



**Partners In Torah**

**San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura**

**Take home Dvar Torah**

**תשפ"ד Ki Teitzei**

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***Hello, Welcome!***

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

***Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.***

***Thank you for joining us!***

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.**

Moshe took a mere thirty-six days to teach the entire book of Deuteronomy to the Jewish people. As we near the book's end, Moshe's death and the transition to Yehoshua's leadership is only days away. This means that they would finally enter the Promised Land, the land that 470 years earlier Hashem had promised to Avraham our Forefather's descendants. There, the Jewish people would establish the Kingdom of Hashem for the entire world to see.

Rashi's first comment on the Torah cites Rabbi Yitzchak's famous question:

Why did Hashem begin the Torah with a description of Creation? Is not the Torah's purpose to convey to man his obligations in the form of the commandments that he must fulfill? So why didn't Hashem begin the Torah with the very first mitzvah given to the Jewish people - the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon, which does not appear until the Book of Exodus?

Rabbi Yitzchak answers this question with Psalms 111, Verse 6.

(ו) כֹּחַ מַעֲשָׂיו הִגִּיד לְעַמּוֹ לְתֵת לָהֶם נַחֲלַת גּוֹיִם :

*He (Hashem) declared the strength of His deeds to His people, to give them to inherit the nations.*

Should the world's nations tell the Jewish people, "You are thieves for having conquered the seven nations dwelling in the land of Israel and taken the land from them," we can respond, "The whole earth belongs to Hashem since He created it. Until now, He let you have it; but now He has chosen to give it to us."

The seven nations that occupied the land of Israel were the lowest people in the world. They practiced sorcery, black magic, and had many despicable practices, including sacrificing their children to their idols.

Hashem commanded the Jewish people to rout these evil forces from the land lest they influence the Jews to follow their evil ways. The Jews would have to go to war to accomplish this.

For the Jewish nation, there are two types of war. There is a war that is a mitzvah - an obligation- and an optional war.

The wars needed to conquer the land of Israel and the continuing war against Amalek are obligatory wars whose purpose is to remove the forces of evil from the world so that they cannot influence people against the Torah's holy and righteous laws and morals. Similarly, a war waged in self-defense to save the good and innocent people from their evil attackers, is also an obligatory war.

A war to broaden the borders of the land of Israel, on the other hand, like some of the wars that King David waged, is an optional war.

Although it sounds counterintuitive, in removing the indigenous nations from the land of Israel, the Jewish people were engaged in a great mitzvah, that of removing the evil forces from the land so that it could be the appropriate home for Hashem's Holy nation to build Hashem's Kingdom.

The idea of a "Holy War," a war for the sake of G-d, is a scary idea to the Jewish people. How we have suffered at the hands of "holy zealots" who felt that any form of murder and torture was justified under the banner of heaven. How many millions of lives were lost and how much property plundered in the name of G-d?

Yet conquering the Land of Israel is a true instance of a war for the sake of heaven, and it becomes obvious when you look at the laws of warfare for the Jewish nation, which are significantly different than those of the rest of the world.

In the end of last week's portion and in this week's opening statement, Moshe teaches the Jewish people the "rules of warfare" before going to war with their enemies.

In Deuteronomy 20:1 it says:

(א) כִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל אִיבֶיךָ וְרָאִיתָ סוּס וְרֶכֶב עִם רַב מִמֶּךָ לֹא תִירָא מֵהֶם  
כִּי יְדוּד אֱלֹהֶיךָ עִמָּךְ הַמַּעֲלֶיךָ מֵאֲרָץ מִצְרַיִם

*1) When you go out to the battle against your enemy, and you see horse, and chariot – a people more numerous than you – you shall not fear them, for Hashem your G-d is with you.*

Our Sages point out that the first point to understand is that they are "your enemy." They are out to kill you and will have no mercy on you. You accordingly are acting in self-defense, and must therefore kill them first. In regard to the seven nations that occupied the land of Israel, Hashem commanded the Jewish people to kill every man, woman, and child, and not to feel guilty for completely eliminating them. They are evil, and if any of them remain alive, they will return to kill you. You are doing a mitzvah by killing them, and you are saving yourselves and your children.

