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**W**e know that life is a test from Heaven to see where we stand on the issues of life, but this is one of the few *parshios* that actually tells us this. Nevertheless, it is easy to forget this, or not know it all, and go through life as things matter less than they do.

It's like a person showing up for an exam thinking it is only a practice run. Instead of really thinking about his answers, he writes down what first comes to his mind. Only at the end when they announce that the exam was the real one does he realize he didn't take the questions seriously enough and probably failed.

The parsha reminds us that we shouldn't get fooled by the events of the day. They might just seem cause-and-effect with limited impact, but the opposite is true. God is making everything happen, and a large part of why is to test us, to see how we feel about the issues of the day. Our answers not only affect our portion in the World to Come, they also affect our portion in this world too.

One such issue today is the drafting of yeshiva *buchurim* at the cost of Torah learning. The situation is heating up and pushing people to one side or the other, with both not willing to blink. How long will this go on, and what will it lead to?

The country of Israel has limited resources and plenty of places to use them. Even when we're not at war with the Arabs, we're at war with them. The average Israeli, if left alone, thinks about prospering in life through legitimate means. The average Palestinian thinks about ways to wipe Israelis off the map. It's why we have to spend so much money and manpower in all sectors of life on security compared to other countries.

Which is one of the reasons why it is so absurd that so much money and manpower have been shifted to a *non-enemy*, Charedi yeshiva *buchurim* who refuse the draft.

Left alone, they pose no threat to state security, but probably would if they were drafted. They make great Torah soldiers but not very good military ones, and their devotion to *balachab* would create great logistical dilemmas for the army. They're more likely to starve themselves than to eat prison food that does not match their standards of *kasbrus*.

The push to draft the *buchurim* is coming from different sectors of Israeli society, and therefore, for different reasons. For some, it is a question of equality. Why should their children have to risk their lives for the country while the sons of others live protected lives just because they learn Torah? Or, why should Charedim benefit from society and not give back to it. . . even though they do in so many, unpublicized ways?

For others, hatred of Torah Judaism and those who protect it fuels their opinion. They have been trying to put the fire of Torah out in this country since its modern-day inception, and the melting pot that is the IDF, they believe, is the fastest and most effective way to do that. They weren't the first to try to do this, but they'll probably be the last.

Because every time the secular world attacks the Torah one, someone else attacks the Israeli State. We've seen this to be true countless times (though a secular Jews doesn't notice this) because:

Just as the prophets were weakened [when the angel damaged Ya'akov's *gid banasbe*], so when scholars are not encouraged and no one gives them financial support the Torah is forgotten from one generation to another and its strength is weakened, those who toil in it having no support, and the sinful kingdom (Edom) increases in power with each day. . . (*Zohar, Bereishis* 170a)

And being so close to the end of history, many believe that the next big war will be the LAST big war, the war to end all wars, the War of Gog and Magog. In fact, there are those who believe that the current state of affairs of the Charedi draft is only a Divine pretext to nudge history in that direction. The Attorney General of Israel may want Charedim in the army, but God wants the War of Gog and Magog, and she and her partners may be the "chosen" *sblichim* to trigger it.

One of the ways we know this is the old rock-and-hard-place rule. It goes like this: if a crisis has a solution that works, then the crisis occurred only to get to it. If a crisis has no solution, which this one doesn't seem to have, then the crisis is occurring to lead to something else. It is but a pretext for something different, like Yosef being sold into slavery in the present to fulfill a past prophecy of being "strangers in a land not theirs for four hundred years."

One of the main reasons why a solution does not exist is because it necessitates that the secular world appreciate the importance of Torah learning to the safety of the country and continuity of the Jewish people. They don't. If anything, they think just the opposite. The war between the secular and Charedi worlds is like the one between Israel and Hamas: both lack sufficient common ground to make peace.

Knowing this, one *Gadol HaDor* commented that all we can do these days is buy time. The fact that the Torah world was left alone for so long itself was a great miracle, and it is not surprising that it is ending. History is ending, Moshiach is coming, and the Torah world is doing whatever it can to maintain its integrity until Moshiach comes and sets the world straight.

The Gemora defines a wise person as one who sees what is being born (*Tamid* 32a). A wise person looks at the events of today but not just in terms of today, but in terms of what they can lead to tomorrow. Sometimes that is easy to see, but other times it may not be clear until after they have led to where they have.

Having an opinion on a matter is only natural if you have some kind of vested interest in the outcome. Being passionate about your opinion of how history should play out can be the result of additional sentiments, like personal hopes and fears. But at the end of the day, the only opinion that matters is God's, and the closest we can get to knowing His opinion is through the Torah leaders of the generation.

But though their opinions carry a lot of weight in the Charedi world, they carry none in the world that despises Torah, and these days often makes government policy. That is the way the GR"A explained it, of the Erev Rav, and where a person falls in line on an issue determines the camp to which they belong. It's all just a pretext to test our beliefs on Torah issues and determine our worthiness to survive the End of Days.

These are difficult times that promise to become even more difficult. Therefore, we have to be *really* smart about the issues of the day. We may not be able to turn the tide of events for the nation with our decisions, but they can still have a great impact on our personal lives and others around us. Don't take life for granted and use your mind well. We're going to need a lot of Heavenly help to survive the transition to the Messianic Era, and we only get that after we've taken the first step in God's direction.

Have a great Shabbos,

Pinchas Winston

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