

**Wembley Synagogue**

כי תצא

Insights from the commentators into the Sidra of Ki Tetzei

כי תצא למלחמה על איבך - When you will go out to war against your enemies, and G-d, your G-d, will deliver them into your hand." (21:10) Instead of "*ki teitzei lamilchamah*" — "when you will go out to war" — it should have said "*ki tilcham im oyevecha*" — "when you will be at war with your enemy"?

This *parshah* is read during the month of *Elul*, the optimal time for doing *teshuvah*; it is not only discussing a physical war, but is also alluding to man's spiritual battle. Man has a *yeitzer tov* — good inclination — and a *yeitzer hara* — evil inclination. Each one fights to control man's direction, and it is extremely difficult for man to overcome his powerful *yeitzer hara*. However, our sages (*Shabbat* 104a) have declared that "*haba letaheir mesai'im oto*" — "the one who wants to purify himself (improve his ways) is assisted from Heaven." Similarly the *Midrash Rabbah* (Song of Songs 5:2) states that Hashem says to the Jewish people, "Make a small opening (of *teshuvah*) like the opening of a needle, and I will open for you entrances through which caravans can pass."

In encouraging us to do *teshuvah*, the Torah is assuring us that "*ki teitzei lamilchamah*" — if you will only resolve to go out and wage war "*al oyevecha*" — "against the enemy" — i.e. the *yeitzer hara* — you will surely be victorious because Hashem will hand him over to you (Source: *Vedibarta Bam*)

כי יתנהו לאיש בן סורר ומורה - If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son, who does not hearken to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother. (21:18) Why is the word "*bekol*" — "to the voice" — repeated? It could have simply said, "He does not hearken to the voice of his father and mother"?

When a man and woman enter into marriage, it is extremely important that they have similar views and mutual goals for the family they hope to raise. Unfortunately, the husband and wife sometimes do not see eye to eye in their aspirations for their children. The Torah is telling us that when a child is exposed to a "*kol aviv*" — "a father's voice" — and a "*kol imo*" — "a mother's voice" — each one telling the child different things, it is possible that the child, receiving mixed signals, may end up being wayward and rebellious. (Source: *Vedibarta Bam*)

The Torah discusses the laws of the Ben Sorer U'Moreh - a wayward and rebellious youth. Under very specific circumstances, such a youth must be executed in order to save him from causing himself and society further harm. Our Sages state that the guidelines for a youth to become a Ben Sorer U'Moreh are so narrow, they preclude the possibility of a person ever becoming one. The only reason that the Torah discusses the issue of the Ben Sorer U'Moreh is so that we can gain the reward for Torah study by learning it. This statement seems puzzling. The Torah is so vast and deep, that even without this portion its study would more than occupy one's entire lifetime.

The answer is that the concept of "learning about Ben Sorer U'Moreh to earn reward thereby" does not only refer to the volume of Torah added by the inclusion of Ben Sorer U'Moreh. The fact that the Torah included a set of laws that have no practical applications demonstrates a vital principle. That is, studying Torah is not only for one to know how to keep the commandments of G-d. Learning Torah is in itself the loftiest pursuit of all, for when one studies Torah, he connects himself to the Word of G-d, the highest means of connecting oneself to Him. The Torah's primary purpose is to serve as a vehicle towards holiness. This is the meaning of the statement that the portion of Ben Sorer U'Moreh was included in the Torah so that one may earn reward by studying it. One who absorbs the lesson of this "extra" portion and studies Torah for its own intrinsic value will thereby gain the greatest reward for Torah study. (Source: Rav Yisroel Salanter - P'ninim, MiShulchan Govoha)

Da'at Chachamim explains the term sorer u'moreh, as sorer: turns himself away, and moreh: teaches others to follow in his ways.

לא תחרש בשור ובחמור יחדיו - You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. (22:10)

The Chizkuni explains the rationale behind the mitzvah. An ox chews its cud, while the donkey does not. When the donkey senses the ox chewing its cud, it thinks that the ox is eating while he is not. This will cause the donkey undue anguish. The Vilna Gaon was once invited to a meal where the wealthier people had already begun to eat, while the poor guests had to wait. The Gaon questioned why the poor were subject to waiting. The response was the usual, "When the wealthy are finished, the poor guests will be fed." The Gaon's response was filled with rebuke, "You are transgressing a negative commandment of the Torah,

referring to the above mitzvah. If the Torah is sensitive to the feelings of a donkey, certainly it cares about the feelings of a poor man.

