

# 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 מְשַׁלְּמֵי הַיָּדָיִם וְהָיוּ אֲנִי וְכָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מְשַׁלְּמֵי הַיָּדָיִם

*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 פחד פחדים- 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.

## Passing the Test

The Book of Judges (chapter 7) relates that HaShem commanded Gideon to bring his army of ten thousand to a river bed, and there, reduce the number significantly through a test. Those who would take the water into their hands and draw it up to their lips are suited to be in the army of HaShem; those who bow to drink the water would be rejected. Three hundred passed the test, the other 9700 failed and were sent home. And it was these 300 soldiers who defeated the entire Midianite army.

By singling out those individuals who did not bow down, Gideon was able to know who was of high personal character and tenacity so necessary for a soldier in HaShem's army.

## Today's Jewish Army

At the present moment there are over forty thousand Israeli troops on the borders of Gaza, poised to decimate the enemies of Am Yisrael. There is not one among them who does not feel that behind him are the millions of Jews who were slaughtered by the descendants of Aisav and Yishmael during our 3500 year history. How HaShem has changed the destiny of our people in the last 70 years, and how He has changed the character of our people. From the depths of the killing fields of Europe, where we were as helpless as sheep brought to the slaughter, to become today a nation whose army is the envy of the world.

And let us remember that above all we are a Jewish army. Last week the commander of the Givati Brigade sent a message to his troops which was later sent to all, as follows:

'וְעַתָּה יֵשׁוּב ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם , וְנִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלֵנוּ וְנִפְעַל בְּעִדְתָּנוּ וְנִשְׁמַר אֶתְּנוּ מִיַּד הָעַרְבִים .” וְעַתָּה יֵשׁוּב ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם , וְנִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלֵנוּ וְנִפְעַל בְּעִדְתָּנוּ וְנִשְׁמַר אֶתְּנוּ מִיַּד הָעַרְבִים .”

'וַיִּשָׂא עֵינָיו אֶל הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּקְרָא בְּקוֹל עוֹשֵׂה עוֹלָם וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה אֶחָד וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֶחָד  
שְׁמָה יִשְׂרָאֵל .וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה אֶחָד

*I lift my eyes to the heavens and call out together with you,  
Shema Yisrael HaShem Elokaynu HaShem Echad,*

*May we be successful in the path we will be going to fight  
for Your nation Israel against the enemy who desires to  
desecrate Your name.*

*In the name of the fighters of Tzahal and the troops of the  
Givati Brigade and its commanders, make true the verse "For  
the Lord your God who goes before you to make war for you  
with your enemies to bring you salvation  
let us say amen.*

My son told me that his base has quite a large bet kneset,  
but it can hold only one third of the soldiers who come to  
pray there daily. And so it is with army bases along the  
length and breadth of the land.

In the merit of our holy soldiers and nation, may we see the  
destruction of all our enemies and our return to the entire  
Promised Land, including the expanded Gush Katif which will  
cover all of the Gaza strip.

May all our soldiers return home safely.

May we all rejoice in HaShem's continued miracles for His  
loyal people in Eretz Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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