

Ki Teitzei: The Power of Unity

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Herschel Reichman

The Shem Mishmuel raises an intriguing question originally posed by his grandfather, the Kotzker Rebbe. In Parshat Ki Teizei, we read, “Ki teizei l'milchomo al oy'vecha...” Hashem tells the Jewish nation that when they will go out to war, He will straightaway give the enemy into their hands. There is no mention of prayer or fasting or fierce battles. It seems as if Hashem gives the foreign nations over to the Jews on a silver platter. In contrast, in Parshat Behaloscha, we read, “V'ki tavo'u l'milchama...” The Jews will need to pray, fast, repent, and then do battle before winning over their enemies. Why does this situation demand so much more?

To answer this, the Shem MiShmuel points out another question. In Parshat Ki Teizei, “Ki teizei”, which refers to the Jewish nation, is in singular tense and “oy'vecha”-your enemies, is in plural tense. However, in Parshat Behaloscha, “Ki tavo'u”-the Jewish nation, is referred to in plural tense. The Shem MiShmuel explains that the Jewish people's success in battle is not dependent on their physical strength. Their victory is dependent on their spiritual level, on how in touch they are with their “Tzelem Elokim”-their G-dly image. In fact, Jewish soldiers wore their tefillin to battle. Tefillin require extraordinary spiritual focus to the point that one needs to constantly feel the Almighty's presence in ones mind and heart. Normally in the midst of war, soldiers become inhuman. Yet the Torah

emphasizes that even in the heat of battle a Jewish fighter must maintain his sanctity. A Jew's power is not physical, rather it is a mystical, spiritual force, drawn from his perfection of Tzelem Elokim. This achieves victory over the enemy.

How does one reach such spiritual perfection? A person is made up of 248 limbs and 365 sinews which correspond to the 248 positive and 365 negative commandments. The soul also has 613 elements. When a person performs mitzvot, he affects his positive corresponding aspects and when he keeps away from sin, he avoids the negative elements. In this way, a person can achieve perfection of Tzelem Elokim. If however, he neglects to fulfill one mitzvah, there is a blemish in his Tzelem Elokim. There are specific mitzvot given exclusively to the kohen and the king. Can one Jew possibly fulfill all 613 mitzvot? Chassidut explains that ideally when all Jews are united they share one common universal soul called “Yechida”. If one Jew performs a mitzvah all Jews can claim a share in the act. That is how we can achieve perfection. Therefore, the most important factor in the defeat of the Jewish nations' enemies is the unity of Israel. Achdut Yisrael is the key to success in war.

The Shem MiShmuel quotes the Maharal that the Jewish people have a paradoxical and tragic tendency to split off from one other. The Jew leans towards being individu-

alistic and separate. How can we subdue this and develop the universal Jewish soul identity? The Shem MiShmuel writes that one should strive for the level of, “Kedoshim Tihyu.” Rashi explains this mitzva as a command to sanctify oneself with matters that are permitted. Dveikut b'Hashem-cleaving to Hashem, should be a Jew's primary goal. In a sense this entails relinquishing one's personal identity and agenda for Hashem's agenda. Part of unity is Ahavat yisrael-respecting each individual Jew's path in avodat Hashem. When we all cling to that same inner point and Source, namely Hashem, then we can achieve unity of Israel, perfection of Tzelem Elokim, and victory in war.

When Jews confront their enemies with achdut, their foes splinter. When Jews are disunited, their enemies join together and defeat them. In Parshat Ki Teizei, the Jews were united in purpose and service to Hashem. Therefore, Hashem gave the enemy easily into their hands. However, in Parshat Beha'lotcha, the Jews were fractionalized and their enemies were united. Therefore they needed to do teshuva, before they could achieve victory. The month of Elul is a time of preparation for the New Year. It is a period when we work on our Ahavat Yisrael and reconcile with our fellow Jews. If we are willing to give up our personal preferences to cling to Hashem, to live holy lives, we will achieve the Yechida level of true Jewish unity.

Faulty Sales & Counterfeit Money

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dayan Shlomo Cohen

Generally, faulty sales involve defective items. But what if money that was exchanged in a sale turned out to be counterfeit? Who is responsible? A problem arises when the buyer didn't know that he handed over forged money. He may claim, “I thought it was good money, I'm no expert in dollars.” How does Jewish law address *toan v'nitan* – a claim and a counterclaim?

The Shulchan Aruch explains that if it was known that there was a clear debt, the *halacha* is that the debtor has to pay. But if the debtor might owe the claimant but it isn't certain, the debtor isn't expected to pay.

There was a case where someone hired a

builder and payed him \$10,000 in a cash. The next day the builder found out that \$1,000 of this sum was counterfeit and he demanded repayment. The client refused to reimburse him claiming, “Who says the bills I gave you were forged? As far as I know they were good.” So in this case there was a clear debt between the builder and the client. The client paid, but the builder claims he is still owed \$1,000. The client is unsure if the bills were good. In this case it seems he must pay again. On the other hand, one could claim, certainly there was a clear debt but from the moment the client paid there was an understanding that the debt was paid. If the builder subsequently comes back, that's a new claim. Therefore the *halacha* would seem that he doesn't have to

pay. The question remains, is it a continuation of an old debt or a new claim?

The Taz writes that a similar question came before his *beit din*. Some judges claimed that it was part of the old debt while others said it was a new claim. The Piskei Teshuva rules that when there was a clear debt between two people it's only considered paid if the debtor pays with legitimate money. In this case, since the client was unsure if the bills were legitimate, he would have to pay again. But where there was never a debt, for example if someone bought something from a shop and then the next day the seller said the bills he was given were forged, the buyer would not have to pay again.