Just before going into battle, a special Kohen would address the soldiers. He would say to them (Deuteronomy 20:3):

(ג) וְאָמַר אֲלֵהֶם שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם קָרְבִים הַיּוֹם לְמִלְחָמָה עַל אִיבֵיכֶם. אֶל יִרְדָּ:  
לְבַבְכֶם אֶל תִּירְאוּ וְאֶל תַּחֲפוּזוּ וְאֶל תַּעֲרִצוּ מִפְּנֵיהֶם  
(ד) כִּי יְדוּד אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַהֲלִיךְ עִמָּכֶם לְהִלָּחֵם לָכֶם עִם אִיבֵיכֶם לְהוֹשִׁיעַ אֶתְכֶם

*3) He shall say to them, "Hear O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies; let your heart not be faint; do not be afraid, do not panic, and do not be broken before them. 4) For Hashem your G-d is the One Who goes with you, to fight for you with your enemies, to save you."*

Do those first few words "Hear O Israel" sound familiar? They are of course the beginning of our declaration of accepting Hashem as the One

and only (the “Shema Yisrael”). Our Sages point out that this is not coincidental. Rashi cites the quote.

שמע ישראל - אפילו אין בכם זכות אלא קריאת שמע בלבד כדאי אתם שיושיע אתכם

Even if your only merit is that you say Shema and accept Hashem as your G-d, it's worth it for Hashem to save you from your enemies.

The following true story illustrates this point.

A colonel in the Israeli army entered a suit store in Yerushalayim wearing a kippa. The owner of the store, shocked to see the kippa, asked the colonel. “What happened to you? Did you fall on your head or something? Since when do you wear a kippa?”

The colonel responded, “I have become a baal teshuva.”

“Really? But you were so anti-religious! What could have made you change your mind?”

“Here’s the story.

“A few months ago, I was sent to lead a fleet of fifteen tanks in the Sinai into Egyptian territory. My men were seasoned soldiers and fully trained. Our mission was proceeding exactly as planned when out of nowhere I spotted 60 Egyptian tanks that were faster and more powerful than any of ours.

“I could see no way out for us, so I called my men together and told them; ‘I am afraid this is the end for us. Everyone is on his own.’

“‘Are you giving up?’ a voice called out. I turned to see who was talking and it was a chassid with payot and tzitzit. ‘Listen, if you’re giving up, then permit me to take charge.’

“I put it to the others and they all said, ‘Why not? What do we have to lose?’”

“He then said. ‘Here are your instructions. We will go full force ahead, and when I give the signal, everyone scream with all his might and concentration, “Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad!” Then shoot your first round of ammunition. With Hashem’s help, we will survive.’

“Everyone got into position, and the tanks started moving. The Chassid gave the signal and everyone screamed, “Shema Yisrael” following it with a round of fire.

“When the smoke cleared, we saw an amazing sight. All sixty tanks had stopped where they were, and the commander had raised the white flag.

“I couldn’t figure out what happened, but I didn’t want to lose the opportunity so I quickly took back command and announced in Arabic that they should leave their tanks with their hands up.

“They all came out of their tanks and started walking towards us, with the leader still holding the white flag.

“‘You see!’ I said triumphantly to the commander. ‘We are more powerful than you!’

“‘Don’t be ridiculous’ he said. ‘We have sixty tanks and you have only fifteen. We were just coming over to finish you off!’

“‘So why didn’t you?’ I asked.

“The Egyptian commander looked up to the sky and said, ‘We saw those twenty airplanes flying above us. There was no way we could have withstood them, so we gave up.’

“The colonel looked steadily at the store owner. ‘I looked up at the sky, and there were no airplanes. Later, I checked with the army, and they also told me that there were no airplanes in the area at the time. Hashem had made a miracle and showed the Egyptians the airplanes to save our

lives. I saw Hashem with my own eyes, how could I not believe in Him and follow His ways?”

