow the shofar daily in advance of Rosh Hashanah as a kind of spiritual wake-up call, to wake us all up from our deep "slumber." And, if we chance to wake up and face the music, then we also have a fighting chance to ward off an attack from *Amalek* (and those who represent him in This World), and the disasters he brings to us in his wake (no pun intended).

Melave Malkah:

Why do the people gather, and the nations talk in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the privy counsellors conspire secretly against G-d and against His anointed. (Tehillim 2:1-2)

According to tradition, *Dovid HaMelech*, in this tehillah, is addressing the age-old question of why bad people prosper. He answers by explaining that their success is temporary because G-d despises them, and adds that if we are not worthy to see their downfall in our lifetime, the world will see it in the days of *Moshiach*. Painful as it is to put up with it in the meantime, you have to know that the success of the evil is short-lived, and people who take immoral short-cuts will have to pay a price in the end that will not have been worth it.

If truth, though it may take time, eventually good triumphs over evil, even the worst kind. The trouble is, within a short time a new evil and perpetrator of evil arises and steals center stage until good can triumph once again, and once and for all--that being in the time of Moshiach. This is why the rabbis teach that this mizmor describes Messianic times as well (Brochos 10a).

Elsewhere, according to the Talmud (Sotah 49b), it says that such a time will be one of political instability for the nations of the world, of revolution, audacity, atheism, corruption, and terrible inflation. (Hmmm ... sounds vaguely familiar.) Eventually, all of this inner turmoil will spill onto the international stage, resulting in that ultimate final war of Gog and Magog, which, as terrible as it may be, will serve to "filter" out all the insincere servants of G-d (Avodah Zarah 3b).

Dovid said:

"... Yours, G-d, is the kingdom and You are exalted as Head above all." (Divrei HaYomim I:29:11)

--and the Talmud explained:

Exalted above all ... This will be evident after the war of Gog and Magog. (Brochos 58a)

Then being evil and prosper will officially be an oxymoron.

Speaking of history and Gog and Magog, there is the following quote that also has to do with this week's parshah and the following posuk:

You must have a perfect and just weight (ehven shlaimah) ... (Devarim 25:15)

As an interesting aside to do with this week's parshah, there is the following:

"I heard from HaRav HaGaon Hishish ... from my teacher, HaRav Yitzchak Margolis, the head of the Bais Din is Shetzutzin in Poland, who heard from the 'Light of the Exile,' our teacher HaRav Chaim from Volozhin, that the Gra (Vilna Gaon) said that the book 'Mishnah Torah' (Devarim) alludes in each parshah to what will happen in each one hundred years of the sixth millennium--ten parshios corresponding to ten periods of one hundred years (Nitzavim and Vayailech are considered one parshah). Rav Chaim asked him, 'Where are we hinted to in Parashas Ki Saitzai (which corresponds to

the 100-year period we are in)?' He answered him that his [the Gra's] name was hinted to in the words 'ehven shlaimah,' but the name of Rav Chaim was hidden from him (it is not clear if the Gra hid it from Rav Chaim, or Rav Chaim left it out because of his humility) ..." (Sefer HaEmunah v'HaHashgochah)

First of all, the words "*ehven shlaimah*" as they are spelt, can be taken as, "Eliyahu ben Shlomo," the Gra's name, because the first word can be an abbreviation of "Eliyahu ben." When they asked the Gra why his last name was spelt in full, and his first name was abbreviated, he answered, "Because I was only meant to reveal part of the Torah I know, and to conceal part as well."

Secondly, according to the Gra, just as *Parashas Ki Seitzei*, the sixth *parshah* in *Devarim* would have corresponded to the period 5500-5600, or, 1740 CE to 1840 CE, *Parashas Ki Savo*, the seventh *parshah*, would have corresponded to the period, 5600 to 5700, or, 1840 to 1940 CE, ending in the middle of World War II. *Parashas Ki Savo*, we must recall, contains the infamous curses for straying from the Torah, describing in explicit detail what can be construed as a Holocaust. According to the Gra, this should come as no surprise.

Moving ahead in time, we arrive at the eighth *parshah*, *Nitzavim-Vayailech*, which we read this year on the Shabbos right before Rosh Hashanah 5760. *Nitzavim-Vayailech*, therefore, corresponds to the period from 5700 to 5800, or, from 1940 to 2040 CE.

What does this *parshah* speak about, and what does it speak to us? If you sneak a peak at these *parshios* (which we won't read until the week before Rosh Hashanah 5760), you will have little difficulty making connections between the *parshios* and our times. Or, you can wait until that week, when I will, b"H, address the issue as well.

Have a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston

L'Shannah Tovah
May this year be filled with much blessing,
And only good news,
For all of the Jewish People.
Nizke Lirot Geulah Shlaimah!

All the best from
The Winston Family
Telzstone