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Parshat Vayera

Zmanim for New York:

Candle Lighting: 5:32pm

Shabbat ends: 6:31pm

R"T 7:02pm

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DIVINE INTERVENTION IN WARFARE: UNDERSTANDING HASHEM'S ROLE IN BATTLE.

WRITTEN BY RABBI SHAY TAHAN

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During wartime, individuals often experience fear, stress, and anxiety due to the constant threat to their safety and well-being. Fear stemming from the immediate danger of combat and potential harm, stress resulting from the prolonged exposure to these dangers and the uncertainty of the situation, and anxiety can stem from the anticipation of future threats and the psychological toll of living in a war-torn environment. These emotions are heightened by the disruption of daily life, loss of loved ones, and the overall instability of wartime conditions.

In the Torah, these emotions are openly acknowledged, and the Torah, as always, gives us direction on how to deal with these emotions.

Psychological warfare.

First, we must recognize that the enemy exploits our emotions and uses psychological warfare tactics, including the use of disturbing videos and images depicting torture and violence. Therefore, the first step is for everyone to refrain from watching such content, for we must understand that this is a tactic used against us. Furthermore, watching such content will only serve to heighten the levels of fear and anxiety we're feeling. Thus, not only is there nothing to be gained from viewing these images, it is actually counterproductive. The Torah already addresses these techniques, stating: "Let not your heart faint; fear not, nor be alarmed, and do not be terrified of them" (Devarim 20:3). Rashi explains that the enemy employs four forms of psychological warfare, and the verse offers reassurance not to succumb to fear:

- "Let not your heart faint" in response to the neighing of horses and the sharpening of the enemy's swords.
- "Fear not" in reaction to the clashing of shields and the noise of their boots.
- "Nor be alarmed" by the sound of trumpets.
- "Do not be terrified" in the face of the enemy's

shouts.

Understanding these tactics and the Torah's guidance can help us resist the psychological warfare waged against us.



Bitachon.

Concerning the fear one feels when fighting a war, the verse states (Devarim 20:1): "When you go into battle against your enemies, and you

see a horse, a chariot, and a force greater than yours, do not be afraid, for Hashem is with you."

Rashi emphasizes that the verse uses the singular form, "horse" and "chariot," to convey that the enemy is depicted as having only one horse or chariot. Rashi's interpretation underscores that the Torah intends to teach us that it is only Hashem Who is the true combatant in the war. From Hashem's perspective, all the horses and chariots of the enemy are as insignificant as a single one, signifying that the quantity of the enemy's resources holds no weight in Hashem's eyes.

This aligns with what the Gemara (Avodah Zara 2) teaches, particularly in the context of the end of times when Hashem will judge all nations. When Hashem questions the Iranians about their contributions to the world, they claim they fought wars. However, Hashem responds by stating that they did not fight any wars; He fought all the wars. This highlights the importance of recognizing that all wars are ultimately waged by Hashem. While we may not visibly see Hashem on the battlefield, we should understand that He is present, orchestrating all events. It's akin to watching a movie about a war where everything on the screen is meticulously directed by the movie's writer.

The Pasuk continues: "And he shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel, today you are approaching the battle against your enemies. Let your hearts not be faint; you shall not be afraid, and you shall not be alarmed, and you shall not be terrified because of them. For Hashem is the One Who goes with you, to fight for you against

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your enemies, to save you."

Two distinct approaches can be found among the Rishonim in understanding these verses. The Ramban asserts that these verses represent a promise to those preparing for battle, assuring them that Hashem will grant them victory.

One may question how the Torah can provide reassurance and make a promise of a favorable outcome, given that history has shown the Jewish nation facing defeats in wars. The Steipler (Birkat Perets, Shoftim) responds that the Torah is not necessarily assuring us of Am Yisrael's victory in battle. Instead, it conveys a different message: The Torah reminds us that we don't know the ultimate outcome of a war, but when one enters a battle, they should understand that Hashem is the one fighting on their behalf. Consequently, they should not be daunted by the enemy's superior numbers or weaponry, as these factors are not decisive. Hashem is present on the battlefield and determines the course of events.

