

CHIZUK AND IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael -
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

A study of the contemporary map of the Middle East reveals a geographically miniscule Eretz Yisrael surrounded on all sides by numerous Arab countries (twenty two at last count). Many of these states have sworn to wipe us off the map, and whether in terms of sheer geographic size, or a simple numerical comparison of soldiers as well as armaments (tanks and planes), our numbers seem to be vastly inferior. As one who lived during the '67 and '73 Wars, I well remember the palpable sense of fear and trepidation that grasped Jews the world-over upon hearing the Arab predictions of how they were going to 'throw the Jew into the sea'. I recall a Holocaust survivor, who went to withdraw all his life savings from the bank, and brought the money to the Israeli Embassy in New York. He couldn't countenance the possibility that his brethren in Eretz Yisrael would be wiped out just as his own relatives had been killed upon European soil.

These above thoughts are occasioned by a number of verses in this week's parsha which speak of similar fears and concerns: "If you will say in your heart these nations are more than I, how can I dispossess them? You should not be afraid of them but remember what Hashem did to Pharaoh and Mitzrayim" (D'varim 7:17,18).

The Malbim explains that the words "Al Tira" are not to be understood as a

Mitzva - the Torah is not commanding us not to fear. Fear is existentially experienced as an instinctual and uncontrollable human emotion, and yet it results from self-imposed feelings of inferiority. In recognition of the inner workings of this psychological mechanism, the Torah instructs us to always be mindful of Yetziat Mitzrayim, the Exodus from Egypt. The words of the Torah are good advice then to those prone to fear. The memory of this august historic episode can provide us with the mental fortification needed in order to withstand all challenges. Directing one's thoughts to that which Hashem did to all our numerous enemies at the time of the Exodus can dissipate our contemporary fears. "You should not be afraid of them" - rather you should constantly remind yourself that the Ribono Shel Olam - whose strength is greater than all armies combined - stood then, and continues to stand today, together with people of Israel!

As the Shlah HaKadosh writes, this verse teaches us that there is no room for fear even when it appears as if the nations are too numerous; their victory ensured. Even if it seems impossible to be victorious over them through natural means - do not be afraid! The Exodus experience proves that Divine assistance is there to back you. On the other hand, if you think your own might can accomplish all without the help of the Almighty, then there is definitely reason to be afraid...

Many might think that this message can ring true in an era like that of the Exodus where "Otot and Moftim", signs

and wonders, were part of everyday life - not so today when we are no longer privy to such miracles. However, a survey of our recent military history turns up many examples of contemporary miracles.

When Major-General Ezer Weizman z"l was asked how it was possible that the Israeli Air Force flew from one Egyptian air-base to another, decimating most of the enemy planes, for three full hours, and yet the Egyptians did not inform their own forces about these attacks, he was silent for a few long moments. Eventually, Weizman lifted his head: "Etzba Elokim", the finger of G-d", he exclaimed. On that auspicious morning of June 5, 1967, Jordanian radar detected the Israeli planes taking off. A red alert was sent off to Cairo, but the decoding officer at the receiving end, used the wrong code for that particular day and thus failed to decipher the vital information.

Was this Yad Hashem or merely lucky chance?

Responding to the Iraqi scud missiles which rained down on Tel-Aviv in 1991 with surprisingly little collateral damage, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe was quoted saying that "Adequate attention is not being paid to these miracles which obviously were performed by HKB"H."

"You should not be afraid of them - remember what Hashem did to Pharoah and Mitzrayim."

A number of years ago, one of my sons accompanied a delegation of IDF soldiers headed by Dan Harel (who was

then the Segan HaRamatkal), as they visited the Birkenau concentration camp. At one point my son turned to address the group, in his capacity as the delegation' Rav Tz'va'i, and carrying the Sefer Torah in his arms, he quoted the Torah's words in this week's Parsha "Remember it is Hashem who grants us strength to be successful" (Laasot Chayil) D'varim 8:18. To this the non-religious Aluf answered: "We have to build up, and rely upon our own strength, but we will gladly accept any help proffered from on high."

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