

# Matot 5774

BS"D Parashat Matot 5774

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Israel is again at war against Amalek. I dedicate this week's divrei Torah to our holy soldiers of Tzahal, from privates to major generals, from regular army of 18 year olds to reserve soldiers of over 50 years old.

## Qualifications for Serving in Hashem's Army

In our parasha, the nation is about to liberate the western side of Eretz Yisrael, beyond the Jordan River. While Moshe was instructing the leadership regarding the equitable division of the land among the nation, the tribes of Re'uven and Gad requested that their homesteads be in the fertile grazing lands of the eastern side of the Jordan. Moshe understood this to mean that they would not take part in the war of liberation against the seven Canaanite nations and reacted in great anger (32,6):

:וְהָיוּ אֲנִי וְכָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִתְּחִלָּה וְאַחֲרָיִם

*Will your brothers will go to war and you will stay here!?*

An agreement was arrived at whereby the tribes of Re'uven and Gad would serve in the dangerous reconnaissance units and would return to their families on the eastern side of the Jordan only after all the other tribes would be settled, each man in his homestead.

In Moshe's mind, it was unthinkable that an able bodied Jew would not fight in the mitzva war of liberation of Eretz Yisrael and the protection of the Jewish nation.

There is no halachic exemption from military service from a war defined as a Milchamat Mitzva (a war which is halachically ordered). The only exemptions are those mentioned in Parshat Shoftim regarding a milchemet reshut" – war for political or economic gain, with the Sanhedrin's approval, as elaborated by the Rambam (Melachim chapter 7).

When the troops are lined up in military formation, the Mashuach Milchama (a Kohen who is anointed for purposes of war) stands before them and declares: "Whoever has built a house, or planted a vineyard or became engaged to be married in the last year must leave the ranks to return home". Then a shoter (military police) declares before the troops that whoever is **afraid** must also return. Rambam explains וְהַיְתָאֵם וְהַיְתָאֵם וְהַיְתָאֵם וְהַיְתָאֵם- defeat begins with desertion – and soldiers in any of the above mentioned categories are more readily inclined to desert.

I believe that the call to those who built homes, or planted vineyards or were engaged to be married to drop from the ranks is actually intended as a face saving gesture by the Torah to permit those who are gripped with **fear** to leave under the guise of one of the three categories of home, vineyard and immanent marriage.

Because to serve in HaShem's army one must be courageous, not meek; determined, not irresolute; of high morale, not cowardly; spirited, not timid; tenacious, not irresolute.

One who lacks these qualities will always find some excuse, either physical, mental or spiritual.

However, in fact it is not the excuse which exempts the shirker, it is the Torah's dictate to exclude from the army's ranks people of weak character, whose presence would cause great harm.



