

Va'etchanan

In this week's parsha, a reference is made--only the second one in the Torah, and one of three in all of Tanach--to the mysterious tzir'ah, which will attack Israel's enemies and destroy them. The nature of the tzir'ah is somewhat unclear. Rashi describes a flying insect which attacks the eyes of its victims with poison, incapacitating them. Ramban (Exodus 23:25) seemingly concurs, saying that this insect is similar to a bee. This would then be a reference to a particularly vicious wasp or hornet, spurred miraculously into attacking the enemies of Israel. Ibn Ezra, by contrast, writes in our parsha that the word tzir'ah is a reference to a disease, similar to tzara'as. In any case, the reference is to a supernatural, devastating attack on those who wished to harm the Jewish people.

The Brisker Rav (Rabbi Yitzchak Ze'ev haLevi Soloveitchik, 1886-1959) records a fascinating observation on the verses surrounding this one. The first pesukim he cites respond to Israel's potential fears upon confronting the Canaanites: *"Do not fear them; remember well what Hashem, your God did to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt...The wondrous acts which your eyes beheld...so shall Hashem, your God do to all the nations of whom you are afraid."* (7:18)

The Brisker Rav notes that there is a primary distinction between revealed and hidden miracles. When Hashem performs revealed miracles for His people, His wondrous acts remove all possibility of fear. "... [T]here is no fear or terror at all ... all see that Hashem does battle for them," he writes. However, when Hashem's miracles are hidden: "... [T]hen there is fear and terror. Who knows if He will perform a miracle for them or not?"

The Brisker Rav explains that technically, the tzir'ah alone would have been sufficient to rid Israel of its enemies. This is made clear in Parshas Mishpatim, where the Torah declares that Hashem will send the tzir'ah *"before you, and it shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites and the Hittites from before you."* (Exodus 23:28) However, the tzir'ah, he writes, is an example of a hidden miracle, concealed from our eyes in natural means. Therefore, Hashem assures Israel: "Do not fear them." Israel will have nothing to fear, for additional, revealed miracles will take place upon their entry to the Holy Land, just as when they left Egypt. They will be enveloped in a sense of security. The

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parsha continues: *“And Hashem, your God, will send the tzir’ah as well against them, until the remaining ones who have hidden from you are utterly destroyed before you.”* (Deuteronomy 7:20)

Here, the Brisker Rav explains, Hashem promises an additional kindness: The subtle, hidden miracle of the tzir’ah will be reserved for those “remaining ones who have hidden from you,” the sly enemies waiting in ambush. Israel, unaware of these deadly foes, will be assisted by the tzir’ah, which will stealthily rid them of their enemies unbeknownst to them. In this fashion, Israel will be spared the distress of uncertainty, and enter the Holy Land without fear.

Shabbat Shalom

The JSN Team

