

Parshat Bo Loyal Legions

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

In Parshat Bo, Bnei Yisroel are called *tzivos*, legions, first, “On that very day the legions of Hashem left the land of Egypt,” and later, “On that very day Hashem took *Bnei Yisroel* out of the land of Egypt in their legions.” What is the significance of this new designation, and how does the first designation of “the legions of Hashem” differ from the more general legions?

Rabbi Leff explains that as long as a Jew has within him that untainted “*pintele yid*” he remains part of the legions of Hashem. But how does one rise from the multitude and become one of the elite? The Alshich Hakadosh writes that the legions of Hashem are the angels that accompanied *Bnei Yisroel* in Egypt. These angels left immediately and waited for Hashem to take *Bnei Yisroel* out of Egypt. But if the legions of Hashem refer to *Bnei Yisroel*, then we need to aspire to become as angelic as possible. This is possible if we act like the soldiers in a legion. Just as each soldier takes personal responsibility for his part in a mission and reports directly to his commanding officer, so must each of us be careful in our task and report to our commanding Officer, writes Meirosh Tzurim citing the Klei Yakar. The Birkat Mordechai explains that a soldier’s entire being is dedicated to his King. His mission becomes his identity. It is his privilege to serve and protect the honor of his King. Therefore, the life of a teacher of Torah by definition must be identified with a full Torah lifestyle. As the Tiferet Shimshon notes, a soldier, can have no personal agenda, but must be a walking emissary of his Commander.

We were imbued with unshakable faith in Hashem through our redemption from Egypt.

But the Sifsei Chaim points out, based on Ramban, that we also accepted upon ourselves the yoke of Heaven. We are obligated to serve Him, for He took us out of Egypt. Just as a soldier responds with, “Yes, Sir,” to every command, just as an angel accepts every mission, so did we respond with “*Naaseh v’nishma* – we will do and we will listen.” Hashem redeemed us from Egypt to be free men. Yet we celebrate the *Seder* with symbols of servitude, with bitter herbs and *charoset*. What is there to celebrate about the servitude? Rabbi Druck adds a corollary question. Our Patriarch Avraham prayed so hard to save Sodom, yet when Hashem told him that his own descendants would be in harsh servitude for 400 years, Avraham did not pray. Rabbi Druck explains that today we have no concept of what a true servant is. A servant today dreams of the day he will be free. A true servant thinks only of fulfilling his master’s wishes. To be able to internalize this mindset, we needed to undergo an enslavement that stripped us of any personal desires, even for freedom itself. Only through this experience would we be able to commit totally to do the will of Hashem and recognize that as the epitome of true freedom. This is the “great riches” Hashem promised Avraham and this is why he did not pray to annul the enslavement. It was only through this experience that we could become legions of Hashem and live lives devoted to holiness.

Tzivot can be read as *tzava ot*, a legion of letters and signs, writes the Sefat Emet. Rabbi N. Scherman notes that Hashem first created the twenty-two letters of the alphabet and used them to write the Torah which then became the blueprint of all creation. These holy letters contain within them every aspect of

creation and its continued existence. Each human being is a composite of all that preceded mankind in creation. As such, each individual is a complete world unto himself and symbolically contains within him all twenty two letters of the *aleph bet*. When a Jew sins, he sullies those letters and dims the visible light of God in the world, while each *mitzvah* enhances that light. There are 600,000 letters in the Torah (rounded out), and 600,000 Jews left Egypt. Each one of Bnei Yisroel represents one letter of the Torah. Every one of us has the ability to be part of the holy legion of Hashem and elevate the world through our actions based on the unique gifts and challenges Hashem has placed within us. The *aleph bet* is the “brick and mortar and soul of the universe. It is through these letters that Hashem “renews each day, perpetually, the work of creation.” But if within a Torah scroll, the blueprint of the world, even one letter is missing or one letter touches another, the entire scroll is invalid. So too each individual must work within his own “blueprint” to achieve his mission without trying to usurp a mission meant for another.

Bnei Yisroel understood, writes Peninei Daas, that just as each soldier must maintain his own position, so must each of us maintain our own mission. One clue to our mission is a trait or activity with which we struggle most, for that is where the *yetzer horo* is expending its greatest energy. The Netivot Shalom explains that *Bnei Yisroel* wanted to know their purpose, and not leave as a ragtag multitude of people. They wanted to accept the Torah as their national mission and hoped to achieve success with their personal missions within the greater army of Hashem.

