

Preparing for the Big Day

An aufruf is a day of great excitement. After all it is another step towards the big wedding day. As we are so close to Jason and Jennifer's wedding, it is natural for the couple to feel not only excitement but also perhaps fear and anxiety. After all, this is a life-changing moment.

Our parsha teaches about another life-changing moment; the battle for the Promised Land. Before entering the land, the שוטרים, or officers, gave a number of statements. One of them was מי האיש אשר ארש אישה ולא לקחה¹ "Who is the man who is betrothed but not married? Let him go back lest he die in battle and another marry her." Parshat Ki Tetze expands on this, stating כי יקח איש אשה חדשה לא יצא בצבא ולא יעבר עליו לכל-דבר נקי יהיה לביתו שנה אחת ושמה את-אשתו אשר-לקח². "When a man takes a bride, he shall not go out with the army or be assigned to it for any purpose; he shall be exempt one year for the sake of his household, to give happiness to the woman he has married."

¹ Deuteronomy 20:7

² Deuteronomy 24:5

That's a beautiful explanation for exemption from war. We know that the first year of marriage is supposed to be sweet, including the custom of dipping one's challah into honey. However, there is another reason given for exemption for war that I want to touch on: מִי הָאִישׁ הִירָא, "Is there anyone afraid and disheartened? Let him go back to his home, lest the courage of his comrades flag like his."³ Fear is contagious and one who is afraid will likely translate that anxiety to his/her fellow, which is why they are exempt from battle.

Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav put it best when he said וְהֵעִיקָר לֹא לִפְחֹד; the point is to never fear at all. Rabbi Nahman also talked about the danger of רֹוּחַ נִכְאָה, melancholy and עֲצָבוּת רֹוּחַ, depression, stating that they are the greatest sins of all.⁴ When we feel these, we need to look for sparks of goodness to bring us out of them. Sometimes it's as simple as listening to a niggun or deep breathing; other times it takes deep work. This is where faith comes in: believing that we are where we are meant

³ Dueteronomy 20:8

⁴ Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, Likutei Moharan, 282.

to be and that G-d has an ultimate plan for us. Knowing that G-d and our partner are there to nurture and support us on our journey helps ensure that we are able to conquer any obstacle and gives us the faith that we need to move forward when we get stuck.

On a day like this, when we celebrate two becoming one, we acknowledge the importance of marriage as bringing people together, starting to transition two individuals to one household. Jason and Jennifer-I feel like I'm preaching to the choir, as you have known each other for many years (far longer than my wife and I have known each other), and you have grown only closer together during this time. Yet something happens after you leave the Huppah which has the potential to bring the two of you even closer together, supporting one another through both the highs and lows of life and having faith and courage when things are difficult that they will work out for good in the end.

My blessing for you, Jason and Jennifer, is to always communicate with one another and work together as a team whenever there is a challenging moment, or one of fear and anxiety. With the perpetual

support of the other by your side, may you follow Rabbi Nahman's
maxim and never fear. Mazal Tov on reaching this joyous day! So that
we can celebrate together, let us turn to Page 841 and read the sections
designated for us.