

Bringing the Farbrengen Home

ABOVE YOUR ENEMY

by Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer

The parsha opens: "When you go to war against your enemy, and G-d, your G-d, will deliver them in your hands and you will take captives."

In a linguistic curiosity, the word translated as "against," literally means "above."

It is explained in Chassidus that in addition to an actual war, the verse speaks of a spiritual battle. When we engage with material matters, we encounter a struggle between holiness and those things which are outside of the realm of holiness (i.e., material matters).

In this battle we attempt to use our physical possessions in a refined manner, elevating them and bringing them to a space of sanctity.

The verse does not say that we wage war "against" an enemy, but "above" our enemy.

We are to know that although it is indeed a huge challenge to conquer the world and transform it into a place that expresses its inner holiness, but we are "above" our enemy before we even begin the fight.

You will succeed. We will succeed.

This is a Torah-charged mission, and we receive a turbo boost that places us "above" our opposition.

Tachlis: How do we do this? How do we transform the world into a holy space?



The parsha goes on to discuss what happens if a soldier meets a woman during battle whom he wants to marry.

In certain circumstances, it is permissible to do so. The Torah tells us that before getting married, "she shall shave her head and cut her nails [after letting them grow]."

Hair and nails have in common that they grow out of the body. Hair grows from the head, representing intellect, and nails grow from the hand, signifying the middot (emotions).


On a deeper level, the Torah is telling us that there are certain things that are extraneous outgrowths of our intellect and emotions, and they need to be recognized as distractions from the battle.

The parsha continues: "And she shall weep for her father and mother for a full month." The Arizal says that the month in the verse refers to Elul, the final month of the year that is a kind of coda to the previous year and preparation for the new year.

Elul is a time of introspection, a time to reflect on where have my hair and nails grown too long, where can my intellect and middot be trimmed and refined.

The Alter Rebbe writes (Tanya ch.9) that we are referred to as a "small city," and there is a battle for control of our city.

Will we act in accordance with our inner animalistic drive or with our G-dly force?

We don't have to let our small city be conquered. When we go to battle against our enemies within and from the outside, the Torah encourages us, saying, "you are above your enemies! You will surely succeed!" 

Just Me שו"ת A Question


Q: Does toothpaste require a hechsher?

A: This question depends on whether toothpaste is considered edible. If it is edible, then some say that either you should ideally only buy with a hechsher, or at least make sure that it doesn't contain glycerin.

If it's not considered edible, then it would not need a hechsher.

The best thing is probably to either buy with a hechsher or check the lists produced by one of the kashrus agencies.

Q: Does a doorway without an actual door require a mezuzah?

A: Most Rishonim maintain that a doorway without a door requires a mezuzah. However, Rambam maintains that it does not. The halacha in Shulchan Aruch is that in such a case we do affix a mezuzah, but in deference to the Rambam, we do not recite a bracha when affixing it. A bracha can be recited on a doorway that is obligated according to all opinions, and this will include the doorway without the door, as well. 

A Forest or Vineyard?

400 Vineyards

by Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer

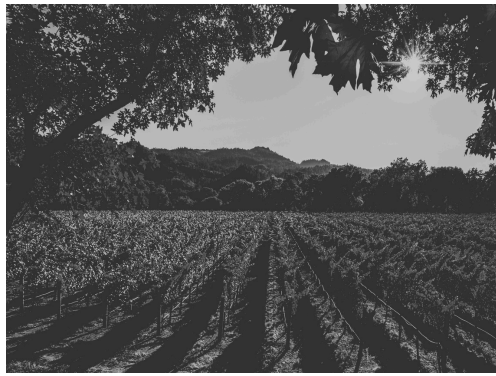
In a conversation concerning the dimensions of the Aron Kodesh, the Talmud (Bava Basra 14a) states that Rav Ami wrote 400 Torah scrolls. Rav Hamnuna found this hard to believe and suggests that perhaps he [just] wrote the verse, "Moses commanded us the Torah" 400 times, and due to the great significance of this verse, it was considered as if he had written 400 complete Torah scrolls.