Eishes Chayil: Pasuk 1 Part I

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Hochheimer

Eishet Chayil, unlike the rest of Mishlei is written in very positive terms. It describes what a woman of valor can achieve, what she can be as opposed to what she should not be. The first verse tells us, "A woman of valor who can find, she is more valuable than pearls." The Malbim says there are two ways in life you can get something. You can either find it or you can earn it through hard work.

Imagine you hear about a guru who promises to change your life. You go to the class anticipating what this person will say. He walks in and announces, "All of you have failed. None of you will be able to achieve the goal." How many will come back to the next class and put down the thousands of dollars he asks for? What would be the difference if you knew at the outset that this person has transformed many lives? Everything he says has such wisdom. When you hear him saying, "This is a really hard mission. I think you will all fail," you might take it differently and understand it a little deeper. The end of *Eishet Chayil* tells us, many women have become *chayil* and you *eishet chayil* have surpassed

them all. They became *chayil* because they worked at it. They were committed, proactive, and systematic. They didn't just give up. But the goal is still harder to achieve than pearls. Where is the uplifting message that will carry us through? The Akeidas Yitzchak explains, one can also get something as a gift from Hashem. This transforms this first verse from-work harder, faster, and smarter to something positive. It's important to remember that our ability to change is a gift from Hashem. The only way we will achieve success is if we invite Hashem in. We need to work hard but we must also rely on Hashem.

Eishet chayil is very often translated as a woman of valor. Valor brings to mind courage and bravery. Why didn't Shlomo Hamelech describe her as righteous or holy? In Shemot, *anshei chayil* is used to refer to a group of men that Moshe selected to help him judge the people. There it connotes fear of Hashem. Ramban translates *chayil* as someone who is outstanding. In the context of *eishet chayil* it means someone hardworking and productive, who invests her all to reach worthy goals. The

Daas Mikra combines the two explanation. The *eishet chayil* is diligent, industrious, fears Hashem, honest and truthful. Her productivity brings wealth to her home.

It is very easy to be otherworldly when no one is around and bothering you. There are plenty of gurus who live on isolated mountain tops. But as a mother, how spiritual can you be picking socks off the floor and potty -training toddlers? Chazal say that embarrassing someone is like killing him. Making someone feel isolated is worse than death. We feel a loss when we don't connect with other people. No matter if we are married or single, relationships evolve as we get older. We live with others that have wants and needs that don't match our own. When we're younger, we think my way is the right way and if I just convince the other person it'll be ok. As we get older, we realize we're dealing with human beings and life isn't going to be easy. How can we build healthy, happy, relationships? In the next installment we will explore this question further.

Bris Mila

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Before a person is born, an angel teaches him the entire *Torah*. When he comes into the world, the angel hits him over the lip and he forgets everything. In a sense this seems tragic. It's like moving from a mansion in Great Neck to the slums of Harlem. Yet our sages tell us that we are meant to become stronger and better through our sojourn on this world. In order to achieve human perfection, Hashem gives us the ability to take the raw material with which he made the world and create something greater. The reproductive organs and the mouth, human speech, essentially express who we are. The Torah uses the same language of reference when it speaks about people who have *arel sefasayim* (uncircumcised lips) and *arlos habasar* (uncircumcised flesh).

Yishmael's birth must have been a source of great joy to Avraham. Although it wasn't with the wife he had wanted and although Yishmael did not turn out the way he wanted, still he believed it was all from Hashem. Avraham saw Yishmael's imperfections but did not want to expel him because he had *emunah* that this is what Hashem had given him to deal with. It was only when Hashem told him to listen to Sarah, that he realized there was a higher level. The Zohar tells us that after the expulsion, Avraham still maintained a connection with Yishmael. In spite of all the pain the child caused him, he was still able to see Hashem when he looked at him because Avraham could see Hashem when he looked at anything. This is what living with *emunah* is about. It's bringing Hashem into every circumstance, even that which appears like

tragedy and failure.

The very first *mitzva* Hashem gave Avraham was *brit milah*. Hashem wanted to convey the message, "I'm there most in your challenges." Avraham was unsure whether to do the *mitzvah* of *brit milah* in public or private. Most likely nobody would understand or relate to it. Instead of seeing him as a great philosopher, as a prince of Hashem, they would see him as a fool. And then where would Hashem's honor be? But in fact, Hashem is most there where he seems to be the most absent. The evil of all desire which seems utterly base, has the potential to be elevated to greatness. It is this that Avraham taught the world through *brit milah*.