

Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality

From Rav Binny

(Portion of Shemot)

Zvika had just been given two weeks leave; Having been accepted to the prestigious Company Commanders course, he had been given two weeks leave and was at home on his Kibbutz Lochamei Hageta'ot near Haifa when, at exactly 2pm on the afternoon of October 6th, 1973, the Yom Kippur War began. Nearly two thousand Syrian tanks poured across the border in the Golan Heights while hundreds of thousands of Egyptian troops crossed the Suez Canal in the Sinai, and Israeli troops, suffering unspeakable losses, scrambled to try and hold back the onslaught.

Twenty-one year old Captain Zvika Greengold, a tank officer, sensed how bad things were and frantically started making his way across the country to the Golan Heights where he understood the situation was dire; Syrian tanks were just a few hours away from Tel Aviv and there was not much standing in their way.

Arriving at the IDF Command center in Nafach on the Golan, a couple of hours before Syrian tanks burst through the gates, he found the army in disarray; tank crewmen who had managed to get to the Golan to try and help had no idea what to do or where to go. Commandeering two tanks he hurriedly grabbed whatever tank crewmen he could find and within a few minutes was rolling out of the base with two tanks.

Not officially a unit with no assigned frequency, he called his unit 'Koach Tzvika' (Force Tzvika) and managed to make contact with troops fighting in the Southern Golan. As night fell, he set out on the tap-line route, the same road used by the Syrians to cross the border and enter Israeli territory.

Almost immediately he encountered an entire company of Syrian tanks advancing towards the Command center. Understanding that if the Golan fell, the entire coastal plain of Israel would soon follow, he advanced in the darkness towards the vastly superior Syrian force and by deft maneuvering and firing from multiple positions, was able to convince the Syrians that they were facing a far larger force of Israelis.

At one point, seeing a Syrian tank ten yards away he fired at point-blank range exploding the enemy tank just in time, but the blast hit his own tank knocking out his radio. So, he jumped off his tank in the midst of battle and commandeered the second tank in his unit to continue fighting. Sending the second tank's commander back to his original tank with no communications he ordered him to simply follow him and fire at his own discretion. But in the darkness the second tank lost its way and Tzvika now faced the entire Syrian force all alone.

Moments later he saw an entire column of hundreds of Syrian tanks headed across the Golan along the road. Despite being outnumbered, he moved in and out of the darkness, firing on the Syrian tanks while remaining undetected. As the battle raged, he changed his position constantly, firing from different directions to give the perception of a much larger force. In an attempt to uncover the Israeli forces, the Syrian tanks turned on their searchlights but discovered nothing. The beams of light only

helped Tzvika and his tank crew identify more Syrian tanks and inflict greater losses. The Syrian forces, stunned by the attacks, retreated to avoid further casualties.

All night long, as more Syrian tanks continued to pour over the northern border, Tzvika continued to attack the Syrians from various positions. At one point, a Syrian tank lit his tank on fire, badly burning his crew. Although he suffered from burns and shock, he ran to another tank and took command over its crew. He continued in this way for hours, striking at Syrian tanks and changing vehicles whenever his tank was disabled. When his gunner was wounded and overcome with shock and fatigue Tzvika simply took his place in the gunner's position continuing to fire shells at the Syrian tanks.

All that night and into the next day, the Zvika Force continued with other troops along the Tapline Route to confront the Syrians, refusing to retreat lest the Syrians press their advantage and discover they had really already won. Eventually, Israeli forces gained the upper hand, repelling the Syrian forces just as they were on the verge of breaking Israel's defenses.

*After more than 20 hours of battle, Captain Greengold got off his tank in the middle of the Nafah base. Exhausted, he fell to the ground. An intelligence officer brought him to an IDF medical center, where he was finally treated for his injuries. It is estimated that during the course of that fateful night, he and his crew destroyed twenty tanks and many more armored vehicles; some say as many as sixty. At one point joined by eight tanks commanded by Lt. Colonel Uzi More they charged an entire Syrian **Divison** (three hundred and sixty tanks!).*

Through the night, Tzvika would not say on the radio how bad things were nor even hint to the fact that he was only commanding one tank, afraid the Syrians might intercept his frequency and figure out he was all alone. Even his own superior Officers were fooled: Colonel Yitzchak ben Shoham commanding the 188th and later killed in the fighting, assumed he was commanding a force of at least a company of tanks...

After the Yom Kippur War, the IDF awarded Captain Greengold with a Medal of Valor for his extraordinary heroism. Sometimes, one man at the right place at the right time, can make all the difference.

