

"THREE LONG LESSONS FROM ONE SHORT WAR"

The difference in mood and temperament of all our people between last Saturday and this one can best be summed up in one verse of King David's Psalms that we recite in our Hallel: min ha-metzar karati yah, "From the straits I called out to the Lord," anani ba-merhav yah, "and the Lord answered me with enlargement." Last week we called out out of our anguish, hemmed in by enemies on all sides, encircled by adversaries seeking to destroy us utterly. By this Shabbat, the Lord has given us His blessing, He has enlarged us; we are now able to breathe more safely and securely, having broken out of the ring of death that has surrounded us only a few days ago.

What does this sudden deliverance mean? Of course, it is vain to attempt to see the events that have occurred to us this week in their proper perspective. This chapter in history is hardly over; we are still very much involved in its consequences. Yet, time in our days has become condensed, communications are incredibly rapid, and even wars are fought and decided in three or four days; hence, our understanding must keep pace and our evaluation must be accelerated.

We do this although we appreciate how complicated our problem is -- especially considering events which can be described as nothing less than nissim, miracles. Indeed, they are not the garden variety

of miracles, the nissim nistarim (hidden miracles), but quite obviously they are in the category of nissim geluyim, evident and open miracles which only a blind man can fail to see and only one who is obtuse can fail to appreciate. The victory of Israel was totally unexpected by the victor, by the conqueror, or by the observers. The extent of what has happened staggers the imagination. This is the week that Jews for the first time in twenty years visited the grave of Rachel in Bethlehem, and that for the first time in the memory of any person alive today, a Jew entered the me'arat ha-makhpelah, the burial grounds of the Patriarchs of Israel. Above all else, this is the week that Jews once again danced in the streets of Jerusalem k'ir she'hubrah lah yabday, a city united. Jerusalem is one; no longer two Jerusalems! This is the week that Jews once again prayed at the Wailing Wall, shedding tears not of anguish but of joy and reunion.

So it is difficult, but necessary, to take the long look, to attempt to recapitulate some of the important lessons of this short war.

The first one was stated quite clearly and simply by King David: al tivtehu bi'nedivim, ye shall not trust in the princes. You shall not place your ultimate faith in presidents or prime-ministers, in generals or commanders, in treaties or alliances.

It is still too early to tell to what extent the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of England stood by us, and

how extensive was their support for us, given the possibilities of nuclear confrontation with Russia. For whatever genuine help we did receive, we are eternally grateful. Yet it is clear that, in essence, Israel fought alone -- and probably will remain mostly alone in the diplomatic battles that are yet to come. The supposed best friend of Israel stood aloof when the crisis came, remotely neutral in his "grandeur"... Others, bound to Israel by treaty, waited for other maritime powers to join it before honoring that treaty; it waited and waited and, when no one came, made no move on its own. Our State Department ignored American commitments -- in thought, word, and deed...

All this -- and, I fear, what lies ahead in the days to come -- recalls the old adage: May God protect me from my friends, I will take care of my enemies myself. We must realize that in an ultimate sense we are, as a Gentile prophet noticed with great perception, am levadad yishkon, "a people that dwelleth alone." Of course, Israel needs and should seek alliances, just as individuals need and should seek out friends. But after all is said and done, we are a lonely people. It is that loneliness which is our greatest weakness and our greatest strength, a source of our deepest anguish and our highest joy.

In the first of the three-fold blessing of the Kohanim as given to us in today's Sidra, we read yevarekhekha ha-Shem, "the Lord bless thee," ve'yishmerekha, "and keep thee." Our tradition has explained this last word as ve'yishmerekha min ha-mazikin, may the

Lord keep thee from those who would injure thee. Mazikin generally is translated as demons, injurious spirits. The Aramaic translator, Targum Jonathan, identifies two groups of such mazikin. He refers to them as bnei tiharerei, the sons of dusk, and bnei tzafrirei, the sons of dawn. There are two kinds of demons -- those who appear in their true colors, black as night, and those who disguise themselves in the brightness of dawn. Some mazikin show their blackness openly; Russia and the Arabs are a good example. Others appear as sweet as dawn. India, for example, has always postured as a paragon of peace and piety. Yet, when it comes to Israel, she is nothing more or less than a mazik, a malevolent spirit. Close friends of Israel, such as the French government, have proved that underneath the exterior of bnei tzafrirei they are yet mazikin, ready to injure us. And even closer friends who are well-intentioned and would genuinely want to remain "the sons of dawn," found themselves ready to abandon us before our strength showed.

The second of the three lessons has to do with the performance of our religious youth. It was amazing how all people of good will rallied to our side: non-Jews of all walks of life demonstrated friendship, and almost all Jews -- with the exception of a sick and psychotic minority which does not deserve to be dignified by mention -- were united in their enthusiasm. But the noblest example of all was provided by those many young people who were ready to give not only their substance but themselves, their own lives, placing themselves

at the disposal of Israel wherever they might be needed in that war-torn country.

