

Who is Conquering Who (2026)

(Parsha Ki Teizei)

At the Bet Knesset on Shabbat morning, somebody making coffee inquired, where is the sugar? Indeed. Where is the sugar? What are the things that sweeten our life and that we search for? Are the sweet things we search for good for us or detrimental?

In the beginning of our Parsha we read about one who goes out to war externally but is defeated inwardly and pays a devastating price for his mistake. That which he was aroused by eventually, he will hate. But to add insult to injury he will have to pay a double price of his inheritance because he demoralizes the strength of his first seed. Later we hear about one who does not even go out to war, but is defeated from the very beginning by his rebelliousness and lusts. Our sages tell us that it is better that he should die young than become a criminal.

From sweet victory that leads to defeat to sweet lusts that end in death, the search for the proper condiment to add enjoyment to our life is not a simple matter. So what is the healthy sweetener that has no detrimental effects?

The Challenge

In answer to this question , there are two interesting passages in this week's Torah Parsha that are written in an unusual way.

> When you will go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your God, will deliver him into your hand, and you will **capture his captivity**. (Dvarim 21:10).....If you build a new house, you shall make a fence for your roof, so that you will not place blood in your house if a **fallen one falls** from it. (Dvarim 22:8)

What does this mean capturing his captivity?And the falling one falls? My friend's 11-year-old son asked, If Israel sins and Hashem sends an enemy against us.What about the free choice of that enemy? Did Hashem just take away their free choice?

I told him that the above passages answered his question.

> Meritorious things are facilitated by meritorious people. While things of ill fortune are facilitated by guilty people.(Sifrei 22:68 in reference to Dvarim 22:8)

If a faller is destined to fall. Why should it be on my balcony? Am I guilty of something that would cause him to fall in my house?

Personal Experience

On a personal note , I recall years ago when I heard about my father's sudden passing there was a tremendous sense of guilt and failure that came crashing down on me. I had been hoping that he would yet see me married with children and grandchildren that he could enjoy. When I read that particular Sifrei this week I recalled something interesting.

That terrible day, I came home and was listening to my voice messages. I heard a number of messages from family members that I should call and then came a message from a friend of mine with condolences regarding my father (z'tl). It was this message that broke the news to me. Who was this friend? He was someone who went off the path of his religious father and mother and lived with a Gentile woman for many years with no children. When I look back now, I see that Hashem sent the appropriate messenger for this particular message. Of course the opposite is also true, when a rabbi surprises me by inviting me up to the Torah for aliyah, this is a positive message from a positive messenger.

When I heard the news of Rabbi Kahane (h'yd). Who was the messenger then? He was a reclusive man that lived in my building. In a way, he was an emissary of Chabad before tefillin stands were popular. When I was a young man, he put tefillin on me one day and had me read the shema. I suppose, as he continued to follow the path of his Rebbe and steered me in a good direction, I would continue to follow the path of my rabbi, and hopefully steer others in a good direction.

Meritorious things are transmitted through meritorious people, and the opposite is also true.

Who is Captured?

So what is the meaning of capturing his captivity? The Torah tells us that this passage is concerning a voluntary war. Some commentators also relate this war to the war against the evil inclination. Especially at this time before Rosh Hoshannah we must consider this idea. If the war against the evil inclination is a voluntary war, what does it mean capturing his captivity?

One might say that there is a positive aspect to the evil inclination, and that is that it wishes to serve and it wishes to be captured. A dog wishes to be ordered to sit and to obey. He feels foolish sitting at a table dressed like a guest. Of course, the one who put him there is more foolish, especially when he jumps off the table to chase the cat.

Tips for Yetzer

I have two good tips that were given to me once regarding the evil inclination. Sometimes when it appears, I look down and say, 'sit' as if I'm speaking to a dog and it listens. At other times I recall the story I heard of a man who owned a bar. People used to come and drink and get drunk and fight and break the furniture. Tired of having to replace furniture all the time, the man decided to leave that business and he sold it. He turned that same building into a quiet and peaceful tailor shop. Sometimes in the nightime, customers would come by and yell to open the bar and he would yell back. I sold the bar. It doesn't exist anymore, go away. This is another great strategy for the evil inclination.

The Sugar

The juxtaposition of the passages of the faller who is falling and the captive that prefers captivity complement each other. If one is busy making fences and being proactive good things will come his way.

Throughout this Parsha there is also the message of giving of yourself, and helping your brother with his load, that sweeten the path and the trajectory of our journey. I suggest that the concept of selfishness connects the three passages of the brother's ox, the cross dresser, and the bird's nest (see Dvarim 22:1-7)

Being seduced by your ego and selfish desires makes a person cold to those in need. They may lead one to do things the Torah calls abominable. Because they are focused on themselves and whatever strange desires they might have. This eventually causes their seed to be wasted in unnatural ways instead of making more life. Shooing the mother bird brings with it a blessing of longevity.

Rav Langer (z'tl) once suggested that maybe because one is preserving the natural order and food chain by allowing the mother to make more eggs, measure for measure his own days are lengthened. One may satisfy their desire to eat the eggs while leaving the mother alive to continue to make more eggs.