This week's portion of *Shemot* contains one of the most painful episodes in Jewish History as an entire people falls from grace in Egypt eventually finding itself enslaved, its children murdered with no end in sight. Then, when it seems as though there must be no hope left, G-d finally tells Moshe, after two hundred years, that it is time for the Jewish people to be redeemed; time for them to come home.

Moshe, in his famous encounter with G-d at the burning bush, is not at all sure he is the right man for the job, but eventually acquiesces to G-d's command and leaves the safety and comfort of his home and family in *Midian* to journey back down to Egypt and confront Pharaoh.

Armed with a miraculous staff and the word of G-d, one would imagine Moshe must be sure their redemption will occur almost immediately, but it does not quite work out that way: Pharaoh refuses to accept Moshe's demand to free the Jewish people, instead withholding the straw they desperately need to fulfill their quota of bricks, causing them to sink deeper into despair until they groan under

the burden of their misery. Eventually the Jews turn on their would-be saviors Moshe and Aaron (ibid. 5:20-21) castigating them for making their situation even worse and doing nothing to hasten their redemption.

At this point, a most curious dialogue ensues between Moshe and Pharaoh, which concludes the portion of *Shemot* in what seems to be the middle of the story. Moshe seems to challenge G-d:

"... Why have you made things worse for this people, and why did you send me?"

And Hashem responds to Moshe (ibid. 6:1):

"...now you will see that which I will do to Pharaoh, for with a strong hand I will send them forth (free them from Egypt)..."

Rashi (ibid. 6:1) notes that Jewish tradition suggest that Moshe is being castigated by G-d:

*"You questioned my ways? Says G-d: **now** you will see (the miracles I will do to Pharaoh when setting the Jews free) but later (when I bring the Jewish people home to Israel) you will not see (i.e. :You will not enter the land."*

So, on the one hand, there must be some legitimacy to Moshe's claim that the Jewish people are suffering, for G-d says the redemption will begin, and you will see it. But he must have also said something wrong seeing as tradition here alludes to the fact Moshe will be punished and not allowed to enter the land of Israel.

So what part of Moshe's claim was right, and what was wrong? Interestingly, Moshe actually asks G-d two challenging questions:

1. Why have you, G-d, made things worse for the Jewish people? And:
2. Why, if things are worse for them, did you send me here?

At first glance, if we had to pick one of these questions which might be considered inappropriate we would probably assume the first question is a good question; after all a true leader is in pain when his people suffer, so perhaps it is good Moshe challenges even G-d: How can you cause even more suffering to this enslaved people?

But the second question might bother us, suggesting a certain presumptuousness above Moshe's pay grade: Moshe is questioning why Hashem sent him to Egypt? Who are we to question G-d's ways? Yet in fact it is this question which is praised in Jewish tradition and the first question, for which Moshe is taken to task: it is not for us to question why some people suffer and some don't...

So, what then, is the nature of this second question? What is Moshe suggesting by asking why he was sent?

Rav Avigdor Nevehnsahl in his *Sichot Le'Sefer Shemot* suggests that while the end result is always in Hashem's hands, our own role in it is another thing entirely.

As an example, when Moshe resists Hashem's urgings to redeem the Jewish people (ibid. chapter 3) at the burning bush, one wonders how he could cause the redemption to be delayed, even for a moment.

After all, if he had not argued with G-d he would have begun the redemption that much sooner, so how could he cause the Jewish people to continue to suffer even for a day? But in truth, the redemption of the Jewish people was always meant to happen on the day it happened; the only question was what role Moshe would play. And if his hesitation was because he worried about whether his being chosen would cause pain to his older brother Aaron who had remained in Egypt all the many years Moshe was in Midian, (see Rashi ibid. 4:13) then he was right to suggest that he wanted to be a force for redemption and not for pain.

What a powerful message: Moshe was willing to give up perhaps the most important role in history; the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt and the receiving of the Torah at Sinai, simply to avoid causing pain to his brother! Because in the end we have to do the best we can to be doing the right thing at the right time and then we can leave it to G-d to ensure the result is as it should be.

Just like Captain Tzvika Gringold, who could not imagine, that with one tank, he would stop an entire Syrian Division. And indeed that was not his job; his job was to fight with every ounce of strength he had, in every moment, to stop the **one** tank in front of him, and leave it to Hashem to decide what the actual result of it would all be.

In whatever moment we find ourselves, we need only decide what we are meant to do based on what we think Hashem wants of us in that moment and be sure we do our best. After that we can trust that Hashem will make sure the result will happen as it was always meant to be...

Ultimately, the Jewish people will be redeemed, and they will come home to the land of Israel, just as it was always meant to be. And the only question is what role we get to play on that journey...

Shabbat Shalom from Jerusalem

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