

KI SEITZEI

JEWISH UNITY,  
THE SECRET BATTLE PLAN

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A

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Two Battle Scenarios

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The Kotzker Rebbe, grandfather of Shem Mishmuel, asked a question. The *parsha* starts, “*Ki seitzei la’milchama al oyvecha un’sano Hashem Elokecha b’yadecha v’shavisa shivyo*. When you will go to war against your enemies, Hashem will deliver them into your hands.” The Torah makes no mention of special prayers or of a difficult war. It seems that Hashem will simply deliver the enemies to you on a silver platter.

However, in Parshas Beha’aloscha, we read a different discussion concerning war. “*V’chi savo’u milchamh b’artzechem al hatzar hatzorer eschem, va’hareioseem ba’chatzotzros, v’nizkartem lifnei Hashem Elokeichem v’noshatem mei’oyveichem*. When there is a war in your land against enemies who are attacking you, you should blow the trumpets (which signal a time for everyone to pray and fast). Then God will remember you and you will be saved from your enemies.” In this discussion, the Jewish people is in terrible danger. It has to pray using trumpets and *shofar*. The Gemara and Rambam describe how Jewish soldiers used to fast on the day of war and would beseech Hashem for assistance. Only then

would Hashem save them. This kind of war is not such a simple one.

In our *parsha*, though, the Torah says simply, “Hashem will deliver the enemy into your hands.” In Beha’aloscha it is a complicated spiritual struggle. The people need the Almighty’s mercy, they pray and blow trumpets, and then they receive salvation from Hashem. Why are these two descriptions of war and the spiritual preparation for it so different?

Shem Mishmuel notices another intriguing difference between the two *parshiyos*. In our *parsha*, the Torah says “*Ki seitzei lamilchama*, When you—a single entity, a single people—go against *oyvecha*—meaning your many enemies.” In Beha’aloscha, though, the Torah says, “*V’chi savo’u milchama...al hatzar hatzorer eschem*. When you (in the plural form) fight a war in your land, against the enemy (singular) who is attacking you.” Why the difference in singular and plural form between the two uses of the word enemy?

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### Strength of Spirit

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Shem Mishmuel explains the fundamental principle of Jewish military victory. The success of the Jewish people in war over our enemies is not a function of our superiority in battle. Many times, our enemies are more numerous and physically powerful. They may have advantages over us in terms of the material aspects of war. Instead, the Jewish people’s physical success is a function of our spiritual success in preparing for and in fighting the war. Shem Mishmuel calls this the *tzelem Elokim*, the Godly image of man. In Bereishis the Torah says, “*B’tzelem Elokim bara es ha’adam*.”

Since we Jews received the Torah, we have an extra obligation to develop our Godliness, our *tzelem Elokim*. To the level that the Jewish people and Jewish soldiers develop their Godliness and

spirituality, to that extent the Jewish army will succeed in war. Even in battle, the Jewish army camp must be a place of holiness, as the *pasuk* says, “*V’haya machanecha kadosh*. Your camp should be holy.” Wartime usually turns people into animals. The Torah, though, emphasizes that the Jewish soldier must retain his sanctity. In the earlier times of Moshe and Yehoshua bin Nun, the soldiers would wear *tefillin* on their hand and head while they were actually in war. *Tefillin* requires great spiritual focus. *Tefillin* is *asur b’hesech hada’as*. Someone wearing *tefillin* can’t be distracted. Someone wearing *tefillin* must feel Hashem’s presence. This is the source of the old custom to wear *tefillin* during war time, as spirituality is the power that gives Israel its strength in battle.

A famous incident that illustrates this principle is recorded in Sefer Shmuel 1 chapter 14. Yehonasan son of Shaul went on a scouting mission together with his servant into the enemy camp of the Plishtim. He felt that he saw a heavenly sign, so he and his aide attacked alone and succeeded in driving away thousands of soldiers. This was not because of his great strength, but due to a spiritual level that he had developed.

The power of the Jew is not in his physical strength. It is his spiritual strength that gives him the power to defeat his enemy in war. This is the *tzelem Elokim* of the Jewish soldier. His Godly image elicits a fear in the enemy to make them flee.

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### Perfecting Your Godly Image

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How does someone achieve perfection of his *tzelem Elokim*? According to Chassidus, this occurs when a person performs the *mitzvos*. We have 365 negative commandments and 248 positive commandments, for a total of 613. The soul also has 613 aspects. The 248 positive *mitzvos* are very important for the 248 positive sides of the *tzelem Elokim* in the human being. If a person is able

to perfect all 248 positive aspects of his soul and avoid the 365 blemishes that those negative sins would incur, he will perfect his *tzelem Elokim* as Hashem wants him to.

