

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Esther Baila *bas* Binyomin *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

David and Goliath and the Army of Yisrael

PARSHAS BECHUKOSAI 5776

When it comes to military battles, conventional wisdom gives the advantage to the side that possesses greater strength and numbers. When Hashem becomes involved, of course, it is another matter entirely; then, these and many other conventional and even physical laws may no longer apply, as we shall see.

Unconventional Warfare

This very point is made to B’nei Yisrael’s army as it prepares to enter the battlefield. The Mishnah (*Sotah 8:1*) records the speech delivered to the army at this time:

הן באין בנצחונן של בשר ודם, ואתם באים בנצחונן של מקום. פלשתים באו בנצחונן של גלית, מה היה
סוף, לסוף נפל בחרב ונפלו עמו... ואתם אי אתם כן, כי ה' אלהיכם ההולך עמכם להלחם לכם.

“They (your enemies) come (to battle) relying on the ability of flesh and blood to deliver victory, while you come relying on the victory of Hashem. The Pelishtim (in the time of David) came (to battle) relying on Golyas (“Goliath”) to deliver victory; what was his fate? In the end, he fell by the sword, and (the Pelishtim) fell with him... But it is not the same regarding you; ‘For Hashem your G-d goes with you (into battle) to fight on your behalf’ (*Devarim 20:4*).”

This same idea is found in the beginning of this week’s *parshah*, which discusses the great blessings to be showered upon the nation for their adherence to Hashem’s will. Amongst the many items promised to B’nei Yisrael are great, lopsided victories against their enemies. As it states: ורדפתם את־איביכם ונפלו לפניכם לחרב, ורדפו מכם חמשה מאה ומאה מכם רבבה ונפלו ונפלו: “And you shall pursue your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. Five of you shall pursue one hundred (of them), and one hundred of you shall pursue ten-thousand; and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword” (*Vayikra 26:7,8*).

Just as in the case of David vs. Golyas, we see here a completely disproportionate match – with the purported ‘underdog’ emerging victorious. Rashi underscores this point by commenting (in v. 8) that the five pursuers mentioned by the *passuk* are “from the weaker ones, not the mighty warriors.” Nonetheless, they are able to vanquish many times their own number.

Now, the verses cited above appear to contain a redundancy, as it twice repeats the fact that “they shall fall before you by the sword.” Rashi seems to address this difficulty, explaining what is added by the repetition. Thus, the second time the phrase appears, Rashi states: ונפלו: “And your enemies (shall fall before you).. (This means) that they shall fall before you in an unnatural manner.”

To what exactly does Rashi refer when he characterizes their falling as taking place in an “unnatural manner”? R’ Ephraim Zalman Margulies, famed author of the classic *Beis Ephraim*, clarifies Rashi’s intent in a most illuminating way.

For Your Convenience...

He begins by hearkening back to the familiar example of David and Golyas. That episode, as alluded to by the Mishnah cited above, featured the open miracle of Golyas’ unlikely defeat at the hand of the much less formidable fighter in the guise of David. Golyas, topping off somewhere in the 12 ft. range (*cf. Shmuel I 17:4*), came with his might and his sword; yet, he was felled by a rock from the slingshot of David, the shepherd lad. David then proceeded to sever the fallen warrior’s head (*ibid. v. 51*).

Actually, the death of Golyas involved a *nes b’soch nes* – a miracle within a miracle. For as Rashi points out in Sefer Shmuel, the giant – upon being stricken in the forehead by David’s projectile – should have fallen backward from the impact. Instead, however, “*Vayipol al panav artzah* – He fell to the ground on his face” (*ibid. v. 49*). In defiance of the laws of physics, Golyas fell forward instead of backward. This was done, as Rashi explains, for David’s convenience. In order to sever Golyas’ head, he wouldn’t need to traverse the long expanse of the giant’s body; since he fell forward, his head was positioned much closer to where David was standing.

R’ Ephraim Zalman asserts that a similar arrangement was provided for the warriors mentioned in our *parshah*. The enemies these fighters had to confront in Eretz Yisrael were likewise most formidable; concerning them, the Navi states: וְאֶנְכִי הִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֶת־הָאֱמֹרִי מִפְּנֵיהֶם – “And I have wiped out the Emori from before them, whose height was that of the tall cedar trees” (*Amos 2:9*). Their considerable height could thus pose a bit of a problem. Even if the Jewish fighters were able to pursue and vanquish them, as the *passuk* had promised, these enemy warriors – as they took flight from their pursuers – would fall even farther away upon being stricken down. At least, this is the natural course of those who are struck from behind. The Jewish fighters would then have to traverse a significant length in order to ensure their demise and sever their heads.

This, then, is the “unnatural manner” of their falling, referred to earlier by Rashi. That is, they would fall in contravention of the laws of physics. Just as with Golyas, who fell in the opposite direction to facilitate his decapitation in a most convenient manner, so would the enemy warriors of our *parshah* fall back toward the Jewish fighters even when stricken while running *away* from them. This is the significance of the “extra” mention of the downing of their enemies. The *passuk* emphasizes that, although running in pursuit – “*v’naflu oyveichem lifneichem* – your enemies will fall *before* you.”

One may wonder, however, why there was a need was for such an extraordinary arrangement. After all, we are discussing warriors in battle; one would assume that they have the stamina to walk that “extra mile” to slay the enemy. Recall, however, that Rashi had anticipated this issue; he commented that the pursuers mentioned by the *passuk* refers to “the weaker ones, *not* the mighty warriors.”