



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת היום

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

Parshas Lech Lecha 5771 פרשת לך לך תשע"א

THE REAL COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

The account in this week's *parshah* of Avraham's battle with the four kings (*Bereishis ch. 14*) can leave one awestruck. In a remarkable display of *Siyata Dishmaya* (Divine Assistance), the patriarch, his servant, and (at most) a handful of lads defeat the combined armies of the most powerful kingdoms of their day.

This achievement was not a one-time event, however. In fact – as with many of the episodes involving our forefathers (see *Ramban, Bereishis 12:6*) – the occurrence served as a precursor for the Jewish nation, to be repeated throughout our history.

Specifically, this notion – of achieving great military victories against overwhelming odds – has been repeatedly demonstrated by the kings of Israel. Waging war falls within the rubric of the monarch's duties, as the Mishnah in Sanhedrin states (2:5):

וּמוֹצִיא לְמַלְחָמַת הַרְשׁוֹת עַל פִּי בֵּית דִּין שֶׁל שִׁבְעִים וְאֶחָד.

“The king calls forth the nation to war, in consultation with the seventy-one-member *beis din* (the Sanhedrin).”

MILITARY STRATEGY

There is a well-known Medrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shmuel II, 163*), which delineates the varying approaches of four righteous kings to their military duties:

The Medrash begins with **Dovid Hamelech** (King David), the progenitor of the Davidic dynasty. While Dovid took part in the fighting, he prayed first for total victory. And what was the result? “And Dovid smote them from one evening until the next... (*Shmuel I 30:17*).

King Asa is described next. While he also participated in battle, he did not engage to the extent that King Dovid

did. Asa joined the pursuit but refrained from actual combat. He left it up to Hashem to defeat his enemies – and his wish was granted. As the verse says (*Divrei Hayamim II 14:12*): “And Asa pursued them (the Cushite enemy)... and they fell... for they were broken before Hashem.”

The Medrash proceeds to illustrate the military activities of **King Yehoshaphat**. He neither fought, nor pursued. Instead, he left it all up to Hashem; he himself just sang hymns. And it worked; as the *passuk* testifies (*ibid. 21:22-4*): “And he appointed singers... who proclaimed, ‘*Hodu LaShem, ki l'olam chasdo* (Praise Hashem, for His kindness is forever).’ And when the singing and the praises began, Hashem thrust the Amonites, the Moavites, and the residents of Mount Se'ir into ambush... and they were smitten... none escaped.”

And then there was **King Chizkiyahu**, who did none of the above. Chizkiyahu's method, it appears, was to totally “opt out.” The Medrash quotes him as saying, “I have no strength – not to fight, not to pursue, and not even to sing praises. Instead, I will go to bed, and You, Hashem, will take care of everything.” And this strategy, too, met with success, as Hashem acceded to Chizkiyahu's curious request.

And the rest is history. Chizkiyahu and his people were besieged within Yerushalayim, surrounded by the powerful Sancheirev and his mighty army. But overnight, the situation changed drastically. “And on that night, an angel of Hashem went out, and he struck down in the Assyrian camp 180,000 men... In the morning... they were all corpses...” (*Melachim II 19:35*).

WHO'S CALLING THE SHOTS

One obvious lesson that emerges from this Medrash

לִזְכֹּר נִשְׁמַת פִּיגַא רִיזָא בַּת בְּרוּךְ שְׁלוֹם ע"ה

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his neshamah.

MISHNAS CHAYIM is brought to you by CHEVRAH LOMDEI MISHNAH, a network of Torah scholars dedicated to bringing the merits of Mishnah study to the greater Jewish public. Encompassing Mishnah, Gemara, and a variety of other services, CHEVRAH LOMDEI MISHNAH primarily assists mourners interested in acquiring the merit of Torah study for their loved ones.



**MISHNAS
CHAYIM**

משנת חיים

is the essentiality and power of *bitachon* (reliance on Hashem), as remarkably demonstrated by these great men. But there do seem to be some perplexing aspects regarding some of the behaviors depicted above. At face value, the kings and their practices appear to be listed in ascending order of their level of *bitachon*. Dovid Hamelech put his trust in Hashem but was intimately involved in every aspect of waging war; Asa would pursue his enemies, but left the actual fighting totally in Hashem's Hands; Yehoshaphat did not even engage in pursuit, but sang hymns instead; and Chizkiyahu just went to sleep. While it is clear that they all were righteous, it seems that Chizkiyahu excelled the most in his faith, while Dovid, in comparison, did not reach that plateau.

Yet, this assessment does not seem to square with what we know about Dovid Hamelech from Chazal. In fact, Dovid's level of closeness to Hashem is almost without parallel. He is considered to be the "fourth leg of Hashem's *Merkavah* (Chariot)," a privilege unattained by any other king.

Another point of difficulty lies in the practices themselves. Obviously, as they are mentioned by the Medrash in a praiseworthy manner, the practitioners are to be commended. But, at first glance, this might not be so easy to comprehend. How, indeed, could they conduct themselves in such a fashion? Just to go to bed in the face of great peril and assume that "Hashem will take care of everything" – is that really the way to go?

The Ba'alei Mussar (Masters of Ethical Teachings; quoted in *Otzros HaTorah, parshas Matos*) explain that, in reality, the four approaches to warfare are listed in *descending* order of spiritual stature. It was actually Dovid Hamelech who demonstrated the greatest level of attachment to Hashem.

A person who attains wealth or success might be tempted to think, "*Kochi v'otzem yadi asa li hachayil hazeh* (It is through my own strength and abilities that I have achieved such success)" (*Devarim 8:17*). The Torah shuns such false self-aggrandizement and instructs us to recognize that Hashem alone is the true source of any achievements.

This is what motivated the righteous kings of the Medrash: they were afraid of falling prey to this dangerous attitude. The more closely they were involved in the particulars of battle, they felt, the more tempted they would be to attribute the victory to their own prowess. And so they opted, instead, to avoid some or all aspects of the battlefield; they felt this was the only guarantee that they would fully recognize that the military triumphs were effected by Hashem alone.

Only Dovid Hamelech – whose faith was so perfect – could "afford" to take part in the fighting. It was precisely because his vision was so crystal clear that he engaged in combat. Even when his own hand would fell the enemy, he was able to perceive – without a grain of doubt – that it was really the power of Hashem Who was winning.

You've come to depend on us for your weekly dose of inspiration. Can we depend on you? Become an active supporter of Mishnas Chayim by contacting Chevrah Lomdei Mishnah at 732-364-7029, or at ChevrahLomdeiMishnah.org

Mishnas Chayim

Insights on the weekly parshah based on the Mishnah.

- SUBSCRIBE BY MAIL OR E-MAIL
- DISTRIBUTE MISHNAS CHAYIM IN YOUR SHUL



**Don't miss a week!
Join today.**



732.364.7029
ChevrahLomdeiMishnah.org

To sponsor MISHNAS CHAYIM, to distribute it to your shul, or to receive this publication via email, please contact CHEVRAH LOMDEI MISHNAH at 732-364-7029 or info@chevrahlomdeimishnah.org.