



THE SOLDIER OR THE WAR?

The Torah commands that several groups of soldiers be absolved of their military obligation. Why? Is this for the benefit of the war? Or maybe for some social purpose?

TEACHER'S MANUAL



JEWISH INSIGHTS

A TASTE OF THE REBBE'S TEACHINGS



PARSHAT SHOFTIM

Book of Deuteronomy / Devarim

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Marty & Kate Rifkin
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Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India

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In this week's Torah portion, several groups are sent home from the battlefield. Those who have new homes, vineyards, and wives, and those who are afraid (source 1). What exactly does "afraid" mean? The Talmud records an argument between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yosi: According to Rabbi Akiva, that means fear of the battlefield, while according to Rabbi Yosi, it means fear of one's sins (source 2).

In a long talk in 1979, the Rebbe analyzed the argument at length. He explained that Rabbi Akiva could not possibly side with the opinion of Rabbi Yosi, because Rabbi Akiva was a famous lover of Israel. As he saw it, the moment a Jew begins to contemplate his sins, he has already made a step towards repentance. In that case, he has no reason to fear the battlefield!

The Rebbe's understanding of the issue is quite reminiscent of the debate after the Entebbe raid: The Rebbe spoke about the unique merit of the soldiers, while other religious leaders argued that secular soldiers cannot be a conduit for G-d's miracles. (see also source 3, which amplifies the Rebbe's teaching).

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There is another lesson in *Ahavat Yisrael* which we can learn from the other opinion – that of Rabbi Yosi, as expressed in source 4, 5 and in the Rebbe's talk.

According to Rabbi Yosi, death is always a result of sin, and therefore, only the sinful soldiers have reason to be afraid. Why then, are the other groups sent home? The answer: To provide cover for the soldiers returning due to their sins.

Introduction:

The Rebbe delivered countless talks on the importance of *Ahavat Yisrael*, learning its importance from stories and teachings throughout the Torah. In this lesson, we will learn about *Ahavat Yisrael* once again, but this is likely the most profound of the lessons so far.

In this week's Torah portion, we learn about rules of war. The first rule is about the soldiers that are not fit for battle: any soldier who built a house but did not inaugurate it, planted a vineyard but did not enjoy its fruit, or betrothed a woman but did not marry her – they are all absolved of battle. Likewise, the Torah says, anyone who is afraid should return home as well.

Why are those groups disqualified? And what exactly might a soldier be unusually afraid of?

This was a discussion two thousand years ago between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yosi of the Galilee. The Rebbe analyzes their argument and demonstrates how Rabbi Akiva's profound *Ahavat Yisrael* influenced his opinion, and how *Ahavat Yisrael* is a major factor in the entire discussion.

This teaches us how our sincere love for others should influence our outlook and change our behavior.

A. The Fearful and Faint-Hearted

Source 1 Deuteronomy 20:1-9

In this week's portion, the Torah prepares the people of Israel for battle. The first rule: Don't be afraid. Therefore, anyone who is fearful is sent home.

When you go to battle against your enemies, and see horses, war chariots and an army larger than yours, do not be afraid of them, since G-d your L-rd, who brought you out of Egypt, is with you.

When you approach [the place of] battle, the priest shall step forward and speak to the people.

He shall say to them, "Listen, Israel, today you are about to wage war against your enemies. Do not be faint-hearted, do not be afraid, do not panic, and do not break ranks before them.

"G-d your L-rd is the One who is going with you. He will fight for you against your enemies, and He will deliver you."

The lower officers shall then speak to the people, and say, "Is there any man among you who has built a new house, and has not begun to live in it? Let him go home, so that he will not die in war and have another man live in it.

"Is there any man among you who has planted a vineyard and has not redeemed its first crop? Let him go home so that he not die in war and have another man redeem its crop.

כִּי־תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל־
אִיֶבֶךָ וּרְאִיתָ סוּס וְרֶכֶב
עִם רַב מִמֶּנִּי לֹא תִירָא
מֵהֶם כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עִמָּךְ
הַמַּעֲלֶיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

וְהָיָה כָּקֵר בְּכֶם אֶל־
הַמִּלְחָמָה וּנְגַשׁ הַכֹּהֵן
וַדַּבֵּר אֶל־הָעָם:

וְאָמַר אֲלֵהֶם שְׁמַע
יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם קִרְבִּים הַיּוֹם
לְמִלְחָמָה עַל־אִיְבֵיכֶם אֶל־
יָרֵךְ לְבַבְכֶם אַל־תִּירְאוּ
וְאַל־תִּחְפְּזוּ וְאַל־תַּעֲרִצוּ
מִפְּנֵיהֶם:

כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הֵהָלֵךְ
עִמָּכֶם לְהִלָּחֵם לְכֶם עִם־
אִיְבֵיכֶם לְהוֹשִׁיעַ אֶתְכֶם:

וַדַּבְּרוּ הַשָּׂטְרִים אֶל־הָעָם
לֵאמֹר מִי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר
בָּנָה בַּיִת־חָדָשׁ וְלֹא חָנְכוּ
יָלְךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב לְבֵיתוֹ פְּוֵי־מֹת
בַּמִּלְחָמָה וְאִישׁ אַחֵר
יִחְנַכֵּנוּ:

וּמִי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־נָטַע
כָּרֶם וְלֹא חָלְלוּ יָלְךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב
לְבֵיתוֹ פְּוֵי־מֹת בַּמִּלְחָמָה
וְאִישׁ אַחֵר יִחְלָלְנוּ:

“Is there any man among you who has betrothed a woman and not married her? Let him go home, so that he not die in war and have another man marry her.”

The lower officers shall then continue speaking to the people and say, “Is there any man among you who is afraid or faint-hearted? Let him go home rather than have his cowardliness demoralize his brethren.”

When the lower offices have finished speaking to the people, then they shall appoint senior officers to lead the people.

וּמִי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־אָרַשׁ
אִשָּׁה וְלֹא לָקַחָהּ יֵלֶךְ וַיָּשֵׁב
לְבֵיתוֹ פְּנֵי־יָמוֹת בְּמִלְחָמָה
וְאִישׁ אַחֵר יִקְחָנָהּ:

וַיִּסְפוּ הַשָּׂטָרִים לְדַבֵּר
אֶל־הָעָם וַאֲמָרוּ מִי־הָאִישׁ
הַיָּרֵא וְרַךְ הַלֵּבב יֵלֶךְ וַיָּשֵׁב
לְבֵיתוֹ וְלֹא יִמַּס אֶת־לֵבָב
אֶחָיו כְּלָבָבוֹ:

וְהָיָה כְּכֹלֵת הַשָּׂטָרִים
לְדַבֵּר אֶל־הָעָם וּפָקְדוֹ
שָׂרֵי צְבָאוֹת בְּרֹאשׁ הָעָם:

Source 2 Talmud, Sotah 44a

What exactly does afraid and faint-hearted mean? Two rabbis in the Talmud argue:

Rabbi Akiva says: “afraid or faint-hearted” is to be understood **as it indicates, that the man is unable to stand in the battle ranks and to see a drawn sword** because it will terrify him.

רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אוֹמֵר: הַיָּרֵא
וְרַךְ הַלֵּבב - כְּמִשְׁמַעוֹ,
שֶׁאִינוֹ יָכוֹל לַעֲמֹד בְּקֻשְׁרֵי
הַמִּלְחָמָה וְלִרְאוֹת חֶרֶב
שְׁלוּפָה.

Rabbi Yosi HaGlili says: “afraid or faint-hearted” – **this is one who is afraid because of the sins that he has**; he, too, returns. **Therefore, the Torah provided him with all these** additional reasons for exemption from the army so he can ascribe **his leaving** to one of **them**. In this way, the sinner may leave the ranks without having to publicly acknowledge that he is a sinner.

רַבִּי יוֹסֵי הַגְּלִילִי אוֹמֵר:
הַיָּרֵא וְרַךְ הַלֵּבב - זֶהוּ
הַמֵּתְיָרֵא מִן הָעֲבֵרוֹת
שֶׁבִּידוֹ. לְפִיכֵן תִּלְתֶּה לּוֹ
הַתּוֹרָה אֶת כָּל אֵלוֹ שֶׁיִּחְזֹר
בְּגִלְלוֹ.

>> The Rebbe

Fear of Sin is Half a Repentance

Rabbi Akiva is “accustomed to seeing the People of Israel in a positive light.” Therefore, when he sees a Jew heading in the direction of repentance, he excuses him immediately, even if his thought of repentance has yet to positively influence his behavior to the extent that he will “never again to revert to folly...never again violate the King’s command, G-d forbid, neither a positive command nor a prohibition.”

Therefore, Rabbi Akiva cannot possibly suggest that “one who is afraid because of the sins that he has” is obligated to leave the battlefield: If a Jew is *afraid* due to his transgressions, he obviously recognizes that he conducted himself improperly, and therefore – no doubt – regrets doing so. Thus, he considers repenting!

