



LESSONS

INBORN KINDNESS

The story has been told of a restaurant employee in New York City who began distributing leftover food from the restaurant to a group of homeless people who frequented the streets nearby. Although most of the people were grateful for his kindness, one homeless woman refused to touch any of the food he offered. After several days, his curiosity overcame him, and he asked her why she would not accept his gifts.


"I would rather starve to death than accept food from a Jew!" she replied.

Surprised, the man exclaimed, "But I'm not Jewish! Why would you think I am?"

"Only Jews are capable of this type of generosity," she insisted.

When the man shared this story with his mother, he was shocked by her reply. "You're not going to believe this, but the truth is that you are Jewish," she admitted. "Your father is a non-Jew, but I am a Jew, and that makes you a Jew as well."

This incredible revelation eventually led the man to Eretz Yisrael and a life of full Jewish observance.

The homeless woman's perception in this story highlights the very goal that we must all strive to attain. As Jews, we must be not just *gomlei chasadim*, but practitioners of *chesed* on such a level that the rest of the world will see it as unmistakably Jewish. 

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OF THE WEEK

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

By Rabbi Moshe Pogrow

To ensure the moral and spiritual integrity of the Jewish people, it was necessary for them to conquer Midyan, because the Midyanim had attempted to seduce the Jews both physically and spiritually. In this *parsha*, the order was given to go to war against them.

Moshe had given the Jews the Torah, which is based on purity and loyalty to Hashem. Now, before his death, he was told to strike a blow against Midyan in order to safeguard these two pillars of his mission, to protect the people against *gilui arayos* and *avodah zarah*.

The war was waged against Midyan, not Moav, because Moav only sought to weaken the Jews physically, not to cause their destruction. Hence, it was necessary to make the people aware of the reason for the campaign. The true enemy of the Jewish people is not the one who seeks their physical destruction, but the one who plots their moral and spiritual demise.


Any defect in the Jews' integrity severs the connection between them and Hashem. Therefore, Hashem sent them to bring His retribution upon

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B'CHOL MEODECHA: REAL COMMITMENT

Sometimes we need to give up something other than our lives for the sake of Hashem. Imagine that in order to avoid doing an *aveirah*, you would have to give away all your money. If your boss insists that you work for him on Shabbos, the *halacha* requires you to forfeit your job. This is what is meant by *bechol meodecha*, with all of your wealth.

When we say these words, we must make up our minds to do this if called upon to do so. If we mean it sincerely, we will be credited with the *mitzvah*, even if the *nisayon* never arises for us. 

Adapted from Emunah in the Classroom

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THE WILL TO CHANGE

By Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation

We turn to the timely subject of the Bais Hamikdash. On Tisha B'Av, we will read the Megillah of Eicha, authored by Yirmiyahu Hanavi and dictated to him by Hashem. Knowing the story behind the writing of Eicha will allow us to experience true mourning when we hear it read.

At the time of its writing, 18 years before the final destruction, Yehoyakim sat on the throne of Yehuda. Yirmiyahu had been imprisoned for the crime of prophesying that the city would be conquered by Bavel.

In prison, Hashem instructed him to take a scroll and dictate an account of the predicted punishments to his *talmid*, Baruch ben Neriah. Yirmiyahu told Baruch to hold onto the scroll and wait for a public fast day, when the people would assemble at the Beis Hamikdash. Then he should read it to them.

After many months, the nation feared an attack by Nevuchadnetzar's army. A fast day was indeed proclaimed, and the people gathered in the Beis Hamikdash to pray. Baruch took the Megillah and read it before them. Although Eicha was written 18 years before the Churban, it was a complete description of all that was destined to occur.

One of the king's officers was present during the reading. He arranged for Baruch to read the scroll again in the staff room where other officers sat. They all agreed that the king had to be notified. Knowing of Yehoyakim's wickedness, they knew he might vent his anger on Yirmiyahu and Baruch, and so the *pasuk* tells us that "Hashem hid them," i.e., they miraculously became invisible.

At first the king's reaction was indifferent. In the first few verses of Eicha, the land of Yehuda is left barren and abandoned. Yehoyakim did not care, "as long as I am king over those who remain!" But the fifth verse described the enemies of the land becoming its master. "I will not be king?" he exclaimed. He slashed the scroll with a blade and threw the pieces in the fire. Hashem instructed Yirmiyahu to rewrite the prophecy, with additional verses added.

Although the nation had come to the Beis Hamikdash to fast and pray, their tefillos were not answered. One of the basic steps of *teshuvah* is to correct one's ways. The Jews of Eretz Yehuda were committing many sins, but their fast and prayer was not indicative of repentance from idol worship and other serious sins. Teshuva requires one to be honest with himself, recognize his faults, and be prepared to change. 🕯

Midyan.

With its policy of corrupting other nations, Midyan was guilty of the gravest international crime. It had lost its right to exist as a nation before G-d.

In the Torah's accounts of earlier military campaigns—the wars against Sichon, Og, and the Emorim—it does not explicitly mention the presence of a *kohen*, nor that of the *aron* or *chatzotzros*. Those wars were wars of self-defense or conquest, fought for material reasons.

This war, however, was waged for the most exalted purposes. For such a war, it was especially fitting that a *kohen* should be there, along with the *luchos haeidus* and the trumpets that call for Hashem's help.

The Jews went out to fight for the sake of the *luchos* and the *aron*, for the sake of the Torah and its bearers. They fought this war to ensure that the Torah and its bearers could dwell securely in the midst of the nations. 🕯

Based on the commentary of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch zt"l on Chumash, with permission from the publisher.



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GIVE ME A SIGN



How did ancient travelers find their way?

In Parshas Masei, the Torah lists every stop Bnei Yisrael made on their 40-year journey through the desert, 42 in all. But before GPS or road signs, how did anyone know where they were going? Ancient travelers who did not have Hashem guiding them used the sun, stars, and natural landmarks. At night, they watched the North Star, which is always in the same spot. During the day, the position of the sun and shadows helped tell direction and time. Some used the wind, the shapes of hills and mountains, or even animal tracks. Sailors learned to read clouds and wave patterns, and desert nomads knew how to find north by moss growth or sand dune formation. Hashem has given us a world full of signs to help us move forward. 🕯

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