If a person has not fulfilled even one positive *mitzva*, his soul will have a certain blemish. How is it possible for any individual Jewish soldier to achieve total perfection of his Godly image? Some of these 248 *mitzvos asei* are restricted to very specific people. For example, only a king can fulfill the *mitzva* for a king to write a second *sefer Torah*. Every Jew has to write one *sefer Torah*, but the king has a special *mitzva* to write a second. Only a *kohen* can do the *mitzva* of *avoda* in the Beis Hamikdash. Only a thief can do the *mitzva* of returning an object that he stole. There is no person in the world who can possibly do all 248 *mitzvos*. Any one Jew cannot be both king, *kohen*, and *levi* etc. How, then, can any Jew even dream of perfecting his *tzelem Elokim*?

How can we expect a Jewish soldier in battle to develop this Godliness that will give him the key to victory? He can't possibly fulfill all the *mitzvos*. He can't possibly attain spiritual perfection!

Shem Mishmuel explains that, according to Chassidus, at one level all the Jewish people share a common universal soul. This soul is called *yechida*. There are three basic levels to the soul: *nefesh*, the biological level; *ruach*, the emotional level; and *nesha-ma*, the intellectual power. More elevated than these three, the *chaya* surrounds the previous levels. Finally comes *yechida*, where all of Israel is united in a single soul. This is the highest level, in which all of us are united in the collective soul of Israel.

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### *Yechida*—Growing Together

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Therefore, when the king or the *kohen* do a *mitzva*, all the individuals of Klal Yisrael benefit from its spiritual perfection. When the king writes his second *sefer Torah*, you and I also write that

second *sefer Torah*. This is because we are united at the level of *yechida*. The key, then, to the success of the Jewish soldier begins at a different locus. The question is not whether the individual soldier has done all 248 *mitzvos*. On a collective level, we share each other's *mitzvos* and the resulting perfection.

If a person put *tefillin* on his hand, could we say that only his hand did that *mitzva*, but his feet did not? The person's whole identity is in the *mitzva*! So even though his foot did not put on *tefillin*, that foot is part of the person who so.

At the national Klal Yisrael level, this is true about all of us together. We all share in a single *mitzva*. This turns each individual *mitzva* into a national event. Therefore, all Jews will share in the perfection of soul brought about by any one *mitzva*.

*Yechida* is even more than a collective of all living Jews. It includes every Jew who ever lived, does live, and will live. You and I share this soul together with Moshe Rabbeinu, Aharon Hakohen, and Dovid Hamelech. We all can in some way achieve perfection. This is a function of our identity as a single national soul, as a living people.

It is possible to put pieces of *mitzvos* together to create a single perfect *mitzva*. I might do a *mitzva*, but in an incomplete fashion. I may say only ten words out of the whole *kriyas shema* with proper intention. But one of you said another ten words correctly. A third person recited another ten words. Bit by bit we put together a perfect *kriyas shema*. It doesn't matter what country each person is in. Eventually, it all comes together to create a national treasure, a perfectly recited *kriyas shema*.

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### **The United *Yechida*— Collective Soul Strength**

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Fundamentally, the Jewish people need a perfected *tzelem Elokim* in order for them to succeed in war and defeat their enemies. This in turn is a function of perfect *mitzva* performance, which itself is a function of the unity of the Jews across the world and across history. To the extent that we identify as Klal Yisrael, we all share in that common Godliness. This is the common perfection and Godliness we achieve together through performance and fulfillment of *mitzvos*. This *achdus*, unity of Israel, is the deciding factor in Jewish victory in battle.

We are united to the level that we feel emotionally, socially, and culturally united. That level is how we share our *mitzvos*. That is the level at which we activate our common universal national soul.

We all feel our *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama*—our physical, emotional, and intellectual sensations. How many of us though actually feel the *yechida*, the national universal sensation? The *yechida* lies dormant, not accessed. Its power has not been released or turned on. This is because we keep ourselves separate from one another. Only when we decide that we will unite with one another will we actually become one. This is how we can activate the dormant *yechida*, the dormant national identity of Israel.

For the Jew, this is the key to success in war.

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### **Fierce Jewish Individuality**

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The Maharal explains that the Jewish people, paradoxically and tragically, have a very strong inclination and tendency to be

individualists, split apart from one another. This is a function of the greatness of the Jewish soul. The Jewish soul is very special; we are children of Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, and Aharon. We have been endowed with amazing individual prowess. The superior intellect and our acute sense of emotion and spirituality emphasizes our individuality. Every Jewish person is his or her own individual. Sometimes, this can unfortunately lead to the development of a self-centered person, and a bravado and self-righteousness that many of us walk around with.

