

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of  
Chayim *ben* Pinchos *a"h*  
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

## On the Battlefield

### The Mysterious Command

During one of the military campaigns of the IDF, a tank battalion became entrapped in a perilous situation. The battle conditions were such that they suddenly found themselves practically encircled by the enemy. Trying to break out would have almost assuredly drawn a barrage of fire; then again, staying put also seemed to be suicidal. It seemed that – in a matter of moments – the end would come.

Suddenly their radios crackled to life. Referring to a particular direction, an unfamiliar voice barked in Hebrew: “Move!” The Israeli soldiers inside their tanks were both mystified and terrified; a commander at base was ordering them to proceed. Although they could not perceive the rationale or logic in the command, they had been trained that orders are orders. And so – although sensing that their time was up – onward they moved, to the indicated location.

Amidst the confusion, tension, and terror of the moment, the miraculous occurred. Inexplicably, they remained untouched, and they soon found themselves free of the enemy and able to return to base in safety.

In a state of euphoria, they were all obviously grateful to have survived the ordeal. After a few moments of calm, a nagging question remained. And try as they might, no one was able to uncover the answer. None of the officers or commanders they talked to had any idea.

At that critical moment in battle – who had issued the command? *Whose voice was it?*

### “Fire!”

The Torah perspective on battlefield events is outlined in the Mishnah in Sotah. Before going out to war, the Jewish army is addressed by the *kohen*, as recorded in this week’s *parshah*. The Mishnah (8:1) reports on the content of that address:

“The enemy comes relying on flesh and blood for victory, while you come with the assurance of the power of Hashem. The Plishtim (for example) relied on Golyas (of ‘David and Goliath’ fame) to emerge victorious. What happened in the end? He fell by the sword, and his army fell with him... But you take a different approach. ‘For Hashem your L-rd goes before you, to fight on your behalf...’ (*Devarim 20:4*).”

Hashem’s “intervention” on behalf of his nation is further elucidated by a seemingly difficult *pasuk* at the end of Sefer Devarim, which states: “And He (Hashem) chases the enemy away from you, and He says, ‘Destroy’,” (*Devarim 33:27*).

R' Itzele Volozhiner clarifies the intent of this verse. The pastime of choice amongst the nobility is the hunt. When aristocrats get together, each wants to demonstrate his hunting prowess to his cronies. However, there exists a tremendous problem with this arrangement.

All goes well for those noblemen who actually *are* expert hunters. They know how to track down their quarry and shoot on target. The others, however, are in real trouble. On the one hand, they possess no real hunting skill; on the other hand, there is no way that they can reveal this “flaw” to their associates. Opting out of the competition is an obvious admittance of inability. What are they to do?

Thankfully for these unfortunates, the sport takes place over a wide area, covered by much dense vegetation. And so, the novice hunters have developed a face-saving method. They employ a personal guide – himself an expert in the ways of hunting – who accompanies their master on the outing. The assistant does basically all of the “heavy-lifting” for his employer. He tracks down the quarry, flushes it into the open, and even sets up the weapon aiming directly at the target. (All of this is done stealthily, out of view of the other participants). With everything taken care of, the master need do hardly a thing. Now, in full view of his competitors, the nobleman walks up to the pre-set arrangement. At the precise moment, his assistant gives the signal from his concealed position. All the master has to do is pull the trigger.

To all of the spectators, it appears as if the shooter is an expert marksman, as the animal is felled with one shot. Little do they realize that the “hunter” himself actually possesses no hunting ability whatsoever. Whatever he “achieved” was actually arranged by someone else working behind the scenes, who delivered the quarry to him on a silver platter.

When the Jews had to go to battle, they experienced the identical situation. They achieved remarkable success on the battlefield, vanquishing their opponents. However, that is only how it *appeared* to the world at large. In reality, it was Hashem Who was directing and orchestrating the events and doing the actual fighting. He was the One Who banished the enemy. In a similar fashion to the nobleman’s guide, He is the One Who arranged for the victory and pronounced, “Destroy!” at the critical moment.

Regarding the aforementioned experience of the tank battalion, the conclusion is obvious. As R' Yitzchok Zilberstein (to whom the story was related) explains, what happened in that particular circumstance is really what occurs *whenever* the Jewish people are delivered. There is no question Who it was that actually issued the life-saving command.