

The Seder Sword, A New Pesah Minhag

by HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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***“And G-d directed the nation the way of the Yam Suf desert,
and the children of Israel were armed when they left the land of Egypt.”***

Ex. 13:18

The pasuk immediately before this states that G-d did not guide the nation to take the more direct route which would have taken them into immediate warfare, knowing that they were not yet ready for such. Yet, this pasuk makes it quite clear that they did nonetheless have the weaponry to fight such a battle. Why was the nation prepared for war and yet circumvented from fighting it? The answer reveals to us much about the true state of warfare and what it takes to fight it.



Every soldier and every military commander knows that on the battlefield, while weapons really do matter, still, the greatest weapon is the resolve of the individual fighter to be victorious in combat. True warriors can be wounded numerous times and still press the attack until victory. While weapons are of great value, a strong heart is the most valuable weapon of them all.

While we begin with the praise of the most valued of weapons, we must never allow ourselves the illusion of thinking that a strong heart alone wins out in battle even against the most advanced weaponry. This is a terrible lie that ends up getting numerous souls killed.

Ultimately the strong heart must be accompanied by the strong arm, and the strong arm must be carrying the strong sword. Inner and outer strength must never be separated in importance. One must never consider one to be more important than the other. In this world, in which we exist as composite entities made up of body and soul, our manner of warfare require of us to address both realms. In the language of the Kabbalah, this physical world of ours is referred to as Olam HaAsiyah, the Dimension of Action. Therefore, as the Kabbalists teach us, the only way to shine the Divine Light into this Dimension of Action is through our righteous and moral behavior, in other words, our correct actions.

When it comes to the conflict between good and evil, talk is cheap and action speaks louder than words. When we speak of the coming of Mashiah, absolutely all Biblical and later Kabbalistic prophecies describe the messianic scenario as one of warfare, conflict and ultimate physical victory over an evil enemy, with the physical death of those enemies brought about through victory in warfare. It is said that those fighting this war will be a combined force of righteous human beings fighting alongside a military formation of angelic beings. How this will actually materialize,

time will tell. Nonetheless, the point is clear, military education and martial experience are prerequisites for any righteous human being who seeks to serve in the messianic army.

While the majority of us may never live to see the messianic army of righteous souls and angelic beings, nonetheless we can each do our share in preparing for the imminent arrival. The Ba'al Shem Tov has rightly taught that each and every soul of Israel has within it a spark of the soul of Mashiah. As such as we refine and better ourselves individually, we each personally help forward the great and coming event. Although not all of us can merit being physical warriors serving in Israel's army, we can each nevertheless, remember our martial past and future and be the best we can be, as soldiers in the fight above and below. When we strengthen ourselves physically and spiritually thus enabling ourselves to confront any foe be it physical or spiritual we are indeed embodying and rectifying the spark of Mashiah within us.

We all familiar with the "spiritual weaponry" of the Pesah Seder. The matzah, maror, and four cups of wine when properly understood and partaken of in accordance to Torah Law create for us a spiritual barrier and shield that can defend us against any attack in the spiritual plane. However attacks on the physical plane are not covered under this umbrella of protection. Although the night of Pesah is called Lil Shimurim, this is mostly an adage against malevolent spiritual forces. I have known from personal experience of Torah observant people who have been robbed and otherwise physically attacked on Pesah night. We must understand and remember that spiritual protection and physical protection are two separate and different things. We must equally understand that anyone who denies this and claims that spiritual protection automatically includes protection in the physical is dangerously wrong; to listen to such an opinion could lead one to disastrous consequences.

Just as we have our spiritual training and our spiritual protection so too must we emulate our ancestors who when they left Egypt were physical prepared for war. When we train ourselves physically to address physical problems only then are we ready to confront them. When the children of Israel left Egypt their bodies were already hardened by physical labor. Many of them had training serving in the Egyptian army. They were ready to meet any physical threat. Yet, in their hearts, they were still slaves. They had no yet tasted the fresh air of freedom and were not yet strong enough of heart to fight and die for it.

Combat exists in dual parallel dimensions and it must be fought in both simultaneously as well. Therefore, as strong as one may be physically, one must still become strong spiritually. For this spiritual training we have been given Torah and mitzvot. Yet, the flip side is also equally true. One who is strong spiritually must also become strong physically and, like our ancestors who left Egypt, be able to meet combat on both the spiritual and physical planes. It is in this last endeavor that many religious and spiritual individuals have fallen greatly short of accomplishment. The terrible results of this we have seen through Jewish history with the slaughter and death of countless numbers of unprepared and untrained innocent Jewish human beings. This is so contradictory to the true message of Pesah and all of later Biblical Jewish history.

Today, the martial aspect of Torah tradition has been almost completely forgotten. Today, the necessity for physical strength and martial ability is even viewed as irrelevant in certain religious circles. It is the members of these same circles who are more often than not victims of all types of crimes of violence, theft and the like. Unlike our ancestors, they have never learned how to defend themselves and they make the terrible mistake of thinking that their spiritual strength will somehow protect them in this physical world, all the while that they are physically weak. If our ancestors in Egypt would have made this mistake they would have all died in the original battle against Amalek and would have never survived to have made it to Sinai to receive the Torah.

In honor of our ancestors and their going forth from Egypt, armed and ready to fight, I myself have instituted a new minhag which I observe at my Pesah Seder. Next to the tradition Pesah Seder plate with all the spiritual weapons of war on it, I follow in the footsteps of our ancestors who left Egypt and I place there my "sword," which today is a military Special Forces combat knife. This is no toy nor is it merely a symbol. It is a real combat knife the type used by soldiers in today's armies. I myself am trained in certain combat forms and am capable of using such a weapon to defend myself, my family, our Torah and our nation, if I was ever called upon to do so.

By placing such a weapon of war next to my Pesah Seder plate I am proclaiming the great eternal truth. I am a free man and I am willing and able to defend and fight for my freedom. My Pesah Seder is for me no mere holiday of antiquated symbolism. It is not just about eating Matzah and drinking four cups of wine. For me Pesah is Israel's Independence Day. This is the day when Israel became a free people, to be one nation, under G-d, indivisible. We would never have been able to accomplish this without the sword in one hand and the Torah in the other. Thank Heaven we have them both and that we can use each as is necessary, each in their right time and each in their right place.

To proclaim this message of Pesah freedom and to encourage and inspire you to embrace the same, I have decided to share with you my personal minhag for the Pesah Seder. This is more than just a mere symbol; it is a message for everyone to see. **The nation of Israel lives and we are all free human beings; ready and willing to fight for our freedom be it in the spiritual or in the physical world.**

May HaShem bless us all to be righteous soldiers in the army of Mashiah, both spiritual and physical. **May our Pesah truly remind us that we are free and able to defend our freedom from whatever foe that arises against us to return us to slavery, be it spiritual or physical.** May we rejoice in our strength and continue to grow stronger in our service of Heaven.