

BS"D Parashat Be'ha'alotcha 5786

Personal stories of writing while sitting on bombs, donning tefillin in the frigid snow...

A lesson (one of many) that I learned at my parent's Shabbat table.

My Abba z"l told the following story:

The sun and the wind were discussing who is more effective in controlling human actions? They noticed a passerby who was wearing a coat and decided to experiment – who can bring the man to take off his coat. The wind tried first.

It began with a short gust, to which the man buttoned down his coat. And with every increasing gust he tightened the coat around himself, until the wind ran out of air.

Now began the sun's turn.

The sun began with a gentle smile and small rise in temperature; to which the man unbuttoned the coat.

And with every increase in sun's smile, the man opened the coat more until finally removing it entirely.

The sun's smile proved more effective than the furious

velocity of the wind.

OPINION – NOT A PSAK DIN

The Medina is at an impasse regarding the mitzva military service for Chareidim. History records that impasses eventually increase the degree of animosity until all “gehennom” breaks out. So, I humbly submit my opinion to unravel this halachic-national deadlock.

The present decision of Chareidi rabbis is a psak din (halachic judgment binding on those who accept that rabbi as his halachic authority), that no one serves in Tzahal – not the learners and not the earners. No one – because they think the army will chip away at one’s faith in HaShem and His Torah.

There are two suggestions that come to my mind:

1 – That the leading Chareidi rabbi (rabbis) declare that on this issue his position not to serve in Tzahal is his personal opinion, not a halachically binding psak din. Therefore, each young man is free to choose the direction that he wants and yet remain within the Chareidi camp.

2- Since the above suggestion will in all probability be rejected out of hand, I have another one whose chances are not any better. The old adage “if you can’t beat them join them”.

Instead of distancing tens of thousands of young Chareidi non-learners from serving and saving our country, do the opposite: send them en masse to the induction centers; and fill the major military units with god-fearing young men, combat soldiers and officers. The sheer numbers of religious soldiers will guarantee that they will retain their religious beliefs and even influence the army to be a Jewish army rather than an army of Jews.

I am quite certain that these suggestions will be rejected; but it is important for the protocol of history to record their contents.

A personal story regarding learning Torah while serving in Tzahal

In 1967, several months after the Six Day war, I was drafted. After a challenging period of tiranut (basic training) I was assigned to the air force as a combat soldier in the then anti-aircraft division (today's Air Defense division), for what was to turn out to be 22 years of reserve duty; 30 plus-minus days a year.

The first time I put on a uniform of the Jewish nation's defense forces (the future "clenched fist" of the Mashiach) was a moment which will never pass from my memory, deserving of the Shehechyanu blessing.

It was as if I was entering the exclusive, aristocratic circle of history. It includes the soldiers of Yehoshua, the liberator of a large part of Eretz Yisrael over 3000 years ago; the warriors of King David who extended our sovereignty over the land to its biblical borders and beyond; my fore bearers, the Maccabean Kohanim, who led the war against the Greeks; the soldiers of Rabbi Akiva and Bar Kochba – all of Jewish history wrapped up in a single shirt of olive green, with the embossed initials of Tzahal in Hebrew.

Whenever it was feasible, my Gemara was with me. I took advantage of the learning minutes when the learning hours were not accessible.

In stark contrast to the usual 30 days in the hot-cold Sinai desert, I was called for a tour of duty in December in the very cold northern Galil. We had to guard a huge and ominous looking bomb depot. There were several factors which,

together, ensured that we would never forget this experience.

The site was a mountaintop whose "head" was leveled off to provide room for thousands of bombs of varying degrees of tonnage and types. Upon seeing this, my first thought was, "Hashem, what sin did I commit to deserve this?". Later, however, we learned that bombs without detonators are docile creatures unless one fell directly on you. At first, we were hesitant to even approach them. After a few days, we came to touch them. After about a week, we would lay all over them trying to get in a little bit of sun the winter would miserly hand out.

That December was a particularly mean month. It rained almost daily, and there were snowstorms which competed with the rain in making our existence a "winter wonderland". The most difficult moment of each day was when I had to roll up my sleeve to expose my arm to the elements in order to put on freezing cold tefillin.

It was the time when I was deeply involved in the 40 years of writing my explanations of the Tosafot commentaries to Shas, called Mei Menuchot; eventually taking the form of 15 large volumes covering 130 chapters of Talmud. Its purpose is to make the complex commentaries of Tosafot accessible to scholars and students.

Our living quarters were four tents stationed around the bombs. Each tent had room for 8 beds with no place for clothing except on the beds which were always damp. There was no room to sit and no light to read or to write by.

The only place where one could sit and concentrate was on one of the bomb clusters. They were stacked like a pyramid: ten on the ground, then descending numbers as you went up – nine, eight... ending with one on the top.

I would write, weather permitting, while sitting on the line of 8 bombs while placing the Gemara and notebooks on the line

above of 7 bombs.

Although I can't be certain; I don't know anyone who wrote Torah while sitting on tons of dynamite.

What happened to the bombs? You might ask. They were all dropped in the Yom Kippur war probably on Damascus, Syria.

The simple lesson from the above: if you serious about Torah study, you can do it even in difficult situations, and certainly as a soldier in HaShem's holy army.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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