

BS"D Parashat Lech Lecha 5784

Why Jewish Soldiers Die in Battle

War time is the wrong time for the people of Medinat Yisrael to point an accusing finger at whoever they believe was negligent in responding to the signs that Hamas was about to perpetrate the unspeakable atrocities. There is plenty of time for that after the cannons become silent.

Indeed, there are irresponsible reporters and news analysts who have already placed the blame for our state of unpreparedness on the night of Shmini Atzeret on the shoulders of the head of military intelligence; while others blame the general of Israel's southern command, and still others on the head of the Prime Minister.

Wise people don't go down that path of social suicide because the only issue at stake now is the swift and complete destruction of the Nazi Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

However almost every rule has its exceptions. I stand now and declare "j'accuse" the despicable actions of groups of Torah deniers, and in particular one woman who provoked the quality of severe justice to appear before HaShem with the criminal sheet.

I will explain:

Jewish soldiers defending Eretz Yisrael fall at the hands of today's Amalek. That should not happen. A Jewish warrior who

goes out to fight for God's chosen people is supposed to return home to continue his life, and not to be killed on the battlefield!

Indeed, the count on Memorial Day of 2023 was 24,213 soldiers of Tzahal who are at rest in military cemeteries scattered throughout the land; and the question remains, what went wrong when not one of them deserved to die?

It is not only me who is asking this question before HaShem. The first to do so was Yehoshua bin Nun.

The Book of Yehoshua relates that after the miraculous victory at the city of Yericho, the next Canaanite place to be taken, as the Jews moved westward, was the small town of Ai. Yehoshua's generals suggested that instead of sending the entire Jewish army, it would be more than enough to send just 3000 troops. Our 3000 men were defeated, with the dire result that one Jewish warrior named Yair Ben Menashe was killed. He was equal in Torah knowledge to half the Sanhedrin of 71 judges!

Yehoshua was devastated! How could it happen that a Jewish soldier was killed while taking part in the major mitzva of liberating Eretz Yisrael? Jewish soldiers don't die in battle!

Book of Yehoshua 7:6-11

⁶ Then Yehoshua tore his clothes and fell face down to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and they sprinkled dust on their heads.

⁷ And Yehoshua said, "Alas, HaShem, why did You bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites – to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan!"

⁸ *Pardon your servant, Lord. What can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies?*

⁹ *The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this, and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will You do for Your own great name?"*

¹⁰ *HaShem said to Yehoshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face?"*

¹¹ *Israel has sinned. They have violated My covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions.*

HaShem informed Yehoshua that "Israel had sinned", the implication being that the community of Israel itself had caused the catastrophe of losing the battle, and a Jewish soldier being killed.

Yehoshua investigated the matter and discovered that one man, Achan Ben Karmi, had stolen some items from the Yericho booty that was sanctified for the Mishkan.

Achan was put to death by HaShem's command, despite the fact that the punishment for intentional embezzling of a sanctified item is malkot (39 whip lashes), not death.

HaShem's declaration to Yehoshua that "Israel had sinned" was in fact the sin of only one man – Achan Ben Karmi of the tribe of Yehuda, who caused the defeat of the Jews and the death of the righteous Yair of the tribe of Menashe.

The Almighty's accounting principle that an "innocent" man could pay the ultimate price for another's sin is beyond human comprehension. But the principle is in effect: Jewish soldiers

die in battle when other Jews sin and cause the Midat Hadin (the Quality of Harsh Justice) to prevail.

The severity of Achan's act and death penalty can be readily understood.

The Jewish nation's 40-year sojourn in the hostile desert was no secret. The Midrash relates that there was commercial and theological contact between the Jews and other nations, so Am Yisrael's end goal of entering the Holy Land was no secret.

But the Canaanite nations in Eretz Yisrael were not overly worried, because between them and the Jews stood two buffer states ruled by invincible kings, Og King of Bashan and Sichon King of the Amorites.

On their way to crossing the Jordan River, Moshe Rabbeinu and the Jewish army totally annihilated these two buffer states. At this point, a gentile in the Holy Land with any thoughts of self-preservation probably left the land or prepared to do so knowing that no one could stand before the "steam roller" of God's chosen people.

Yehoshua at the head of the army destroyed Yericho. By then, it is probable that the majority of the gentile population had already left Eretz Yisrael. Then came the disaster at Ai caused by the sin of Achan. A Jewish soldier was killed, and our army was routed. The remaining gentiles concluded that it was possible to defeat the Jews in battle. So why leave? And so, they unpacked and remained.

Indeed, Yehoshua conquered the land in seven years of battles, however, the gentiles who remained, influenced many of the Jewish nation to adopt their idolatrous ways, which eventually led to the destruction of the First Bet HaMikdash.

The result of Achan's heinous sin and the resulting military defeat empowered the gentiles to deny HaShem's gift of the Holy Land to the Jewish people, and they remained in Eretz

Yisrael. HaShem commanded that Achan be put to death, not because he embezzled from the sanctified objects, but because of the dire repercussions of his act: the goyim remaining here and influencing the Jews to practice idolatry.

We all sin! Indeed, there is no escaping the tyranny of the yetzer hara (evil inclination), as stated by Shlomo HaMelech (Kohelet chapter 7): "There is not a tzaddik in the world who does good and never sins".

There are sins which go no further than staining an individual's neshama, however there are sins which carry with them historical implications.

There was a group of Israelis whose conduct raised doubts as to their authentic Jewish genealogy of being born to a Jewish mother, and especially one woman whose dire sin was equal in its national and religious consequences to that of Achan Ben Karmi, with similar tragic results.

It occurred on the night of Kol Nidrei and Yom Kippur day in Tel Aviv, this year. This anti-Torah group interfered with noise and other related nuisances against the thousands who came together to pray. But the peak of insanity was one woman whose name I don't know who will have to stand before the heavenly court and explain why so many Jews have been murdered. She entered a minyan wearing only a bathing suit and stood by the chazan until he stopped the prayers.

When I heard of this on the news, and that she and her friends were not arrested and charged with degrading Judaism, I knew that it would not pass without a divine reaction. We would feel a big sheimis (slap) very soon, and indeed, it came on Shemini Atzeret.

She and her liberal progressive friends who seek to eradicate all semblance of Judaism from the land crossed the border into insane evilness. They evoked the heavenly gazeira (decree) that our nation is in need of an electric shock to return us

to our Jewish roots.

It was not the generals, nor the politicians, nor the troops in the area who were derelict in their responsibilities. It was a decree from the Shamayim that we, as the nation chosen by Hashem, must do teshuva, so the leaders were “put to sleep” temporarily.

After three thousand years of bonding and acquaintanceship, it is high time that we realized that HaShem is serious. He restrains Himself from punishing us for our sins, but there comes a time and limits of conduct where restraint turns to action.

The hate of Judaism demonstrated on Yom Kippur by certain Jews was the TNT that took down the defense wall in Gaza. It remains for us to analyze, draw conclusions, and return to who we really are.

I wonder. Why have we not seen pictures of burnt batei kneset (shuls) and desecrated Torah scrolls? Think about it – there is a reason!

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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