“All they had was the merit of saying the Shema.”

The essence of the Kohen’s message to the soldiers is that they have nothing to fear. They have Hashem, the greatest power in the world, to fight for them. He is your Partner in this holy endeavor. This is why in all the battles in the Bible that the Jewish people waged against their enemies, they never lost even one soldier. There is one exception to this, the battle with the city of HaAi, when a few soldiers were lost because Achan had sinned by taking the forbidden spoils of war.

The **officers** also spoke to the soldiers before they went to war, and in their address, they told any soldier who is afraid of going to battle, “Go home!” lest he weaken the hearts of his fellow soldiers when he flees from the battle.

The next chapter says (verse 10):

(י) כִּי תִקְרַב אֶל עִיר לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ וְקָרָאתָ אֵלֶיהָ לְשָׁלוֹם

*10) When you draw near to a city to wage war against it, you shall call out to it for peace.*

Maimonides writes (Laws of Kings 6:1).

(א) אין עושין מלחמה עם אדם בעולם עד שקוראין לו שלום

*1) One does not war with a person in the world until they have called out to them in peace.*

(ה) שלשה כתבים שלח יהושע עד שלא נכנס לארץ הראשון שלח להם מי שרוצה לברוח יברח וחזר ושלח מי שרוצה להשלים ישלים וחזר ושלח מי שרוצה לעשות מלחמה יעשה

*5) Joshua sent three letters into Israel before he entered. The first one said, “Whoever wants to run away, run away.” The second letter said,*



*“Whoever wants to make peace with us, let him make peace.” The third letter said, “Whoever wants to war with us shall do so.”*

The Talmud Yerushalmi reports that:

גִּרְגָשִׁי פִּינָה וְהָאֱמִינִין לוֹ לְהַקְדֹּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְהִלְךְ לוֹ לְאַפְרִיקָי, (ישעיה לו) "עַד בּוֹאִי וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל אֶרֶץ כְּאַרְצְכֶם" זֶה אַפְרִיקָי. גְּבֻעוֹנִים הַשְּׁלִימוּ, (יהושע י) "וְכִי הַשְּׁלִימוּ יוֹשְׁבֵי גְבֻעוֹן אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל". שְׁלֵשִׁים וְאַחַד מְלָכִים עָשׂוּ מִלְחָמָה וְנָפְלוּ

*The Girgashites fled and went to Africa..., the Givonim made peace..., and the other 32 nations warred with the Jewish people and fell.*

The goal here was not to kill the people per se, but rather to prepare the land for the Jewish people's entry. Would the indigenous nations be prepared to leave, or to become slaves to the Jewish people and accept not to worship their idols, they could stay.

The next chapter (verse 19) instructs the soldiers not to chop down any fruit trees.

(יט) כִּי תִצּוֹר אֶל עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשָׁהּ לֹא תִשְׁחִית אֶת עֵצָהּ לְנֹדֶחַ עָלֶיהָ גֵרְזוֹן כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאֵתוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה לְבָא מִפְּנֵיךָ בַּמָּצוֹר

*19) When you besiege a city for many days to wage war against it to seize it, do not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them, for from it you will eat, and you shall not cut it down; **is the tree of the field a man that it should enter the siege before you?** (In context: Why would you cut it down? It is not a man, so it poses no threat to you.)*

The next verse allows a non-fruit bearing tree to be cut down.

This is also unique in a war. Many countries have used the “scorched earth” policy in warfare, completely destroying perfectly good resources so the enemy cannot use them against them. Here, the Torah teaches us that you cannot for no purpose, cut down a fruit tree since it is a source of food for you. If, however, the tree is needed to build a fortress for protection, or any other need for the war effort, you may cut

it down, since it is for a constructive purpose; but just to destroy it for the sake of destroying it is proscribed.

Homiletically, by way of דרוש *drush* – the words say, **a man is a tree of the field.**

In what way can a person be compared to a fruit tree? My teacher, Rabbi Moshe Shapiro לצ"ל, explained.