In contrast to the Ramban, the Rambam (Melachim 7,15) disagrees with this perspective, since there are numerous instances in Tanach where the Jewish people faced defeat in wars (Sefer Megilat Ester). Therefore, the Rambam interprets this not as a promise but as a commandment – a Mitzvah. When someone goes to war, they are commanded to place their trust and faith in Hashem and not succumb to fear. The reason is that engaging in a battle while feeling fearful is destined for failure.

Hishtadlut.

One might question our role in a war if indeed Hashem is the ultimate combatant. We must understand that we have a re-

sponsibility to exert effort and take action (hishtadlut) to achieve victory. Our goal in warfare is to bring honor to Hashem and His people. Rashi alludes to this by highlighting that even having just one Mitzvah, such as reciting the Shema, is sufficient to secure victory. Perhaps this particular Mitzvah is singled out because saying the Shema represents the symbol of our faith (emunah). Rashi's message is clear: while the enemy may rely on their weapons, we should enter the battlefield with trust in Hashem, recognizing that our ultimate strength lays in our faith in Hashem.

Certainly, achieving the minimal merit to win a battle is essential, but we should strive to go beyond the minimum and give our best effort. According to the Gemara (Makot 10), the key to victory is to increase Torah study. The Gemara references the verse "עומדות היו רגלינו בשער ירושלים", which means "Our legs are standing on the gates of Yerushalayim." The Gemara expounds on this verse, explaining that the merit that allowed Yerushalayim to stand victorious in war was the dedication to Torah learning.

Another Gemara (Sanhedrin 49 and see Rashi) recounts that Yoav's success in his wars was attributed to the merit of King David, who was engaged in Torah study at that time. Additionally, prayer is a powerful tool, as evidenced by a Midrash (Bamidbar Raba 24,2) that mentions how in a battle with 12,000 warriors, they appointed another 12,000 people to remain behind and pray for them. This demonstrates that both prayer and Torah study play a crucial role in turning the tide of events. The fact that these individuals chose to dedicate themselves to study and prayer instead of joining the battle underscores the importance of these spiritual endeavors.

INGRATITUDE: A TALE OF UNAPPRECIATION

In our Parasha, Sarah Imenu expels Yishmael and his mother, Hagar, from her household, as she realizes that such individuals residing in her home would result in their negative influence on the rest of the home. Although Avraham Avinu is initially hesitant, Hashem appears to him and affirms that Sarah is correct, instructing him to comply with her wishes. So it is, Hagar and Yishmael find themselves in the desert without water. Yishmael is dying of thirst, and his mother leaves him to his fate. The verse states that she distanced herself twice the amount required to shoot an arrow. Rav Ovadia of Bartinura (ספר עמר נקא) questions this distance, asking why it was necessary. If she merely didn't want to witness his suffering, a shorter distance would have sufficed. So, why did she go so far?

Rav Ovadia of Bartinura provides an explanation: Hagar distanced herself so significantly because she was apprehensive that, in his desperate state, Yishmael might attempt to harm her by shooting arrows at her. This precaution is troubling, as the notion of a son potentially resorting to violence against his own mother, the one who gave him life and cared for him, underscores a profound ingratitude. It suggests that Hagar was aware of the ungrateful and untamed nature of the child she was raising.



This ingratitude can also be observed in contemporary instances. Take, for example, Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar (יחיא סנווא). Israeli doctors saved his life when he was in prison in Israel, successfully treating a brain tumor. Remarkably, this occurred while Sinwar was serving multiple life sentences for his involvement in the kidnapping and murder of two Israeli soldiers back in 1988. After his release in a prisoner exchange for Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in 2011, Sinwar immediately assumed a leadership role within Hamas and directed the organization's ongoing campaign

against the very people who had saved his life.

Another recent news story involved a woman who gave birth to a child in need of a kidney to survive. A Jewish father, who had tragically lost his son in the war, selflessly donated his kidney to save the child's life. However, after the successful operation, the mother expressed a disturbing hope that her son would grow up to become a "shahid" – a term often associated with a suicide bomber.

