

IT'S WAR OUT THERE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

The commentators point out, based upon the wording of the first verse, that it is talking about fighting against one's internal enemy, the yetzer hara. As the Talmud points out, that's a war that doesn't stop until a person dies. Over the course of a lifetime, there are many victories and losses.

The same thing is true on a national level. Not all enemies are external ones. As the GR"A warned, the final battle of the Jewish people will be an internal one—and the worst. It will be against the Erev Rav, the Mixed Multitude, and it won't be fought with conventional military weapons.

That's what will make it so hard to fight. Unquestionably, bullets and missiles are massively deadly. But, in a war scenario, it is hard to move them around without being noticed. Backstabbing, on the other hand, takes place behind closed doors, beyond the watchful eye of satellite surveillance, and can be far more dangerous.

It amounts to Civil War. The simple definition of a civil war is "a war between citizens of the same country." It doesn't mention anything about the type of weaponry used. In 1864, the weapons of choice included: knives, swords, rifled-muskets, breech loaders, repeating weapons, artillery, and new weapons such as the early grenade and machine gun. The combined total of war fatalities: 1,264,000.

The brain is a very fascinating component of being human. Its ability to learn new things is amazing. Its ability to UN-learn something, less so. Once the brain gets used to something, it stays used to it. That's why psychiatry is such a lucrative profession. People need to find ways to cope with their brains' inability to let go of inaccurate and counterproductive perspectives on life.

So, even though we use the word "war" in a very general fashion, such as, "I am at war with my belt line," when we talk about it on a national level, we think guns. If we say "Civil War," we imagine military mayhem in streets down which we once safely strolled. We see smoke clouds rising in the air from missiles shot or bombs exploded. That's what our brains have been told for the longest time.

The military, of course, has moved on from all of that. They still build and purchase the stuff because it still has its use, and probably will until Moshiach comes. But, everyone knows that the best way to go to war today is to use computer technology to bring down the infrastructure of the enemy. Just an EMP blast somewhere over the Eastern seaboard, which is not so hard to carry out, could take down significant sections of the American power grid and result in countless deaths within weeks.

Or, a terrorist could simply walk down a crowded street with a deadly virus and kill millions within hours, and no one will have seen it coming. A huge and powerful nation like the United States of America could be brought to its knees within weeks by a handful of clever, well-funded, but diabolical individuals. We may not worry about it, but the people at the top do. It would be arrogant and very imprudent to just assume it can't happen, as we learned on 9/11. It is only by the grace of God that it hasn't as of now.

The thing about man is that he is always looking for better ways to do the "old" thing. This has resulted in amazing advances in technology and a lot more convenience in life. It has also resulted in a lot more vulnerability to the world's population because of people who use the same good for evil. Unfortunately, there are A LOT of them in the world today.

Every war is primarily about objectives, not methodology. It is about achieving certain goals, and as efficiently as possible. Why loses soldiers you can save? Why spend money on destruction that can be avoided? As long as the war is won, the objective that launched the war is achieved, and victory can be declared.

Anwar Sadat, the President of Egypt until he was assassinated in 1981, wanted back the Sinai. He tried to recover it through war but failed each time. He finally had it handed to him on a silver platter by the Israelis at Camp David in 1972, as a concession for "Cold Peace." Sadat made Israel so sick of war until giving up the Sinai seemed, to the Israelis, worth the price of peace. Wars are fought and won in a number of ways.

Here's the question. Is America currently experiencing Civil War, and if yes, how bad will it get? If you ask people this question, you get different responses. Some people say that Civil War has definitely begun, while others will look at you with an, "Are-you-kidding-me?" face. They don't see the army dividing into two opposing sides, bombs dropping, or borders closing. They see political war, but not CIVIL war.

I wonder what it took to make the 1864 American Civil War a real possibility, and when it became clear that it was actually going to happen. The slave debate had been going on for some time, and both the North and the South had entrenched opinions. Clearly, neither side was going to back down, especially the South which had so much riding on keeping slaves, slaves. If they didn't get their way, they would have to retool their entire economy and their mentality. It was something to die to avoid, apparently.

The trouble is, not everyone in the South felt that way. There were probably plenty of Southerners who felt that if it was a choice between war and emancipation, emancipation was better. There were probably people in the South who, stubborn as they were about keeping slaves, still did not want to secede from the Union. Some may have even fled to the North instead.

Wars, however, are not decided by the people at the bottom. They're decided by the people at the top, the people with the power and the money. They're not necessarily the wisest people, just the

most influential ones. They can secretly make decisions that plunge entire nations into devastating conflicts. It's happened all through history.

The people at the top rarely think like we do. Sometimes that's good, sometimes that's bad. In the secular world, it has probably been mostly the latter. Such leaders could have been "off" from Day One. Other times years of being in politics and fending off hostile forces have molded them into people that stopped resembling the average person a long time ago. Their vision of reality may differ greatly from ours. Their ideas of what should or shouldn't happen, what could or couldn't happen, may exceed ours.

But here's the bottom line. The reason the Civil War occurred in 1864 is the same reason why any war has occurred throughout history or will occur in the Future, God forbid. God decides which wars will occur and which ones will not even begin. He decides how they will be fought, and who will win and at what cost. It looks like leaders wage wars, but they are puppets of the will of God. It appears like the better, or more clever army wins, but that is just the way God makes it look.

People forget how many times something seemed impossible, or at least unlikely, until it happened. After the damage has been done, they go back and analyze what it was they missed that resulted in their dangerously faulty predictions. They find answers, but the truth is, they only became clear after the fact because that is the way God wanted it.

He warns us, though. He may not tell us what He is going to do, but He does give warnings of what He might do. If things like wars were only a function of nature, then logic might be enough to chart the path of destruction. Since they are completely a function of the will of God, it pays to consider the unlikely as a possible outcome. Even the impossible becomes possible with some minor adjustments to history that God can make at a moment's notice.

As we have seen so many times before, the Talmud says that a wise person is one that sees "what is being born." We might add to this that he factors into his projection what Divine Providence might cause to happen. Civil War in the States may seem preposterous at this time, especially when the conflict is not simply North versus South. But hey, we're talking about God here. Being ready for anything means expecting the unexpected. What God wants God does, and everyone else is just His means to make it happen.