A fruit tree takes nutrients and water from the ground, sunlight from the sun, and air from all around, and through its roots and wood, blends these ingredients to bring forth sweet and delicious juicy fruits. The different fruit trees all take the same ingredients and produces their unique fruits. The apple tree - apples, the orange tree - oranges, etc.

In the same sense, Hashem endows a person with many gifts and talents. His job on this world is to blend those talents and endowments to bring forth beautiful fruits. What are a person's fruits? The Torah he learns, good deeds, and children.

Perhaps, this lesson comes here, in the context of war, to tell the people that the Jewish people who are here to produce fruit, should not be cut down, and we must preserve them by taking out the lowly indigenous nations who threaten the Jewish people's existence.

This brings us to the fourth installment of the instructions to the Jewish soldiers before going to war, the first verses of this week's portion Ki Teitze (Deuteronomy 21:10,11).

(י) כִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל אִיְבֹיֶיךָ וַיִּתְּנֶנּוּ יְדֹדֶיךָ אֶלֶיְכֶם בְּיָדְךָ וְשָׁבִיתָ שְׂבִי  
(יא) וַרְאִיתָ בְּשִׁבְיָהּ אִשָּׁת יְפֹת תֵּאָר וְחִשְׁקֶתָּ בָּהּ וְלִקְחָתָּ לָּךְ לְאִשָּׁה

*10) When you will go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hand, and you will capture his captivity; 11) and you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form, and you will desire her, **you may take her as a wife.***

How could this be? A Jewish man is permitted to take a gentile captive woman for a wife?

Rashi, quoting the Talmud explains:

לא דברה תורה אלא כנגד יצר הרע שאם אין הקב"ה מתירה ישאנה באיסור -  
*The Torah spoke here to combat the "Yetzer Hara" the evil inclination. For if Hashem did not permit her, the man would marry her anyway, even though she is forbidden to him.*

In other words, since Hashem saw that it would be impossible to demand of a soldier at war to refrain from marrying a beautiful woman that he sees among the captives and he would marry her in sin, Hashem rendered her permissible to marry.

Here we see a most remarkable element of the Torah. Hashem does not demand of a person something that he is incapable of doing. Hashem, our manufacturer, knows what we are capable of doing and what we are not. Therefore, in this situation, where Hashem acknowledges that it is impossible for a man to refrain from taking the woman, Hashem doesn't forbid her. The corollary of this is that every law that we are obligated to do, we are capable of doing or Hashem would not have given it.

How does this fit with this being a holy war, and the people engaged in it performing a mitzvah?

Our Sages explain that when a person is in his normal surroundings where the laws of society are firmly in place, he feels human and dignified. Therefore, it is easy for him to control his desires and limit himself to a Jewish woman. He would never look at a gentile woman, for she is not a candidate to be his wife.

However, when a person is at war, and all the barriers of what makes a person feel human are broken down, viz, he is engaged in taking the lives of others, he is compromised. Under these circumstances it would be impossible to demand that he not look at a woman in captivity and desire her. Therefore, Hashem, who understands this, did not forbid her, and after going through a lengthy conversion process, the person may marry her.

Nevertheless, in the following verses, the Torah puts in place various laws to expose her lowliness to him and show him that she is really not a suitable mate for him. Just because he was infatuated with her doesn't mean he should marry her. Better he should just send her on her way and forget about her.

Indeed, the next chapter in the Torah deals with the wayward child, who is destined to be a murderer. The Sages explain the juxtaposition of these two portions in that if a man marries the captive woman, the next step will be a wayward son from her. Since they are incompatible, the resulting child will be a problem.

Once again, we see the ways of the Torah are special and unique. The Torah does not place unreasonable demands on its constituents.

The Torah is a תורת חיים, a Torah of Life, and it is designed to give the person who follows its ways the very best life possible. This becomes clear even in the way that the Jewish people go to war. How fortunate we are to have Hashem's holy Torah to guide our lives.