

Anointed for War: Jerusalem Leads Us Into Battle

This week's Torah portion describes various *halachot* pertaining to war. Given what has transpired over the last 10 months, the last two *aliyot* particularly strike a painful chord, while simultaneously reminding us of what makes *Klal Yisrael* so special. The Torah describes the *mitzvah* of the *Kohen Meshuach Milchama*, the priest who is anointed to lead us with inspiring words as we prepare for battle. "And he shall say to them, "Hear, O Israel, today you are approaching the battle against your enemies. Let your hearts not be faint; you shall not be afraid, and you shall not be alarmed, and you shall not be terrified because of them. For the Lord, your God, is the One Who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (*Devarim* 20:2-3).

These verses (familiar from the *Mi Shebeirach* recited for our *chayalim*) beautifully portray the *emunah* and bravery that permeate the army of *Klal Yisrael*. But why are they recited by a *kohen* in particular? Shouldn't the commanders of the army, who are strangely only mentioned many verses later, be the ones to provide these inspiring words? The *Sefer HaChinuch* (526) explains that the words of these *pesukim* carry more power when recited by someone respected. Since the *kohanim* are the respected spiritual leaders of *Klal Yisrael*, the *kohen* imbues the message with spiritual gravitas.

However, this only explains why a *kohen* recites these verses. But our *parsha* is not describing any regular *kohen*. This *mitzvah* necessitates appointing a specific *kohen* and anointing him with the same oil used for the vessels of the *Beit HaMikdash* and the *Kohen Gadol*. He is sanctified, in the same manner as the holy vessels in Jerusalem, as the *Kohen Meshuach Milchama*. This exalted office of the *Meshuach Milchama* is literally exclusively for purposes of war alone. If the goal of this *mitzvah* is simply to inspire and encourage, why must the *kohen* be anointed with the sanctified oil?

The answer to this question perhaps relates to another unique practice of the Jewish army. The *Aron HaKodesh*, containing the *Luchot HaBrit* given to us at *Har Sinai*, would be carried out to the army's encampments. There are those who would suggest that the presence of the Holy Ark provides us with "power" to destroy our enemies. This petty understanding relates to idolatrous and superstitious perspectives (probably informed by Indiana Jones as well). What the *Aron* truly represents is the essence of our values. It holds our holy Torah and is the centerpiece of our holy city. The *Aron* following us into battle reflects God's presence accompanying us as we champion His kingship in this world.

When *Klal Yisrael* goes to war, we take *Yerushalayim* with us. Yes, *Hashem's* presence is most palpably experienced in Jerusalem and on *Har HaBayit*. But our holy city sends her most precious gem, her innermost sanctum, to remind us that God's presence follows us. We deliberately sanctify a *kohen* with the same anointing oil that was used for the holy vessels of Jerusalem. It is this *kohen* particularly who reminds us that *Hashem* is with us even as we enter into the dark, agonizing reality of war. The Jewish people will never compromise their *kedusha* and *tahara* when battling against an evil foe. The presence of the *Aron* and the encouraging words of the *Kohen Meshuach Milchama* provide us with the spiritual clarity to sanctify even that which seems most distant from Godliness.