Elul: Room For Reflection

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The verse in Shemot says, “*V'elokim inah l'yadi v'samti lecha makom asher anus shama,*” This refers to the unintentional murderer who had to flee to a city of refuge. The Arizal says the first letters of the first four words spell Elul. What is the connection between the *ir miklat* and Elul? Invariably we try to justify our faults by taking comfort in the thought that we didn't mean it. The *ir miklat* teaches us the serious consequence of an unintentional act. We have to face our mistakes and recognize that in some ways we are responsible.

The Sichot Hischazkus notes that *teshuvah* begins by remembering the purpose of our existence. Before a soul is sent down to the world, Hashem shows it what it's meant to accomplish. But the *yetzer hara* makes sure to distract us. Before the sin it was clear to Adam what his mission was. But when he ate of the fruit, he entered a state of death. Death is loss of clarity. It's living for months and years and never growing or becoming what we should or could be.

On Rosh Hashana we continually ask for life. On a deeper level we ask for the ability to utilize our full potential, to meet the right people, to seize the opportunities, and to be inspired. All of us have to ask ourselves, are we living up to our potential? In the Western world this means making it to the top in one's profession. In Judaism, it's sanctifying the name of Hashem and being the best we can be.

Mrs. Smiles recounts, “I have a talented student who is a teacher. When her family began to grow, she considered the possibility of leaving her job as she didn't need the extra income. She told me, ‘I'm afraid in heaven they will ask me, ‘Where are all the students you could've had?’ So I told her, I'm afraid they will ask you, ‘Were you the best mother you could've been to your children?’ No one can substitute what a mother can give a child. A Rav once told me that our primary responsibility is our own children. Other people's children are secondary. Developing ourselves to the fullest means developing ourselves in the areas where we are indispensable.”

Chazal say that Hashem brings *tzadikim* into the world and takes them away on the same day. But we see that there were many *tzadikim* who didn't die on their birthday. The Chasam Sofer explains that the day a *tzadik* sets out on his path to greatness is his true birthday for it is then that he truly began to live. In the introduction to Rav Pincus' *hagadah*, he describes the turning point in his life. As a young boy, he was once doing *bedikat chametz* on the night before Pesach. He went up to inspect the roof and he saw it was full of *chametz*. He knew the *halacha* that the area must be clean before checking. So he set to work cleaning up. Right before sunrise, he did the *bedika*. He felt so invigorated, after displaying such self-sacrifice for a *mitzvah*, that the entire Pesach he was on a high. He describes this as a defining point in his life. Sadly, Rav Pincus was taken from us many years later on the night of *bedikat chametz*. So we see Hashem fills the days of *tzadikim* in a different way because that is really what *chayut* is about, investing oneself in matters that are worth living. In Elul, we have to ask ourselves, “*Ayeka,*” Where have we been this year? Have we given to the world as much as we could've given? Have we really lived?

Rav Brazil says that the *ani* in “*Ani l'dodi,*” comes first because before we can build a relationship with Hashem we have to recognize our own inner greatness. No one else can do what we were put on this world to do. Rav Freifeld says the greatest obstacle in spreading the light of the Torah is our lack of confidence in our power to change and move forward. When the Midrash talks about people who are *osek b'Torah* (occupied with Torah) it refers to those who try to give expression to their soul. These are people who are prepared to struggle over and over and are never afraid to grow and strive higher.

Rav Leff says that killing unintentionally shows a disregard for the value of life. If we see the physical world as a means of creating eternal spiritual bliss then every second of temporal life is invested with infinite value. This is how the Telzer Rosh yeshiva explains Rebbe's last words, “*Yesh kono olamo b'shah achas.*” (There are those who can acquire the world to come in one hour.) He was bemoaning the fact

that we let precious seconds escape us without eternal acquisition. One who appreciates his own life won't be careless in endangering another person's life. Therefore, an unintentional murderer had to be exiled to an *ir miklat*. He had to be inspired by the *leviim* who understood the sanctity of life. And he had to remain till the *kohen gadol* died in order that he would be aroused by the eulogy of the *tzaddik*. When we don't consider the eternal value of life and carelessly commit sins, we are guilty in a certain sense of unintentional suicide. Killing time is killing life itself. Therefore Hashem gave us *chodesh Elul* as a kind of refuge to regain our perspective.

It is told that the Chofetz Chaim opted to buy slip-on shoes so he could save the time it would take to tie his laces. When Rav Trop, the *mashgiach* of Radin took ill, his students gave away days and weeks of their own lives so that he would live. The Chofetz Chaim considered donating one moment or two because for him that was like an entire life. Elul is a time to stop and ask ourselves, “How much of my day is wasted on foolish things? What steps can I take to be more responsible in the future?”

The Tiv Hamoadim says that the root word of *aveira* is *avar*-the other side. Sin brings a person to the other side. It creates a wall between us and Hashem so that even if we are learning Torah or praying we are really far away. We become our own worst enemy and there's no one to blame but ourselves. Still Hashem has mercy on us and gives us Elul to return. How do we begin? A good way to start is to make a list of sins and then highlight the easy ones to fix first. The big ones can be attacked slowly with a plan. Sometimes the *yetzer hara* will get us to take on a lot so that we get overwhelmed enough not to do anything. Deciding on one manageable *kabbalah*, something simple that can be done every day, can affect our entire focus. Success breeds success and there's no turning back once we're set on the road to return. May we merit *teshuvah sheleima* and a fulfilling new year.