The Bookends

In the beginning we read about being defeated by our capture and in the end we read about being captured by what we failed to defeat. The warning of Amalek is next to the passage of the one who has unequal weights and measures. The surprise attack is perplexing. We thought we had made a deal with this enemy, yet it turns out that he is as crooked as we are. Just as we cheat in our deals, so does he.

We are punished by those who have contempt for our Torah and our people maybe because our indifference and corruption demonstrates our own contempt. If we betray our mission and calling, especially when concerning justice we are defeated by those with a conplete disregard for justice.

The messengers that reward or afflict us are meritorious to those who merit them and shameful to those whose indifference invited adversity.

The Antidote

The antidote to the evil inclination is to be busy with proactive mitzvot that capture the captivity, prevent the faller from falling and keep the scales balanced. There is another important message in our Parsha that contributes to the sweetness of life and that is having gratitude in the attitude (to borrow a phrase from Shifra Hoffman z'tl).

The Torah puts such tremendous emphasis on gratitude to the extent that we should remember and be kind to the most despicable nations who tortured us and almost physically wiped us out. Why? Only because at one time they had saved us and enriched us. Lot on the other hand is excluded because he lacked this sense of gratitude. Even though Avraham had saved him on many occasions.

Atonement

The best way to express this gratitude is to offer sacrifices to Hashem. We may go out to war and be defeated by desire. Or desire may defeat us even before we go out to war. The sacrifice is a way to admit our defeat which brings success. The gratitude towards one who has intervened constantly to prevent our downfall sweetens the path.

What better way to express this than to defeat Amalek whose hand is on the throne of justice. As the minyanim are increasing on the Har Habayit, that hand loses its grip. We see this happening

more and more each day. What we have discussed on a personal level is also true on a national level.

National Teshuva

When we are proactive and follow the guidelines of the Torah, that tells us to understand when our enemy is preparing to attack, and therefore attack him first, we bring redemption earlier and our enemies are subdued. Some examples in the news this week of dealing with the yetzer proactively on a national level.

> Finance Minister and Religious Zionism party chairman Bezalel Smotrich sharply responded to the international criticism voiced by the British Foreign Secretary over the approval of construction plans in the E1 area.
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> “I heard the British Foreign Secretary’s condemnation of my decision to eliminate the idea of a Palestinian state and to connect Jerusalem, our eternal capital, with Ma’ale Adumim on the ground in E1-something my predecessors did not dare to do," Smotrich said. “I want to tell him in no uncertain terms: the British Mandate in the Land of Israel is over. I refuse to be impressed or intimidated by threats of sanctions. We do not accept dictates from foreign countries. We do what is good and right for the State of Israel, in order to realize our historic and biblical right to our ancestral homeland and to remove existential threats to our citizens." (Arutz Sheva)
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> The National Security Minister posted in response to British Foreign Secretary Ed Miliband:
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> "Someone should update Ed that the British Mandate for the Land of Israel ended in 1948 and that Israel is an independent state. Perhaps instead of playing make-believe about the Mandate era, he ought to look out of the window at his London..." (The Jerusalem Post)

In another news item.

> Arab media reported that four airstrikes hit the runway at Abu al-Duhur early Tuesday morning. The aircraft involved were not identified, and the reports said the strikes caused material damage to the runway without causing injuries.
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> Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the strike in Syria, stressing that Israel opposes a Turkish military buildup in Syria.

> "We will not tolerate a Turkish military presence in Syria that threatens Israel. We made the message clear: Don't. Apparently, they didn't hear it clearly enough, so we made sure they understood it better," he said. (Arutz Sheva)

Self Conquerors

Alavai, we should continue from strength to strength and announce the disbanding of the humiliating Board of Peace that seeks to build a Trump Riviera for our sworn enemies and begin the transfer of these peace lovers to any country who wishes to embrace their love of liberty. Spain would be a good place to start. Recently the sun bathers ran away in horror from a prestigious Spanish resort, as Muslim pirates from Africa arrived from the sea to join their party. The Spanish government that grants amnesty to all of its invaders while chastising Israel for declining their offer to 'rest in peace', would be an excellent candidate.

May we continue to be proactive and follow the guidelines of the Torah that may be resented by the rest of the world. We must remember that that resentment is just the angry growl of a dog that's being told to sit. For in the end, even the evil inclination will gladly be subservient to the good will of Israel and its Father in Heaven.

Let the faller who is falling, fall elsewhere. May those who have been captured by the Noahide laws become loyal servants and thereby free people. May those at war with civilization be disinherited to express their wild nature in the wilderness. May the impure hand on the throne of the king be replaced by the foot of the king's children ascending. May we succeed in the war without having to go to battle. May we taste the sweet smell of success when we conquer our captivity that is thirsty for direction and growth. And may we find the sweet antidote of overcoming ourselves, or at least bringing an atonement for trying.

(join the Har Habyit Minyan)
(read more at Kahane Codes)
(listen to the musical Torah)