

BS"D Parashat Devarim 5784

Devarim, the 2nd of Menachem Av 5784

David vs. Goliath

The Book of Shmuel 1, chapter 17, describes the miraculous, surprise ending of the thrilling standoff between the Philistine giant warrior, Goliath (Goliath) and the teenage shepherd boy, David ben Yishai from Bet Lechem. This episode serves as a metaphor for future altercations between HaShem's chosen nation and all the world's human rejects, to this very day.

The lines were drawn between the two armies, positioned atop two opposing hills with the valley of Elah, south of today's city of Bet Shemesh, separating the combatants.

Apparently, these ancient cultures were more sympathetic to human life than our current sophisticated enlightened societies. Their rules of combat were that instead of thousands of soldiers on both sides being killed and maimed, each would send one warrior with the "winner takes all" and the losers amicably consenting to being slaves of the victor.

The Philistines sent their champion – Goliath. He was six cubits tall (three meters, the official height of the net in basketball games). He wore a bronze helmet and bronze coat of armor weighing 5,000 shekels (about 57kg or 125 lbs.)! His spear shaft was as thick as a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels (about 7kg or 15.4 lbs.).

Twice a day for 40 days, the Philistine would march out to no man's land and bark out: "This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other".

On hearing the Philistine's words, Shaul and his soldiers were dismayed and terrified.

On day 40, David arrived at the front to meet his brothers, who were serving in the army. Just when Goliath stepped out and shouted his usual defiance, David answered: "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

While the army, to a man, was fearful of fighting Goliath, David approached King Shaul and volunteered to challenge the Philistine. The King rejected the offer, pointing out that David was a teenage shepherd whereas Goliath was a seasoned warrior.

David replied with an experience he had as a shepherd, when a lion and a bear threatened his flock. "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear. This uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine."

In view of the circumstances, Shaul had no choice but to accept David's offer.

David refused to don the standard military armor, preferring instead his simple sling. With wooden staff in hand, David chose five smooth stones, put them in his pouch, and proudly approached the Philistine.

Now an interesting sidenote. When the two combatants – the Jewish David and the pagan Goliath were staring at each other's eyes, what were they thinking?

David and Goliath knew that they were cousins. David's great grandmother was the righteous Ruth and Goliath's great grandmother (or grandmother) Orpah were sisters. They were married to the sons of Naomi, who died in Moab leaving their

widowed wives.

When no longer connected to Naomi, Orpah returned to her Moabite roots, but Ruth clung to Naomi. She converted to Judaism and accompanied Naomi back to Bet Lechem.

Goliath, with his shield bearer in front of him, ran towards David.

HaShem then put words into Goliath's mouth that brought him disgrace and irrational anger. He saw the staff held by David and said, "am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" David then probably brought up the discreet secret known only to members of the family (including David and Goliath) that on the day that Orpah (Goliath's grandmother) left Naomi to return to her Moabite roots, she had relations with 100 men and a dog (according to the Midrash).

This provoked Goliath to the point of infuriation where there is no room for logic.

David replied, "you come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of HaShem, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day HaShem will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here (Jews and the goyim) will know that it is not by sword or spear that HaShem saves; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give all of you into our hands."

As the Philistine moved closer to attack, David reached into his bag and took out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead, bringing him face down on the ground.

David then took hold of the Philistine's sword and beheaded Goliath.

The Philistines saw that their hero was dead; but instead of fulfilling the deal that loser becomes slaves, they turned and ran.

The soldiers of Israel pursued the Philistines whose bodies were strewn along the road to Gath and Ekron.

David brought Goliath's head to Jerusalem as a warning to potential enemies.

As it was then, so will it be in our time

Medinat Yisrael is now being threatened by a coalition of Arab entities who have etched in concrete their aim to destroy the Jewish state as a forerunner of destroying world Jewry.

As with David and Goliath, all bets were on Goliath to win and today the UN's preference is with the enemies of the Jewish nation. Goliath was twice David's size, a veteran warrior, shielded with metal armor, and armed to the hilt.

Iran, with Russia's backing; has Hezbollah in Lebanon with its many missiles; the Houthis of Yemen; and over two million Arabs in Judea and Samaria who at a moment's notice could cross the "green line" into Israel; as well as the large army of Egypt, and the dictator of Turkey looking over our shoulder.

Over the millennia, Goliaths of various sizes from many continents, strange cultures speaking different languages, have appeared in our history; all sharing the same goal: to trample on the seemingly "helpless" David.

We have seen them all and have collected a museum of "heads" to prove that our "David" is invincible.

So will it be now and forever!

As we say when blessing the new moon:

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ

David King of Israel lives forever!

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

Copyright © 5784/2024 Nachman Kahana