

TORAH THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

PARSHAS SHOFTIM

(Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9)

Stop - Wrong Way!

“You shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left”. (Deut. 17:11)

Moshe told the people, "You must obey the decision of the courts, even if you are convinced they are wrong and even if they seem to be telling you that right is left and left is right." If we need to listen to the Sages even when they tell us something that apparently contradicts reality, where is there room to use our own judgment? Must we be robots?

When you're driving to work the Exxon gas station is on your left hand side. However, when you return home it is on your right side. It all depends on your viewpoint. The Sages are telling us, "Your perspective is wrong. Turn around!" To us it may seem like that whatever we're doing is unquestionably right, but the Sages reveal to us that we're looking at things backwards. You need to face the other direction.(1)

The lead pilot of a squadron of F-15 fighter jets had the task of shooting out flares in the area of the target. He would then elevate his plane to a higher altitude while the two planes flying alongside him would attack the target. One night, as they were flying at hundreds of miles per hour in total darkness, he shot out the flare and was struck with vertigo. Vertigo means confusion. The plane was upside down but he thought that he was right side up. He pulled the lever in order to lift the plane, but he was heading straight down towards the ground at hundreds of miles per hour!! The barometer started beeping, indicating the plane was losing ground. He ignored it thinking the indicator was broken. F-15 fighter jets are built with two indicators for this very scenario. The second barometer started beeping: "YOU ARE UPSIDE DOWN!" He then radioed the two jets alongside him, "Check with your radar - what's my position?" They replied, "You're upside down and within seconds you're going to crash! He was still certain that he was right side up, but he reluctantly pulled the yoke, bringing the plane back over and landing safely. The pilot later realized that this fight is the same as the struggle between man and his evil inclination.

We tend to lose our sense of direction while rushing through life. We feel a strong drive to do something, certain that it is a noble and righteous cause. Our intellect tells us that it's wrong, but we don't trust it. We then need our wingmen - a rabbi or a good friend - to tell us that our position is wrong and that we need to turn around.(2)

NOTES

1. R' Yitzchak Berkovits.
2. Heard from R' Paysach Krohn. The pilot later became a fully observant Jew.