

IT'S WAR IN THERE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

When you go out to war against your enemies... (Devarim 20:10)

Well, we just did that, and we're still doing it. However, is the posuk really talking about that kind of war?

Life has been called many things, and one is war. There is a story of soldiers, that upon their return from war and victory were confronted by a sagely person who told them, "Now that you have finished fighting that war, prepare to fight the real one. You will find it far more difficult to be victorious with this one."

He was of course referring to the internal battle that we all fight against the yetzer hara, our evil inclination. It is a far more insidious battle because we often mistake the enemy for ourselves, doing things that WE would not do if we had paid better attention to the impact of our actions. And, as the Talmud says, just like our mortal enemies, the yetzer hara gets up each morning to kill us (Kiddushin 30b); unlike our mortal enemies, he's got a great shot at it all day long.

This year, this week's parshah comes just THREE weeks in advance of the Yemai Norayim and is a great eye-opener. Actually, every year it is read just in advance of the Day of Judgment. This week's parshah is a great reminder of what the real battle in life is, and how easy it is to lose that battle if a person is not on a constant vigil against this spiritual enemy.

For, the enemy we fight on the outside is just an external manifestation of the enemy we failed to fight on the inside. Furthermore, the type of enemy we find ourselves up against, be it the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, or more recently, Iran and Hizbullah, is based upon the type of internal enemy we are meant to fight but do not fight.

This is important to know and to take to heart, especially in a generation lacking prophets. For life is all about serving G-d, and the most important thing about being a servant of G-d is to know what is expected of you, when and how. No sense to bring the king a nice cup of wine when what he really wants now is a fresh loaf of bread.

In this case, serving G-d means to overcome the yetzer hara and do what is right to do at any given moment in time. The trouble is that the yetzer hara is a master of disguise. How are we supposed to know which yetzer hara it is that we are supposed to confront and overcome? The answer is, look at

the nature of the physical enemy that is trying to overcome you, and infer from this outward manifestation of evil what the inner manifestation of evil actually is.

So, for example, Hizbullah is a group of hardened terrorists that lives to exterminate every last Jew, regardless of his religious affiliation, or of his connection to Eretz Yisroel. We, on the other hand, let religious affiliation determine how we relate to our fellow Jews, and how attached we are willing to become to Eretz Yisroel.

Hizbullah lie through their teeth with absolutely no shame to accomplish their goals. They disregard the truth about reality and make reality whatever best suits their own agenda. To put it mildly, we as a people have been quite inconsistent with the goals of Torah and Creation, in general, ignoring the principles of Jewish history to justify our status quo.

Finish the list yourself. You'll be amazed over how such a vicious and violent enemy can be related to us, spiritually-speaking. Or perhaps, an even better way to describe it would be, how frightened we can become of this enemy.

SHABBAT DAY:

...And G-d, your G-d gives them over to you and you take captives, and you see among the captives a desirable, beautiful woman who you want to marry... (Devarim 20:10-11)

This is proof that the real war begins only after the physical one ends. As the Talmud points out, this section of the Torah was written only against the yetzer hara, teaching us a strategy against a yetzer hara that has gone out of control, or rather has gained control over a person. When a person locks his or her eyes on a subject of desire, "No!" is simply not going to work.

Everyone comes around eventually, the Torah says. The question is, when a person finally comes around, will it be after having committed the sin, or while still holding out against it? When the curtain goes up, will we be able to take a bow, or will we run for the wings?

"One more second, one more portion in the World-to-Come. One more second, one more portion in the World-to-Come."

That was the advice that one rabbi gave to his students to use to save themselves while in a situation of temptation that is very hard to turn down. Some tests are easier than others, but some are monumental, and by forcing yourself to wait out the moment, it can pass and leave you with your Heavenly slate and self-esteem intact.

For as the Torah goes on to say while discussing the hated wife and the rebellious child she gives birth to, nothing good ever comes from giving in to the yetzer hara. How can it? That's like saying that when it comes to going against G-d, there is actually a way to have your cake and eat it too. Nothing can be farther from the truth. Heaven always win, sooner or later, as the Talmud states:

It has been taught: Rebi Meir used to say: "If a person commits a transgression in secret, The Holy

One, Blessed is He, proclaims it against him in public, as it says, 'And the spirit of jealousy came upon (avar) him' (Bamidbar 5:14). The verb 'avar' - came upon - means 'proclaiming', as it is said, 'And Moshe commanded, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp' (Shemot 36:6).

