

Be'chukotei 5772

BS"D Parashat Be'chukotei (in Eretz Yisrael) 5772

Our parasha begins:

When you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit.

Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat bread in plenty and you will live secure in your land. I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will cast their fear upon you. I will remove wild beasts from the land, and a (foreign) sword will not pass through your country.

After HaShem's promise "and you will live secure in your land", isn't the following phrase, "I will grant peace in the land", superfluous?

Indeed not! I believe that the first phrase, "and you will live secure in your land" is HaShem's promise that we will not be challenged by foreign nations; whereas the following phrase, "I will grant peace in the land" refers to harmony and tranquility among fellow Jews in Eretz Yisrael.

Early in the establishment of the Medina, the saintly Rabbi Avraham Yishayahu Koreltz, better known as the Chazon Ish, requested from the then Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, that he exempt full-time yeshiva students from military service. This was not a simple matter for the Prime Minister, in view of the fragile security situation at the time when every man and woman was necessary for the defense of the country. And especially for a secular person like Ben-Gurion, who did not believe that the Torah was necessary in the newly established modern State. Nevertheless, he agreed and a law exempting

yeshiva students from military service was adopted.

At the time there were approximately 400 full-time yeshiva students; but every year since the numbers have grown, and today they stand at 40-50,000 (kain yirbu – may their numbers increase).

The religious Zionist bnei Torah view military service as a Torah mitzva, and indeed a privilege, that does not detract from Torah study and faith in HaShem, it even enhances one's motivation to be fully dedicated to Hashem and a complete Torah life.

The matter of draft exemption has always been a bitter bone of contention between the chareidi bnei Torah and the majority of Israel's population. It is forever present in the national debate; sometimes on a slow and low back burner, and sometimes, like the present, when it appears on the national radar screen and the combatants line up to vent their feelings in the media and Knesset.

The chareidi claim is that, without total commitment to Torah study, Judaism cannot exist, and without Judaism, there is no reason for the State of Israel to exist. They reject the merging of Torah study and military service like the religious Zionist sector, because of the secular atmosphere in the army created by the presence of women soldiers and many other factors which, taken together, are detrimental to the spiritual level expected of a chariedi person. Last, but not least, is their ambivalence toward the Medina at large, as a stage in the final redemption of the Jewish nation.

Those who oppose exempting yeshiva students from military service claim that the law created an immoral, asymmetrical division of historical responsibility, whereby so much responsibility is placed on the shoulders of the general population while bnei Torah enjoy preferential treatment. They point out that the general population is the productive

segment of society, is drafted into military service at the age of 18 and then serves in the reserves until the age of 50, and pays the taxes from which bnei Torah receive their stipends. They say that bnei Torah see themselves as the nation's Mashiach, while the others are the donkey that carries the Mashiach on its back. But no one wants to feel like a donkey! They top off their opposition to the draft exemption with the poignant claim that on Memorial Day for the fallen Israeli soldiers, it is very rare to find a chareidi person at a military cemetery crying over the grave of a loved one.

So what will be?

The following are scenarios which will not happen:

- Peace breaks out in the Middle East and Tzahal is demobilized.
- Another is the nightmare of heads of chareidi yeshivot, that in its attempt to create a more egalitarian society the Knesset replaces the draft with an all voluntary army, which would result in emptying out of most chareidi yeshivot.
- Another thing which will not happen in the near future is that the army will address the needs of chassidic charedei soldiers. They will build mikvaot in every base, to permit them to immerse daily; supply every base with the most strict kashrut food requirements down to the milk in the coffee; they will release all women soldiers; permit 4-5 hours of Torah study every day; court martial anyone using an off-color word; set up a tisch on Friday night and furloughs to celebrate all the britot, pidyon habens, weddings of all the members of one's chassidic sect.

So, the simple reality of our lives is that the vast majority of the chareidi population will not serve in the army. The loss will be less felt by the army than to the chareidi

community itself, because military service in Eretz Yisrael is a privilege and a great mitzva. It provides the character building factors which are necessary to be a ben Torah. For in addition to physical strength, army training increases one's self respect and self confidence, courage and adherence to achieving a goal; all of which are necessary to being a real ben Torah.

It is my firm belief that one day the entire Torah world will not only recite the Psalms of David, they will return to the beliefs and ways that made David ben Yishai the most successful king of Israel, and his future descendant the Mashiach of Israel. I am referring to what is cited in the Gemara regarding King David's army (Kedushin 76b), referring to the statement of Rabbi Chanina ben Antigonus that the complex requirement of verifying the halachic genealogy of a woman who wishes to marry a kohen is suspended if the woman's father served in David's army.

Rav Yehuda in the name of Shmuel: [Rabbi Chanina ben Antigonus] was referring to a soldier (the future bride's father) who served in the army of King David... because David chose his soldiers only from those who had impeccable halachic credentials, so that their merits and the merits of their fathers would aid them [in combat].

As things look today, with the religious Zionist youth serving as the chalutzim (pioneers), the day will come when the IDF will be called the Israel Dati Forces. The chareidi world will come around and realize that they cannot expect our police force to act in accordance with the halacha, if they themselves are not part of the force. They cannot expect the commercial sector to respect the Shabbat if they themselves are not part of the economic scene. And they cannot expect the army or the government to adhere to the Shulchan Aruch if the chareidi community remains aloof to the needs and desires of

the majority who are yet not Torah adherent, and refuse to take an active part in making the necessary changes.

Until that time, the various communities within Eretz Yisrael will have to tread water in their intra-national relationships, with the religious Zionist community serving as the bridge between the secular and charedei, and the model of how to implement the sanctity, wisdom and morality of Torah in all facets of our national renaissance in Eretz Yisrael.

In the ideological-religious dialogue taking place within Eretz Yisrael, each of us has to remember, at all times, that 1) we are brothers and sisters, and 2) no one has a monopoly on wisdom or sanctity. With the aid of our Father in Heaven, we will emerge from our struggles as better Jews. With His miracles, He will guide all of us towards tshuva, and we in the Holy Land will live to see the realization of the two blessings in this week's parasha:

“And you will live secure in your land,” free from foreign enemies, and “I will grant peace in the land”, between fellows Jews.

Post Script:

In the struggle to restore our halachic national life, only the people living here will determine the future of Jewish history; while the Jewish communities in the galut are irrelevant as they struggle just to survive. Eretz Yisrael, vis-a-vis the galut, is like the Sun in relation to the Earth. The Sun generates its own heat with the residual energy providing Earth with the heat and light necessary for life. There is nothing that we on Earth can do to influence the Sun. It is a one way arrangement. So, too, we who have returned home and with great effort maintain our holy Medina and with our residual energy influence Jewish life in the galut. Whereas, nothing in the galut can have anything more than a superficial influence on us.

If one wishes to be among those who reject the modern day
meraglim in order to enter the Holy Land and gain eternal
merit, now is the time. Who knows what tomorrow might bring?

Shabbat Shalom

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