Continuing the theme, the Talmud recounts: "Rava said to Rav Zeira: Rav Yannai planted 400 vineyards."

1963 (5723 on the Jewish calendar) was the 150th year since the passing of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Rebbe of Chabad, often referred to as the Alter Rebbe (lit. the old rabbi). Discussions were circling around what could be done to mark this special milestone of three times *yovel*, that is, a jubilee times three.

Zalman Shazar, who was elected that very year as the President of Israel and had an ongoing relationship with the Rebbe, suggested to plant a forest to be named for the Alter Rebbe.

The Rebbe's written response was dated Rosh Chodesh Kislev (Nov. 17, 1962), which was also Shazar's 74th birthday. The Rebbe opens with a lengthy birthday blessing for success in utilizing his spiritual capabilities to the fullest. The more we use and exercise our body, the stronger we get, and so too, when we utilize our spiritual strengths to the fullest, we are granted more and more spiritual strength from Above.



Turning to Shazar's suggestion to mark the 150th *yahrzeit* of the Alter Rebbe by planting a forest in his name, the Rebbe asserts that this is not the proper way to honour the Alter Rebbe.

That being said, the Rebbe continues that he did find an instance in the Talmud of planting lots of trees: Rav Yannai's 400 vineyards. Here we have a large-scale endeavor; perhaps a precedent for Shazar's idea.

One difference is that Rav Yannai planted fruit-producing grape vines, thus fulfilling, according to one opinion in the Talmud, the mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel. However, a forest would not be fruit-producing and would thus not fulfill this mitzvah. Even though the Midrash extols the virtue of planting – noting that Hashem was involved in planting right at the beginning of Creation, and so too, we should plant when we enter the Land of Israel – however, this is not the same as naming an entire forest after a person.

The *Yahrtzeit* was marked with 150 hours of increased study and Tzedaka in increments of 150.

HAYOM YOM

13 Elul

The chassid Reb Hendel related: It was known to all chassidim that at one's first *yechidus* (meeting with the Rebbe) the *orla* (insensitive "thick skin") was removed. Whatever else, one was immediately rid of the *orla* of the heart.

Chassidic Story

in 1912 Rabbi Zelig Slonim travelled from Jerusalem to Lubavitch to attend Yeshiva. He traveled with his mother and was included in her passport. When she returned to Israel, he was left without identification. This only became an issue two years later with the outbreak of WW1 in 1914.

The Masgiach of the Yeshiva was concerned about R. Zelig and consulted with the Lubavitcher Rebbe at the time, Rabbi Shmuel Schneerson, who said, "Zelig will be alright. After all, he is a descendant of the Mittlerer Rebbe."

By 1916 the Yeshiva evacuated to Rostov. Despite the war, the Rebbe established new Yeshivas in Gruzia & Kherson. In 1918 Zelig joined the yeshiva in Kherson traveling with the passport of a student two years his senior who had passed away. Just before Rosh Hashana, the bochurim decide to travel to Rostov to be with the Rebbe for Yomtov. Despite much danger, they reached the destination safely.

The bochurim enjoyed an amazing Tishrei and after Simchas Torah they began making arrangements for their return. The trains were very dangerous for Jews and they asked the Rebbe if he agreed that they return via steamboat instead.

The Rebbe did not agree. "If you go by boat you would have to stop at Mariopol, and this should be avoided." He suggested a roundabout trip via train. The bochurim couldn't get the permits for the train and were very hesitant. With much courage they went back to the Rebbe to explain the situation.

"I do not like idea of a stop in Mariopol," the Rebbe said, "but since you seem eager to go by steamboat, go, and may you have a safe voyage." Zelig wondered if perhaps this was the time to return to Israel (to be continued....) ☺

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