לֹא תִתְעֵב מִצֵּרִי כִּי גֵר הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ - You shall not reject an Egyptian for you are a sojourner in his land. (23:8,9) What an incredible demand: to show hakarat hatov – to recognise and appreciate the good that the cruel Egyptians did for us! While it is true that the Egyptians gave us a home, they also treated us cruelly, by making us perform backbreaking labour. They slaughtered our children and drowned our male infants. They used Jewish babies as filler in the cement for their buildings. They did not provide us with straw to make bricks, and when we went to the field to gather the straw, they would beat us incessantly. Perhaps cruel is not a strong enough term to describe their wickedness. Do we owe hakarat hatov to these people? Furthermore, if anything - they owe us. Was it not our ancestor, Yosef, who sustained them? When Yaakov moved to Egypt, the devastating famine ceased. The Egyptians acted in such a dreadful manner against the descendants of Yaakov and Yosef. Yet, Hashem demands that we act towards them without malice or contempt. All this is because they provided us with a home during our time of need. The famine was strong in Canaan, causing Yaakov and his family to seek refuge with his son, Yosef, in Egypt. We journeyed in their land for a little over two hundred years - most of which were difficult and treacherous. At least, however, we had a home, a haven from the trial and travail of wandering. All of the cruelty does not abrogate this good. This is how far hakarat hatov, gratitude to one who benefits us, goes. (Source: Peninim on the Torah)

זְכוֹר אֵת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק - Remember what Amalek did to you...that he happened upon you on the way...when you were faint and exhausted, and he did not fear G-d. (25:17,18)
It is a positive commandment to erase the memory of Amalek. We are equally enjoined to remember their evil deeds in order to inspire a greater hatred of them. It is true that Amalek's insolence supercedes that of the other nations, -- and he was the first to audaciously attack us, but is that a reason to hate him forever? Hashem considers Amalek His and our archenemy. Why is this? Wherein lies his unique evil?

The Brisker Rav, zl, notes the Torah's emphasis upon Amalek's lack of fear of G-d. What did Amalek do that indicates his fearlessness of the Almighty? He cites the Talmud in Bava Kama 79a, where the Rabbis distinguish between a ganav –a thief, and a gazlan -a robber. The Torah fines the thief, kefel (double payment) whereas the robber only pays the principle. The ganav steals at night, when no one will find him. He is afraid of people. Consequently, he demonstrates a greater fear of man, the servant, than of Hashem, the Master.

The gazlan, on the other hand, does not differentiate between man and G-d. He steals openly, brandishing his weapon to protect himself from anyone who might attempt to stop him. He fears no one. The thief seems to have greater fear of what humans will think than what Hashem will say. The gazlan does not care about either.

The Brisker Rav presents an insightful analysis of the minds of the ganav and gazlan. A robber does not deliberate before he acts. He does what he wants. He needs something - he steals it, regardless of who is watching. Conversely, the thief is meticulous in planning, taking great pains to make sure that he is not caught. He does not want people to see him. He is afraid /ashamed of people, but could not care less about Hashem. This is the lowest form of chutzpah. He rejects Hashem knowingly and with acute awareness. He contrasts the one who does not think at all, but who acts impulsively. One who acts on a whim is not nearly as offensive as one who acts maliciously, contemplating every step of his actions.

The Torah says that the Jewish people were weak and exhausted when they were attacked by Amalek. This means that Amalek was deliberate in his actions, planning his attack against the Jewish People at a time when they were down. He knew what he was doing. He staged his battle at a time when he knew the people were exhausted and had little fight left in them. He acted deliberately - like the thief. He acted with malice towards the Jews and contempt towards Hashem. He took all the factors into his battle equation - except for one - Hashem. He did not include Hashem in the equation, because he was not a *yarei Elokim* – G-d fearing. Therefore, Hashem continues to wage war with Amalek *midor dor* -throughout the generations. (Source: Peninim on the Torah)

Shabbat Shalom



Shabbat starts 7.50pm



Shabbat ends: 8.53pm

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is produced by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

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