These feelings then create the antithesis of unity. Jews are very argumentative concerning their individual opinions. Jews are simply independent thinkers. The *New York Times* once wrote about a group of Jews who met with the Dalai Lama. Since he had just gone into exile himself, he asked them for the secret to Jewish survival in exile. One of the Jews half-jokingly said, “We are always fighting with each other. If you pick that up from us, maybe that will help you survive.”

We have an individuality which is a function of our individual abilities. However, this also interferes with Jewish unity. Jewish unity is extremely important because it enables us to access our *yechida*, our universal shared soul. No one can achieve perfection without that.

How does one conquer this Jewish tendency for individualism, separateness, and conceit and instead develop this feeling of the universal *tzelem Elokim*?

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### Clinging to One Source

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Shem Mishmuel offers several ideas. The first idea is based on “*Kedoshim tihyu*.” The *pasuk* says we should be a holy nation. The Ramban says this means, “*kadesh atzmecha b’mutar lach*. Stay away even from things that the Torah doesn’t command you to

avoid.” Add extra practices to the requirements of the Torah in order to achieve personal holiness. In the pursuit of *kedusha*, the goal is to achieve *deveikus*, to become close to the Almighty. When we become close and attached to Hashem, His holiness will spread and pour into us. When a person focuses on attaining *kedusha* through attaching himself to Hashem, then in a sense he relinquishes his personal identity. Obviously, the Almighty is infinite and limitless. When a person truly attaches to Hashem, he realizes that truly his own identity is nothing in relation to the vastness of Hashem, the creator and master of this universe.

Any time a Jew truly says, “I will cling to the Creator of the world,” he gives up his personal agendas. He replaces his agenda with God’s. If every one of us does that, then we are clinging to the same inner point: Hashem. Then we can achieve unity of Israel, the perfect *tzelem Elokim*. We do this when clinging to God in any affair—not just in *mitzvos*, but in all of our activities. We should try to surmise what He would want us to do in non-*mitzva* situations as well as in *mitzva* situations.

The Torah is a blueprint. It gives us 613 do’s and don’t’s. The goal, though, extends beyond these basic rules. We should be able to generalize it into every area of our lives, to act in a holy, Godly, Torah way. God has confidence in us that we will learn this method. We will be able to intuit with spiritual and emotional awareness the proper ways of *kedusha*. If a Jew will be careful in every area of his or her personal life to try to act in the holy Torah way, even in things that are not mandated by Torah (*divrei r’shus*), then one can achieve holiness and fulfill *kedoshim tihyu*. He can lose the part of the personality that is pushing himself to the detriment of the people around him. If we all act *l’shem shamayim*, for God’s sake, then clearly our selves don’t matter as much, and there will be less dispute among us.

If we all truly act *l’shem shamayim*, then we can understand the words, “*eilu v’eilu divrei Elokim chayim*.” There are varied approaches to Torah and life. We understand that Torah, especially



in voluntary areas, doesn't prescribe a single solution. We all must fulfill the 613 *mitzvos*. We all wear the same *tallis* and *tefillin*, eat the same *matza*, and don't eat non-kosher food. However, in areas of *reshus*, we choose different ways. Some people are very generous, some fight for justice in the world, others are studious, and others are emotional. Part of unity is to realize that everyone has his or her own way of expressing his or her personal goal of closeness to the Almighty. If we respect the way others do things, since they are doing so because it is their way, we can develop strong feelings of unity. "*V'havta l'reiacha kamocho*, respect your friend and his individual way." The respect for his or her individuality provides the bonding that leads to unity, the *yechida*, the oneness of Israel.

By focusing on doing everything *l'shem shamayim*, even optional matters, we ultimately produce Jewish unity. This develops the *tzelem Elokim*, the way to perfect the Jewish collective to help us earn victories in war.

Indeed, the Jewish people have a long history of victory in war as function of our unity. It wasn't because we were more numerous or stronger. Many times, we weren't, but when we united it gave us a unique power that made our enemies flee. This is the story of the Chashmonaim. The Maccabees were united in their devotion to Hashem and to Am Yisrael. This is the key for victory in Jewish wars.

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### The Power of Unity

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Shem Mishmuel says when Jews confront our enemies we find a true historical phenomenon. If the Jews are united, then the enemies are disunited. When the Jews are not united, then the enemies unite. In the times of the Greeks, when the Jews were not united, the Greeks banded together and defeated the Jews. The

Romans, too, took soldiers from countries all over the world and united them to fight against the Jews. When Jews today are disunited, then all sorts of soldiers connect to fight against us. Sunni and Shiite Moslems, Lebanese and Syrians, Iranians, Gazans, and Egyptians. These people often fight wars among themselves. But because the Jews are not united, these people unite and fight against the Jews. When we take the power of unity, though, our enemies will disunite. But when we are disunited, they take the power of unity and use it against us.