It is a source of profound pride to us that the first to volunteer -- when the situation was still dark and dismal -- and in numbers highly disproportionate to our percentage of the population, were students of Yeshiva University and other yeshivot, young people who had Day School background, some Jewish education, some anchorage in a life of Torah, some reiah Torah. I am told that at the beginning of the crisis crowds of young people gathered at the Jewish Agency building to volunteer their services for Israel, and that a leading secular Zionist ideologist opened the door to the office, observed the young people, and turned to an Orthodox member of the Jewish Agency staff, asking, "I wonder where the boys without the kippot are!" Certainly we have noticed the presence of young religious Jews in the pictures that appeared in the press, and in the rally in Washington, D.C. We have always known of the greatness of Torah; rarely have we had this God-given opportunity to observe the graciousness of Torah! What a kiddush ha-Shem!

The second of the three-fold blessing reads ya'er ha-Shem panav elekha, "may the Lord cause His countenance to shine upon thee," vi'yekuneka, "and be gracious unto thee." Our tradition saw in the blessing of God's bright countenance a reference to Torah, for torah ore, the Torah is considered light. That is why this blessing is interpreted by the Rabbis as yaamid mimkha banim bnei torah, may the Lord give thee children who will be students of Torah. On the

second half of that blessing, vi'yehuneke, they offer a comment according to which the word should be translated not "and God will be gracious unto thee," but rather yiten hinkha b'einei ha-beriyot, "God will give thee the gift of appearing gracious to others!" This indeed is what has happened: those of our children who deserve the honorific title of bnei torah suddenly appeared in a marvelous and wondrous aura of hen, of genuine Jewish graciousness and charm. Would that this unusual but thoroughly proper "image" became usual and natural!

The third point is, that what Jews could not accomplish, the Arabs did: they united the Jewish people. The sense of purpose and unity was evident to all. Even in Jerusalem, where opinions are sharp and disagreements strong, religious groups of all types were unified. In New York too, with a few painful exceptions, our people were united. A great spirit of fellowship overtook all Jews of all persuasions. Jews who never admitted to being Jewish, neighbors who, according to the custom of this great and faceless metropolis, never greet each other, suddenly smiled at each other with a new and effusive friendship. The blessing of peace, shalom, had overtaken our people.

This, indeed, is the third and greatest blessing: yisa ha-Shem panav elekha, "may the Lord turn His face unto thee," ve'yasem lekha shalom, "and grant thee the blessing of peace."

Quite appropriately, the Yalkut comments that gadol ha-shalom

she'afilu be'shaat milhamah tzerikhin le'shalom, peace is so great, that even in times of war it is necessary to have peace! Apparently what the Rabbis meant by this remark is that war should never be absolute, even when it is necessary. There should always be some pacific residue, some irenic core, some opportunity left for establishing peaceful relationships. Even in the course of war, we must find peace.

However, I should like to express a deeply-felt hope based upon a paraphrase of this statement of the Rabbis. I would prefer to read that: gadol ha-shalom she'afilu be'shaat shalom tzerikhin le'shalom, now that we have learned to find peace and unity in times of war, may we, in looking ahead, strive for the blessing of peace even during peacetime! May we learn to cherish this fellowship and oneness even when we are not threatened from without. We must make a new start not for superficial uniformity, but in always asserting the underlying oneness of the people of Israel even while disagreeing and arguing with each other.

Furthermore, our hope for shalom must apply to the entire Middle East, as the blessing of peace between Israel and the Arab countries, distant though that seems. A victory can be meaningful only if it results in enduring peace. The Hebrew word for victory, nitzahon, derives from the word netzah, which means: eternity. Military victory is meaningful only if it is followed by eternal peace, or at least harmony for a long, long time. Our current nitzahon will not have been complete unless we can look forward to a netzah-type

peace which will follow. Of course, if it does not come, we will survive anyway. The Jewish people has changed part of its character these last twenty years. We will no longer submit to enemies in order to satisfy their whims or interests. In the Biblical era, it appears that our people had to fight every forty years for its survival; nowadays, apparently, the cycle comes every ten years. We can do it if we have to. But this is not our choice. We are not, despite our fantastic military successes, a martial people. Our ambition is always that of shalom, that of peace for ourselves and for the entire world, and peace and war cannot long coexist.

So we ask Almighty God on this day for His threefold priestly blessing. We ask Him to bless us and ve'yishmerekha, to guard us from all those who would injure us, whether these damaging demons growl black as night, or smile bright as dawn.

We ask of Him that He cause His countenance to shine upon us, by giving us a generation which will be guided by the light of Torah and which will continue to serve as a source for the special Jewish charm of hen; for this is the blessing of vi'yehuneka.

And above all else, we ask for ve'yasem lekha shalom, unity in our own camp, harmony in the Middle East, peace in the world.

We conclude with the same words with which that priestly blessing concludes: ve'samu et shemi al benei Yisrael, "and they shall place My name on the Children of Israel, va'ani avarkhem, "and I shall bless them."



May the Name of God indeed be placed upon Israel, so that our people will become not only champions in war, but, as the very name Yisrael indicates (as it incorporates His Name in its name), we will become the champions of the Lord; and that shall be our greatest blessing: va'ani avarkhem.