I remember, seven years ago when then-candidate Trump was running for office, he recited the snake poem about Arabs which really sums it up:

On her way to work one morning

INGRATITUDE: A TALE OF UNAPPRECIATION

Down the path alongside the lake
A tender-hearted woman saw a poor half-frozen snake
His pretty colored skin had been all frosted with the dew
"Oh well," she cried, "I'll take you in and I'll take care of you"
"Take me in, oh, tender woman
Take me in, for heaven's sake
Take me in, tender woman," sighed the snake

Now she wrapped him up all cozy in a coverlet of silk
And laid him by the fireside with some honey and some milk
Now she hurried home from work that night, as soon she arrived
Now she found that pretty snake she'd taken in had been revived
"Take me in, oh, tender woman
Take me in, for heaven's sake
Take me in, tender woman," sighed the snake

Now she clutched him to her bosom, "You're so beautiful," she cried
"But if I hadn't brought you in by now you might have died"
Now she stroked his pretty skin again and then kissed and

held him tight
But instead of saying thanks, that snake gave her a vicious bite
"Take me in, oh, tender woman
Take me in, for heaven's sake
Take me in, tender woman," sighed the snake

"I saved you," cried that woman
"And you've bitten me, even why?
And you know your bite is poisonous and now I'm going to die"
"Oh, quite, silly woman," said that reptile with a grin
"Now you knew very well I was a snake before you brought me in"

Summary: If we believe that surrendering land, providing job opportunities, and boosting their economy will bring us peace, we may be misunderstanding the true nature of the situation. Just like a snake, it doesn't care about the favors you extend; it may still bite the very hands that feed it.

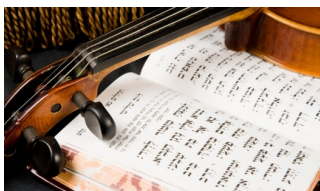
THE RAMIFICATIONS OF NEGATIVE INTENTIONS IN TORAH READING AND TEHILIM

It is clear that it is permissible to pray and recite Tehilim for the success of our soldiers in war, and recite Tehilim with the explicit intent that the enemy be destroyed and suffer punishment, and also to curse them with curses such as "Yimach shemo" (may his name be erased) and the like. The question we'd like to address is whether we need to mention (before or after) that our intent while reading the chapters is for the purpose of the destruction of Hamas, or perhaps it is self explanatory, and thus this is understood automatically and no further action is needed?

Answer: Indeed, it is permissible to recite Tehilim with such intent, particularly when directed towards cruel and wicked individuals. As there are Tehilim chapters, such as 109, in which King David invokes curses upon his enemies with verses like: "Let there be appointed over him a wickedness, and let the Satan stand at his right hand...When he is judged, let him go out guilty, may his days be few and may strangers inherit his possessions." etc. Similar chapters can be found in Tehilim 35, 55, 69, and many others.

Even when reciting these chapters in Tehilim without specifying that the intent is for our enemies, they are still valid. The principle of intent being sufficient can be derived from a contrasting case mentioned in the Rema.

The Rema writes (53:19) that if an individual harbors ill feelings or hatred toward the Chazan of the community, they should not participate in the Torah reading portion when the rebukes are read during that week. This is due to the concern that since he hates the Chazan, it is very likely that the



Chazan hates him as well, and in this state of mind, may intend the rebukes he's reading towards him, thus bringing him harm. Consequently, one must refrain from entertaining thoughts of harm towards any person during the public reading of the rebuke in the Torah, and similarly while reciting the harsh chapters of Tehilim.

Similarly, it is written in the Sefer Chassidim (Chapter תשסו): "There was a man who used to stand up during the rebuke portion of the Torah reading. Once, the Shaliach Tzibbur (prayer leader) got angry and said, 'For your honor, I intend [to read].'" That man responded, "Since you intend to honor me through the rebuke, do not call me for it." Another person was called up, and later, they reconciled and read the rebuke. On that same Shabbat, the daughter of that man fell ill and passed away after Shabbat. Although his intention had been for good, he should have accepted the embarrassment from the Shaliach Tzibbur, who suspected he intended harm.

Now that we've established that intent is adequate to invoke consequences, the same principle would apply to addressing the enemy. However, when conducting a public reading, it is still preferable (lechatchila) to explicitly declare the intended purpose of the reading before starting, which is for the defeat and punishment of the enemy. This practice can be inferred from the teachings of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (הליכות כב (שלמה תפלה פ"ח בדבר הלכה כב), who clarified that without such an announcement, the public might have a different intention, potentially losing the focus on this specific objective.