Even if he is not yet ready to abandon his previous ways, it is only because of his “external senses.” The soul-feeling which inspired him to repent has yet to penetrate through to his senses to the extent that his actual behavior changes. Nonetheless, he has contemplated repentance, and therefore, Rabbi Akiva – who always saw people in a positive light – is of the opinion that he has already been transformed into a righteous person!

רבי עקיבא “רגיל לזכות את ישראל” ... מובן שבראותו אצל יהודי כיוון של חזרה בתשובה - הדומה למסירות נפש - הוא זיכה אותו מיד, אף כאשר התשובה עדיין לא גרמה לשיפור התנהגותו בפועל, ש”בל ישוב עוד לכסלה... ולא יעבור עוד מצות המלך חס ושלום, הן במצות עשה והן במצות לא תעשה”.

לכן אין רבי עקיבא יכול להסביר, ש”הירא מעבירות שבידו” צריך לשוב מן המלחמה, כי כאשר היהודי ירא מהעבירות שבידו, הרי הוא חש שלא נהג כשורה ... ואז הכרחי שהוא יגיע לידי חרטה על הגורם, על העבירה - “הרהר תשובה”.

ואף אם לפעמים עדיין אין בכוחו “לפרוש מחטאיו לגמרי להיות מודה ועוזב”, אך כיון שזאת רק לגבי הכוחות הגלויים, שהתעוררות עצם הנשמה (שהביאה להרהור התשובה) עדיין לא חדרה אליו עד כדי החלטה לשנות את התנהגותו בפועל, אבל הוא הרהר תשובה, ומשום כך סובר רבי עקיבא, מזכה ישראל, שעל ידי הרהור תשובה זה לבד הוא הופך מרשע גמור לצדיק גמור.

In essence, the fact that he is afraid of his sins serves to absolve him of them altogether, and he therefore has no reason to fear the battlefield!

וכיון שכך, יוצא, שעצם היותו
"ירא מעבירות שבידו" מוחק את
עבירותיו, ואין הוא צריך לחשוש
מיציאה למלחמה.

Likutei Sichos vol. 9 pg. 121

The Talmud relates that Rabbi Akiva was a "chassid." He always saw the good in people. His behavior, including his approach to Torah study, was always permeated with this attitude – to look at people with a good eye.

Therefore, in the case of a soldier who is afraid of battle, Rabbi Akiva prefers to understand it as someone afraid of death, rather than someone afraid of sin. Why? Because the soldier afraid of sin has already, in Rabbi Akiva's view, repented. The very fact that he evaluates his actions and fears the consequences is the beginning of repentance. He is therefore already considered righteous in G-d's eyes; the very fact that in the midst of all the chaos of battle preparations he evaluates his actions and contemplates his character, demonstrates who he really is.

Therefore, it is impossible to suggest that the Torah would instruct him to leave the battlefield for being afraid of his transgressions. If he is afraid of his transgressions, he is no longer a sinner.

*

This conversation between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yosi, as seen through the Rebbe's prism, is reminiscent of a similar back-and-forth which took place two thousand years later, between the Rebbe and other religious leaders regarding the IDF's Entebbe raid.

Operation Entebbe:

Operation Entebbe or Operation Thunderbolt was a successful counter-terrorist hostage-rescue mission carried out by commandos of the Israel Defense Forces at Entebbe Airport in Uganda on 4 July 1976.

A week earlier, on 27 June, an Air France airliner with 248 passengers had been hijacked by two members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The hijackers had the stated objective to free 40 Palestinian and affiliated militants imprisoned in Israel and 13 prisoners in four other countries in exchange for the hostages.

The flight, which had originated in Tel Aviv with the destination of Paris, was diverted after a stopover in Athens via Benghazi to Entebbe, the main airport of Uganda. After moving all hostages from the aircraft to a disused airport building, the hijackers separated all Israelis and several non-Israeli Jews from the larger group and forced them into a separate room.

Many of the Jewish passengers later related that being separated from the other passengers while hearing orders in German (some of the terrorists were German) was reminiscent of the infamous “selections” of the Holocaust. The captain of the airplane refused to leave his passengers and remained behind along with his entire crew. For his act of bravery, he later received a medal of honor from Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin.

Over the following two days, 148 non-Israeli hostages were released and flown out to Paris. Ninety-four Jewish and Israeli passengers along with the 12-member Air France crew, remained as hostages and were threatened with death.