And, as we all find out sooner or later, tikun is never on our terms, but on Heaven's terms. We never get to choose the consequences of our sins, only G-d does, and He does it in such a way that a person has to say, "Wow! If I knew that giving in to my yetzer hara would result in THAT consequence, I would never have done it!"

Hold out for one more second, and one more portion in the World-to-Come.

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

If a man takes a wife... (Devarim 24:1)

Lest we forget, the Torah reminds us that more than being an enemy, the yetzer hara is a "chavruta", a study partner whose true role is to make us improve ourselves. To achieve greater heights it is not enough to strive against oneself; we all need someone who can push us to our limits so that we can reach for the stars. Believe it or not, the yetzer hara is such a device.

It is not so much of an issue of destroying the yetzer hara as it is one of channeling its awesome energy. Think of it as a wild bronco yet to be tamed, running free doing its own thing, ready to destroy anything that gets in its way until it knows that it has been beat. From that point onward, with the proper rider, it can run, but with control, and more importantly, with purpose; for nothing is more meaningful in Creation, no matter what it is, than being used in the service of G-d.

The Torah started talking about the Yafat Toar - the beautiful woman captive, a symbol of any forbidden desire. As human beings, we are hard-wired to only take true pleasure from that which is justifiably our own, which means after having earned it the "honest" way. We can't help it; it is a function of having been made in the image of G-d.

Nevertheless, people try to cheat the system, in one way or another, and on one level or another, and as a result they are forced to reduce their G-dliness in order not to feel bad about their approach to having pleasure in this world. It is amazing how far we can stray from the G-dly image from which we were created, and when we do, we cause damage that we do to ourselves and the world around us.

However, towards the end of the parshah, it talks about marriage, the symbol of channeling the energies of the yetzer hara in a productive and G-dly way. Indeed, marriage itself is a measure of where we are holding in our growth process, as the Talmud teaches:

Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchak said: "When Resh Lakish began to expound [the subject of] Sotah, he said, 'They only pair a woman with a man according to his deeds, as it says, 'For the scepter of evil shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous' (Tehillim 125:3). (Sotah 2a)

That's exactly what they're going to ask you on Yom HaDin. They're going to tell you how the yetzer hara was given to you to make you into a great person, and ask why you let it make you less than that. It reminds me of what the Arizal teaches, that rather than descend to the 49th level of spiritual impurity in Egypt, we were supposed to have elevated the Egyptians to the 50th level of holiness. Had we done that, then the entire world would have become 'holy to G-d', and rather than face future exiles, we would have enjoyed a permanent redemption.

Rav Chisda said, "At first, before Israel sinned the Shechinah abode with each individual; as it says, 'For the L-rd your G-d walks in the midst of you camp' (Devarim 23:15). When they sinned, the Shechinah departed from them... (Sotah 3b)

And now we must do everything we can to return it to Tzion.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Most of us, at one point in time have had the good fortune of coming across one good sefer that contains material so crucial and dramatic that it alters our perspective on life forever. For me, one such work is the classic, "Nefesh HaChaim" by Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, one of the primary students of the Vilna Gaon, and often referred to as the father of the European Yeshivah Movement.

Recently, I had cause to return to "Nefesh HaChaim", thinking that I had since moved on from it over the years. Though it is true that I have since seen deeper versions of the same material, I discovered that the material in Nefesh HaChaim cannot be outgrown, since it deals quite directly with the battle each and every one of us fights on a daily basis.

Therefore, I have decided to post material from the first section (there are four altogether) for the time, making available ideas that are not only relevant today, but crucial for winning the battle on ALL fronts.

CHAPTER ONE: It is written, "And G-d created the man in His image, in the image of G-d He created him" (Bereishis 1:27), and it is written, "Because in the image of G-d He made man." (ibid 9:6). The essence of the concept of "image" is of the loftiest of ideas and comprises most of the inner secrets of the Zohar. However, in this work, we will speak only of the word "image" in simple terms, as it has been understood by the early interpreters of the verse, "Let Us make man in Our image and likeness." (ibid 1:26)

They do not interpret "image" (tzelem) and "likeness" (d'mut) literally, since the verse says, "What likeness can you compare to Him?" (Yishayahu 40:18). Rather, they explain these words, that in order to be a comparison of sorts, not unlike the verse, "I am like the pelican of the desert" (Tehillim 102:7). Obviously, he (King David) did not grow wings or a beak, nor did he take on the form of a bird. Rather, his lifestyle as a wanderer [at that time in his life] resembled that of the pelican that lives alone and flies from place to place.

Likewise do the early commentators understand the word "image", which is similar to "likeness" in

meaning.

*Have a great Shabbos,
PW*

Text

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