

Our *Parashah* opens, "When you will go out to war against your enemies . . ." *Rashi z"l* comments: "The Torah is speaking here of a *Milchemet Reshut*."

Literally, *Milchemet Reshut* refers to a war that is not obligatory, as opposed to the wars against the Canaanites and Amalek, which are obligatory. However, notes R' Yehoshua Heschel (Harry) Kaufman *shlita* (rabbi in Washington, D.C. and Montreal), teachers of *Mussar* interpret *Rashi* as referring to the most difficult battle of all--the war against things that are "*Reshut*" / permitted pleasures. R' Kaufman explains: The *Yetzer Ha'ra* generally cannot cause an upstanding, observant Jew to sin outright. Instead, the *Yetzer Ha'ra* entices us to become absorbed in permitted pleasures--for example, to eat kosher food to excess--at the expense of studying Torah and performing *Mitzvot*. Since these pleasures are permitted according to *Halachah*, it is very difficult for a person to recognize that he is in the *Yetzer Ha'ra's* clutches. That battle is the war ("*Milchamah*") against *Reshut*.

Alternatively, R' Kaufman writes, "*Milchemet Reshut*" can be explained as follows: There are some *Mitzvot*--for example, the requirement to have *Bitachon* / trust in *Hashem*--that apply differently to each person based on his personality and circumstances. With regard to *Mitzvot* in this small category, every person has "*Reshut*" (here meaning "permission") to determine how they apply to him. But, being honest with oneself when making this determination is extremely difficult; that is the war against *Reshut*. (*Ohr Yehoshua*)

## Shabbat

"Rabbi Chanina said, 'Let us go out toward the bride, the queen.' Some say that he said, 'Let us go out toward *Shabbat*, the bride, the queen.' Rabbi Yannai would wrap himself in his cloak, and he would stand and say, 'Enter, bride! Enter, bride!' (*Bava Kamma 32b*)

R' Yehuda Loewe *z"l* (*Maharal* of Prague; died 1609) writes: These three expressions--*Shabbat*, bride, and queen--represent three aspects of the Sabbath day. "*Shabbat*" reflects the *Mitzvah* to refrain from prohibited activities, for the literal meaning of the word "*Shabbat*" is to refrain from work. "Bride" reflects the *Mitzvah* to change one's clothes in honor of the Sabbath, just as a bride adorns herself. Lastly, "queen" reflects the *Mitzvah* to honor the day with food and drink, just as royalty finds delight ("*Oneg*") in feasting. The word *Shabbat* can be seen as an acronym alluding to these three obligations--"*Shin*" for "*Shevitah*" (refraining from work), "*Bet*" for "*Begadim*" (garments), and "*Tav*" for "*Ta'anug*" (pleasure).

*Maharal* continues: These three *Mitzvot* parallel three aspects of person--food and drink for his body, refraining from work for his *Nefesh* / animal soul, and clothing for his *Tzelem* / Divine image. Regarding the latter, our Sages refer to clothing as a person's "honor," for clothing distinguish a human from an animal. Thus, clothing highlight a human being's uniqueness, which is due to the fact that he has a *Tzelem Elokim*.

According to the first version of R' Chanina's statement, he said only, "Let us go out toward the bride, the queen." Those are personalities whom it is customary to go out to meet. Not so *Shabbat*, which is not tangible. According to the second version, he mentioned "*Shabbat*" nevertheless. Indeed, *Shabbat* is similar to a bride--a bride is connected to her husband, and *Shabbat* is connected to *Hashem*. Also, *Shabbat* is like a queen--a queen is separate from commoners, and *Shabbat* is separate from the weekdays. Rabbi Yannai, in contrast, felt it was sufficient to say, "Enter, bride," for a bride encompasses all three ideas: she does not work on her wedding day, she wears special garments, and her celebration includes a feast.

(*Chiddushei Aggadot*)

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Moshe Aharon ben Menashe Yaakov Reiss a"h

**“You may not cause your brother to take interest, so that Hashem, your Elokim, will bless you in your every undertaking on the Land to which you are coming, to possess it.” (23:21)**

R' Yehonatan Eyebuschitz z"l (Central Europe; 1690-1764) writes: *Eretz Yisrael* (referred to here as “the Land”) is a small area that “expands” to hold a lot (e.g., a large population and great wealth). Experiencing success in *Eretz Yisrael* is a fitting reward for one who does not lend with interest: He gave up the opportunity to turn his small loan into something bigger, and he will conversely experience a great blessing in a small land.

