

GREAT FOR SHARING
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

בְּשִׁיטְיָחָה



אור ישראל

Self Inspired

PARSHAS
SHOFTIM

BY RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN
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THE ONLY THING TO FEAR

Parshas Shoftim includes instructions to the Jewish people on how to conduct their wars. A *kohein* was appointed to speak to the soldiers, encouraging them to not fear the enemy. In describing this short speech, the Torah uses multiple terms — “Don’t let your heart falter, do not fear them, do not panic, and do not be alarmed.”¹

Rashi² explains that each term is in response to different intimidating acts the enemy soldiers may do. They bang on their shields, they cause their horses to stomp, they shout, and they blow trumpets. The terrible noise can have the effect of frightening the opposing soldiers, causing them to run, or at least doubt their own prowess. Therefore, the Torah cautions the Jewish army to stand strong against this psychological warfare.

However, R’Yerucham Levovitz³ (1873–1936) questions the need for such wordiness. Why doesn’t the *kohein* simply state, “Do not fear them!” Why must every particular fear be addressed?

Reb Yerucham explains that human nature is such that each new event is assessed as a totally new reality. Passing one test is not a guarantee that we will have an easy time with the next. We may steel ourselves and inspire ourselves to act a certain way under a particular set of circumstances, but unless we make those changes a part of ourselves, when those circumstances change, we may not be ready.

This is a powerful way our *yetzer horah* can attack us. There are times when we may be challenged, and we rise to the occasion. However, the *yetzer horah* does not give up. And despite our successes, one should not assume that they need not fear their challenges again. This is the idea behind ‘fear of sin,’ the understanding that one must be on guard, and not let *aveiros* slip through one’s defenses.

The Torah commands the soldiers to stand strong against every new circumstance, and we too must stand strong against every new challenge.

1 Devarim 20:3

2 *ibid.* s.v. אל ירד

3 *Da’as Chochmah U’Mussar*, Vol. I, 50

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Any instructor will tell you that the best way to be consistently successful is through, “Practice, practice, practice.”

Not only is this true for mundane areas like writing, driving, or learning a language, but it is also true in the area of *middos*, when one wants to excel at a particular character trait.¹

For example, we may think that it is important to learn how to be calm only when there is something that is upsetting us, but at that point, it may be too late.

Rather, one can practice speaking calmly during every interaction. Regularly speaking with a certain pitch, inflection and tone will accustom oneself to keeping one’s cool even in trying situations.

Thus, when something comes up that is unexpected or distressing, one’s training will automatically kick in, saving oneself from failure, and paving the road to success.

1 *Iggeres HaRamban*

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Everything depends on the degree that a person can see himself honestly and accurately. Such recognition is possible by studying Mussar. And this awareness is the most essential knowledge that one can possess. - Revered Mashgiach Rav Chatzkel Levenstein zt”l, Avodas Yechezkel Parashas Mikeitz, pg. 125

AFRAID TO SLIP UP

"I appreciate you saying that, but the truth is, I reviewed all the *halachos* of the *Shabbos seudah* just last week," Michael said, deflecting the compliment.

As they left Shacharis, Yehuda mentioned to Michael that he was on a diet and avoiding bread, which led to a discussion about Shabbos, and then to various *halachos* of the meal. To Yehuda's surprise, Michael was quite knowledgeable on the subject, quoting various opinions and laying out the practical *halacha*.

"Just reviewed it? Why?"

Michael smirked. "Because I was nervous that I wasn't doing it right!"

"Why is that?"

"I've been running a Shabbos table since I got married, about forty years ago. And I was fairly confident that I knew what I was doing — which *challah* you are supposed to cut, and so on. But last week we were having Rabbi Elbaz over, you know Rabbi Elbaz, right? Anyway, we were having him and his family over, and I just felt that I wanted to be sure. So over the week, I went over all the *halachos* of the *Shabbos seudah*, just to double check!"

Yehuda laughed and nodded knowingly. "I know what you mean. You remind me of when I was in *Eretz Yisrael*, I had the opportunity to learn every Shabbos afternoon with a great *talmid chacham*, Rabbi Yechiel Dinowitz. And every single time, he would offer me a piece of cake, and would not take no for an answer. So, I would have to take a piece, make a *bracha* with him watching me, and eat the cake. After he made sure I had enough, I would have to make a *bracha acharona*. Now, I know *al hamichya* by heart, but you can be sure that I asked for a *siddur*! I explained that I always try to make a *bracha* from a *siddur*, and he was happy to oblige."

Michael and Yehuda continued walking, smiles on their faces as they thought about the potential embarrassment of making a mistake on something so simple. Yehuda then broke the silence, "I will add, though, that using the *siddur* did help me. I mean, I know all the words, but seeing them inside, especially with Rabbi Dinowitz standing there, helped me focus on what I was saying.

"The truth is, I kind of got used to using a *siddur*. I don't do it all the time, but I just thought to myself, 'If I'm this nervous about making a mistake in front of Rabbi Dinowitz, shouldn't I be at least somewhat nervous about making a mistake in front of Hashem?'"

**"Now, I know
al hamichya by
heart, but you
can be sure
that I asked for
a siddur!"**

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Despite Avraham Avinu reaching his greatest spiritual level at *Akeidas Yitzchak*, the *yetzer horah* still attempted to stop Avraham by causing the ram to get caught in the thicket.¹
- 'Fear of sin' is greater than both 'fear of punishment,' and 'awe of Hashem.' This is because 'fear of sin,' is constant, while 'fear of punishment,' and 'awe of Hashem,' only occur when one is engaged in an action.²

¹ *Rashi* on *Bereishis* 22:13, s.v. בקרניו, *Sifsei Chachamim ibid.* s.v. שהיה רץ

² *Mesillas Yesharim*, Chap. 24

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