

BITACHON LESSON FROM THE PARSHA

פרשת שְׁפָטִים וְשִׁטְרוֹת תשפ"ד – Nothing To Fear But Fear Itself

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יֵרָאֵךְ עַל אִיְבֹךָ וְרֵאִיתָ סוּס וְרֶכֶב עִם רַב מִמֶּךָ לֹא תִירָא מֵהֶם כִּי ה' אִלֶּיךָ עֹמֵד - *When you go to war against your enemies, and you see horse and chariot, a people more numerous than you, do not fear them, for Hashem is with you* (Devarim 20:1)

The Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 7:15) writes regarding a soldier going to battle:

ישען על מקוה ישראל ומושיעו בעת צרה וידע שעל יחוד השם הוא עושה מלחמה וישים נפשו בכפו ולא יירא ולא יפחד ולא יחשוב ולא באשתו ולא בבניו אלא ימחה זכרונם מלבו ויפנה מכל דבר למלחמה. וכל המתחיל לחשוב ולהרהר במלחמה ומבהיל עצמו עובר בלא תעשה שנאמר אל ירד לבבכם אל תיראו ואל תחפזו ואל תערצו מפניהם

He should rely on the Hope of Yisroel and their Savior (Hashem) in times of trouble. He should realize that he is fighting for the sake of the Oneness of Hashem's Name. Therefore, he should place his soul in his hand and not show fright or fear. He should not think about his wife or children. Rather, he should wipe their memory from his heart, removing all thoughts from his mind except the war. Anyone who begins to feel anxious and worry in the midst of battle to the point where he frightens himself, violates a negative commandment, as it states (Devarim 20:3): "Do not be faint-hearted. Do not be afraid. Do not panic and do not show anxiety before them."

The Ramban (Sefer Hamitzvos; Lo Sa'seh 58) does not concur with the Rambam that it is a prohibition to fear; he maintains it is a *Havtacha*, a guarantee and a promise from Hashem that he will have nothing to fear.

The Rambam (ibid.) also agrees to the "guarantee" aspect, as he writes: וְכָל הַנִּלְחָם בְּכָל לִבּוֹ בְּלֹא פֶחַד וְתִהְיֶה פְּגִימָתוֹ לְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת הַשֵּׁם - *anyone who fights with his entire heart, without fear, with the intention of sanctifying Hashem's name alone, can be assured that he will find no harm, nor will bad overtake him.*

The Steipler Zatzal (in Birchas Peretz) wonders about this "guarantee"; does it mean that nobody will ever die in a war?! We know that the anointed Kohen, in his pep-talk to the troops heading out to battle, would proclaim things like מִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר - *Any man here who has built a new house and has not yet inaugurated it, let him return to his house lest he die in the war and another man inaugurate it.* (Devarim 20:5)

We see clearly that people do fall in battle. As Chazal teach, *השטן מקטרג בשעת סכנה*, the Satan is especially active in his prosecutive antics during perilous situations, which a battlefield definitely is.

How then can the Torah mandate that we not display fear, in a situation which clearly can - and often does - result in death? How can such fear be prohibited (according to the Rambam) and how can we explain this "guarantee" of safety? Perhaps the sins of the soldier will diminish his divine Hashgacha - just as Yaakov Avinu feared that his sins may have lessened his heavenly shield - and lead to him falling in battle. That is a valid fear! We even find instances in *Tanach* of great, righteous people who fell in battle. In fact, during the times of Dovid Hamelech, all soldiers gave their wives conditional divorces before heading to battle, in the event that they didn't return (See Gemara Kesuvos 9b and Rashi there)

We see clearly that war is a dangerous game, and fear of not making it out alive seems to be warranted. So, how do we explain the Pesukim, the Rambam and the Ramban above?

The answer is that the Posuk specifically states *לֹא תִירָא מֵהֶם* - do not be afraid of *them*. Sure, war is dangerous, and war can have fatalities, but Hashem is the One that we should fear, and our own sins causing us harm is what we should fear. What we may not fear is the size of the enemy, the power of the enemy or the weapons of the enemy. Fearing those things is a sin! Winning wars is not based on military hardware or on one strategy or another. Hashem alone determines who wins and who loses. Therefore, of course going to war demands a strengthening of Bitachon, Emunah, Tefilah, Torah and an overall connection to Hashem, but it still remains a dangerous situation and of course there can be casualties - but every single victim is determined by Hashem, not by enemy size, might or tactic.

Fear of falling in battle is not the sin - as that may be divinely orchestrated - and thus arming oneself with Bitachon, Tefilah and Teshuva is the right way to prepare for war. Fear of human involvement in that fall is the sin - as that gives credence to human power where there is none. Furthermore, that fear itself will be the very thing that causes the downfall - as the Posuk (Iyov 3:25) reveals, *כִּי פֶחַד פְּחַדְתִּי וַיֵּאֲתֵינִי וְאֲשֶׁר לִירְתִּי יָבֵא לִי* - *For the thing I feared has befallen me, and what I was afraid of has overtaken me.*

Indeed, we have nothing to fear but fear itself!

Good Shabbos!