(*Tiferet Yehonatan*)

**“Asher karcha / That he [Amalek] happened upon you on the way, and he struck those of you who were hindmost, all the weaklings at your rear, when you were faint and exhausted, and he did not fear Elokim.” (25:18)**

*Rashi* z"l writes, based on a *Midrash*: The word “*Karcha*” is related to “*Mikreh*” / “a sudden happening”--i.e., Amalek surprised you. Another explanation is that it is related to “*Kor*” / “cold”--meaning, Amalek cooled you down from the “boiling heat” you had before. All the nations were afraid to wage war against you, but Amalek came and showed the way. This may be compared to a boiling hot bath into which no one could descend. A good-for-nothing came along and jumped in. Though the water scalded him, it was cooled down for others. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R' Simcha Zissel Ziv z"l (1824-1898; the *Alter* of Kelm) derives another lesson from the *Midrash*: Amalek's intention was to cool the fervor that *Bnei Yisrael* themselves felt after the miracles they had witnessed in Egypt and at the *Yam Suf*. When we read (*Shmot* 17:11) that *Bnei Yisrael* were victorious when Moshe Rabbeinu lifted his hands Heavenward, it means that *Bnei Yisrael* were victorious when they strengthened their recognition of their own loftiness. When the Jewish People does not let the nations of the world lower its self-esteem, the *Alter* writes, then the Jewish People emerges victorious!

This is a battle that repeats itself throughout history, the *Alter* notes. For example, this is the explanation behind Mordechai's obstinate refusal to bow down to Haman, a descendant of Amalek--not letting Haman strip Mordechai of his self-esteem as a Jew. And in the end, not only did Haman not strip Mordechai of his honor, Haman was forced to give Mordechai additional honor, leading him around Shushan on a royal steed.

The *Yetzer Ha'ra* uses similar tactics--trying to lower our self-esteem, so that we will be unashamed to commit sins. If we fight back, never forgetting how lofty our souls are, we are sure to emerge victorious.

(*Kitvei Ha'Saba Mi'Kelm: Chanukah-Purim* p.94)

**“They shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is wayward and rebellious; he does not listen to our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ All the men of his city shall pelt him with stones and he shall die; and you shall remove the evil from your midst; and all Yisrael shall hear and they shall fear.” (21:20-21)**

The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 71a) states that there are so many improbable circumstances that would have to occur before a boy could be labeled a “*Ben Sorer U'moreh*” / “wayward and rebellious son” that there never has been, and never will be, such a case. Why, then, is the *Ben Sorer U'moreh* mentioned in the Torah? The *Gemara* answers: “Expound upon it and receive reward.” [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Chaim Friedlander z"l (1923-1986; *Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Ponovezh Yeshiva) explains: R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*) writes that a *Ben Sorer U'moreh* is punished for violating the commandment to be holy and the commandment to cling to *Hashem*. But these are challenging *Mitzvot* even for adults! R' Friedlander notes. Does the Torah really hold a 13-year old boy, which a *Ben Sorer U'moreh* is, liable for not fulfilling such difficult commandments?

R' Friedlander answers: As noted, there never has been or will be a *Ben Sorer U'moreh*. Rather, the Torah is teaching us about the importance of our aspirations. If, at the tender age of thirteen, a boy's thoughts already focus on meat and wine, it is likely that he is headed for disaster. This is what our Sages mean when they say, “A *Ben Sorer U'moreh* is put to death because of his future.” Why do we assume that he will not repent and change his future? Because without lofty aspirations, a person cannot effectively repent. Instead of true repentance, a person who lacks aspirations will satisfy himself with making small changes “at the edges,” not truly identifying that which needs to be addressed. That is not *Teshuvah*!

R' Friedlander adds: This is the meaning of, “Expound upon it and receive reward.” Expound upon the law of *Ben Sorer U'moreh*, learn the importance of having high aspirations, and then you will merit to receive reward. Without high aspirations, on the other hand, one cannot even begin to serve *Hashem*.

(*Siftei Chaim: Mo'adim* Vol 1b, p.33)

**“You shall not cause your brother to take interest . . .” (23:20)**

R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (Belarus; 1749-1821) writes: *Pirkei Avot* (1:2) teaches that the world stands on three pillars: Torah, service of *Hashem*, and kindness. It is important to know, however, that once the Torah has been given, only it defines what is “service of *Hashem*” or “kindness.” For example, before the Torah was given, making a loan at a reasonable interest rate also was an act of kindness. Now, in contrast, making such a loan to another Jew is a sin.

(*Ruach Chaim*)