תהלים בלילה

שהקב"ה מלמדו מקרא היה יודע שהוא יום וכו'.
והסביר זאת הבן איש חי (פקודי אות ז'): "אין לקרוא מקרא בלילות של חול,
והטעם דהמקרא בעשיה והלילה בחינת עשיה והכל הוא דינין ואין לעורר
הדינין וכמו שכתב רבינו ז"ל בשער המצות פרשת ואתחנן עיין שם". ופסק

כן גם בבאר היטב (או"ח סי' רלח סק"ב).
וקריאת תהלים נכלל בזה כמו שהביא החיד"א (בשו"ת חיים
שאל ח"ב סי' כה ובשו"ת יוסף אומץ סי' נד), הביא דבריו
הגר"ע יוסף בשו"ת יביע אומר (ח"ו סי' ל).
אולם יש שהקילו בענין זה, וכגון הפמ"ג (משבצ"ז סי' רלח)
שכתב שראוי לשלש את הלילה כמו היום, שליש מקרא,
שליש משנה ושליש גמרא, וחזינן שאדרבא יש לאדם ללמוד
מקרא בלילה. וכן במהרש"ם (ח"א סי' קנח) כתב שלא לקרוא
מקרא בלילה אינו רק אלא מידת חסידות. וכן הורה בעיקרי
הד"ט (או"ח סי' כב אות נז) להלכה שלא למנוע עמי הארץ
מקריאת מקרא, שבדברים הנסתרים קבלה טובה לשתוק.

אכן בעת צרה מותר לקרוא תהלים בלילה כמו שהביא הגר"ע יוסף (חזון
עובדיה אבילות ח"א עמוד יט) וכן הביא הגר"מ שטרן (שו"ת באר משה
ח"ד סי' כב אות ב'), והוסיף שלדעתו גם החיד"א שהחמיר בזה מפני דברי
האר"י, יודה שבמקום חולי אין להחמיר כלל, וכן היקל באשל אברהם
(מבוטשטש סי' שו).

וכל שכן אם קורא תהלים בדרך תחינה ובקשה שמצאנו מקילים באופן זה
(ראה יד יהודה סי' כב, ובספר עלינו לשבח ח"ב עמוד תרלא-ב, ובשו"ת יחי
יעקב או"ח סי' ט).

**שלום לכבוד הרב. האם מותר לקרוא תהלים בלילה לנוכח מצב
החירום שאנו נמצאים בו?**

שלום וברכה, ויהי רצון שיהי לכולנו שלום ורוגע.

איסור קריאת תהלים בלילה נלמד מדברי האר"י ז"ל (שער
המצוות ואתחנן דף לה, ב) וז"ל: "בשאר לילי השבוע (דהיינו
להוציא את ליל שבת) אין ראוי לקרוא מקרא לפי שהמקרא
הוא בעשיה, והלילה עצמה הוא בחינת עשיה והכל הוא דינים,
ואין ראוי לעורר דינים". ובפרי עץ חיים (שער הנהגת הלימוד
פרק א) כתב: "ובלילה לא תקרא מקרא לפי שהוא סוד עשיה,
וגם לילה זמן עשיה ואין לעורר הדינים אז".

ובמדרש תנחומא מובא (סוף פרשת כי תשא סימן לו): "ומנין
היה יודע משה אימתי יום ואימתי לילה, אלא כשהקב"ה היה
מלמדו תורה שבכתב היה יודע שהוא יום, וכשהיה מלמדו על

פה משנה ותלמוד היה יודע שהוא לילה". ובתנא דבי אליהו: יום יבוע
אומר – זה תורה נביאים וכתובים, ולילה לילית יחוה דעת – זה משנה".
והרקאנטי (פרשת יתרו) כתב: "ודע שצריך האדם לעסוק בתורה שבכתב
ביום, ובתורה שבעל פה בלילה, דבר כפי ענינו, וכמ"ש רז"ל בפרקי רבי
אליעזר (פרק מו), כל אותן ארבעים יום שעמד משה בהר היה קורא מקרא
ביום ושונה בלילה.

והרב חיד"א בברכי יוסף (סי' א ס"ק יג) כתב שעל דרך האמת אין לקרוא
מקרא בלילה קודם היום זולת באור הששי כמ"ש גורי האר"י זצ"ל. וחזר
שנית (סי' רלח ס"ב): "שכתבו גורי האר"י שלא ילמד מקרא בלילה, ושכן
מוכח בילקוט (כי תשא), ומנין היה יודע משה אימתי יום וכו', אלא בשעה



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