When the Jews stood at Yam Suf, they saw the Egyptians coming to attack them and they were frightened. Hashem had told Klal Yisrael to expect an Egyptian attack. They panicked, even though they knew that this would happen and Hashem would smite the Egyptians at the sea. Why were they frightened?

Shem Mishmuel explains this based on a careful reading of the *psukim*. “*Va’yisu Bnei Yisrael es eineihem v’hinei Mitzrayim nosea achareihem.*” There is a dramatic difference in the nouns in this verse. The verse refers to Bnei Yisrael in plural form, *rabim*. “They raised their eyes,” and “They were afraid.” But Mitzrayim, referred to in the singular construct, was following them. The Egyptians were united as a single entity. Rashi there actually says, “*k’lev echad b’ish echad*, with one heart as one person.” The Egyptians were united by their shared goal to recapture the Bnei Yisrael. This is why the Jews were afraid. They realized the disunity among themselves, fragmentation into factions, and they saw a united enemy. (In World War II the Nazis had allies, but the Jews tragically were not united.)

This is why Bnei Yisrael felt they couldn’t rely on God’s promise. They thought God’s promise was a function of their unity. They didn’t know how God would save them. He did, nonetheless. Hashem knew that shortly thereafter the Jewish people would be totally united at Har Sinai to accept the Torah. He used that merit to split the Red Sea for them.

The key to victory in wars is Jewish unity.

## *Teshuva Together*

Now we can understand our original question. Why in our *parsha*, *Ki Seitzei*, does the Torah present the war as a simple process? “God will give the enemy into your hand.” After all, in *Beha’aloscha* the Torah describes a difficult time of war. “You will blow trumpets and pray, God will remember you and He will save you from your enemies.” What is the source of the difference between these two scenarios?

In our *parsha*, the singular *teitzei*—“you”—our *yechida* identity, is going out to fight. Our enemies will be many, *oyvecha*. God will give the enemy into our hands. We will win; it will be easy. You, as an individual united nation with a singular identity, will win the war. You are united in purpose in service to Hashem. You are imbued with love of your fellow Jew, *v’havta*. You realize that this world is only for you to serve Hashem and that your individuality is not a reason to pull you apart from fellow Jews, especially as its importance fades in contrast to the reality of Hashem’s existence. You have become a holy nation with a Godly image. Therefore, God simply gives those enemies into your hands.

However, in *Beha’aloscha*, the Torah writes *Ki savo’u*, “When you (plural) enter a war *b’artzechem*, in your (plural) land.” The enemy in this war, *hatzar*, is singular. He fights against you, *eschem*, in the plural form. In this war, the Jews are divided, and the enemies are united. It will be a difficult situation. The Torah provides a solution to this discord: “*va’hareioseem bachatzotzros*.” You divided Jews should blow the trumpets and pray. God will remember you, you will repent, and He will save you.

When the Jews are united, we easily win wars. When the Jews are disunited, our enemies are united, and then we have a long and arduous struggle.

How appropriate and exactly the Shem Mishmuel speaks to our situation today. We are surrounded by enemies who split us

and carry out their plans to attack and to destroy. We desperately need unity. The unity of Israel is a function of how much we cling to Hashem. To what level do we give up our personal agendas for the agenda of holiness? “*B’chol derachecha da’eihu.*” We will grow in holiness when we know God in every way, when we give up our personal agendas for the sake of His, to make us more like Him. Then, without doubt, we will be able to win all the wars that come against us.

The month of Elul is a time of preparation for Rosh Hashana. On that great day at the beginning of the new year, we must reconcile ourselves with all fellow Jews. We have to feel love for Klal Yisrael, the *yechida*, the single nation-soul of Israel. When we come to Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, may we, as a united people, hear God’s voice calling us, caressing us, consoling us, and blessing us with a happy, healthy, and holy new year.

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## REVIEW QUESTIONS

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1. Why are the two descriptions of war in *Ki Seitzei* and *Be-ha'aloscha* so different?
2. What is the key to Jewish victory in battle?
3. What level of the soul unites the Jewish people?
4. How does anyone get credit for all 613 *mitzvos*?
5. According to Maharal, what is the root source of Jewish individuality?
6. When Jews are united, what happens to our enemies?
7. When Jews are disunited, what happens to our enemies?

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## EXERCISES

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1. Keep a log for a week of activities that you did for other Jews, and to strengthen Jewish unity.
2. When did you fail this mission?
3. Develop a program to improve.