The IDF acted on information provided by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad. The hijackers threatened to kill the hostages if their prisoner release demands were not met. This threat led to the planning of the rescue operation.

The operation took place at night. Israeli transport planes carried 100 commandos over 4,000 kilometers (2,500 mi) to Uganda for the rescue operation. The operation, which took a week of planning, lasted 90 minutes. Of the 106 remaining hostages, 102 were rescued and three were killed. The other hostage was in a hospital and was later killed.

Five Israeli commandos were wounded, and one, unit commander Lt. Col. Yonatan Netanyahu, was killed. Netanyahu was the older brother of Benjamin Netanyahu, who would later become Prime Minister of Israel.

Operation Entebbe, which had the military codename Operation Thunderbolt, is sometimes referred to retroactively as Operation Jonathan in memory of the unit's leader, Yonatan Netanyahu. It immediately became world-famous for its stunning success and remains famous until today.

Several days after the successful operation, the Rebbe spoke about it at the Yud Beis Tammuz farbrengen.

>> The Rebbe

Thank You to the Soldiers

Recently, a frightening event has taken place – something which shook the entire world... Dozens of Jews were saved from the opposite of life, and were brought back to the Land of Israel, “the good and spacious land,” “the land which G-d’s eyes are upon from the beginning of the year until its end.” This was despite that from a logical perspective, they were not sure if they would be successful.

In this operation, we have clearly witnessed how quality overcomes quantity. There were many more [enemy] soldiers than the rescuing force.

...The soldiers who risked their lives to save their brethren deserve our thanks and commendation; may G-d bless them with all good, and many times over...

12 Tammuz 1976

After hearing the Rebbe’s positive response, various religious leaders raised questions: How could the Rebbe praise soldiers who do not observe Torah and its commandments? How could he claim that G-d does miracles through such “evil” people.

During a later gathering, on Chof Av 1976, the Rebbe addressed those questions:

לאחרונה ארע מאורע מזעזע, שזיעזע את העולם כולו, ... שהצילו עשרות יהודים מהיפך החיים לחיים, והביאום לארץ נושבת, ארץ טובה ורחבה, ארץ אשר עיני ה' אלוקיך בה מראשית השנה ועד אחרית השנה, הגם שעל פי טבע לא ידעו איך יצליחו בזה.

וכאמור לעיל, בפעולת הצלה זו ראו בעיני בשר איך שהאיכות ניצחה את הכמות, משום שבאותו מקום היו הרבה יותר חיילים מאשר הכוח המחליץ.

...נתינת תודה ו"ישר כח", לחיילים שמסרו את נפשם בכדי להציל יהודים אחרים, והעמידו עצמם בסכנה, תבא עליהם ברכת הטוב, וכמה פעמים ככה...

>> The Rebbe

Soldiers With Unimaginable Merit

I repeat my statement without regard for all the naysayers:

The soldiers that flew to Uganda and risked their lives to save the hostages — and G-d granted them success — have earned their reward in the world-to-come without a doubt, because they risked their lives to save their brethren (as the Talmud states regarding Papus and Lulianus and others).

These are individuals who have an unimaginable merit. They didn't request recognition and they didn't get paid. Some of them are newly married. They flew thousands of miles on their own accord and out of their own goodwill to rescue dozens of Jews from the opposite of life. The greatest proof of their merit is that G-d made them successful and over one hundred hostages are now safe. What other miracle of that magnitude has occurred in recent years?

It's quite a shame that there are those who attempt to conceal the G-dliness that was revealed in this story.

20 Av 1976

In this case, the Rebbe — like Rabbi Akiva in his day — spoke about the self-sacrifice of the soldiers and explained that the very fact that they were willing to risk their lives is a source of unimaginable merit.

הנני חוזר על דבריי הברורים מבלי הבט
על כל המלעיגים -

שאנשי הצבא שטסו לאוגנדה וסיכנו את
חייהם, להציל את החטופים, וה' הצליחם
במשימתם ... חלקם בעולם הבא בלי
שום ספק, משום שסיכנו חייהם להצלת
יהודים, כמובן ממאמרי חז"ל (תענית יח,
ב - בנוגע לולינוס ופפוס. ועוד כמה וכמה
מקומות. ואכ"מ).

מדובר ביהודים בעלי זכות גדולה שאין
כמוה - שלא ביקשו כבוד, לא קיבלו שכר,
מהם צעירים שלא מכבר נישאו וכן כאלו
שטרם נישאו, הם טסו אלפי מיל ובדעת
עצמם ומרצונם הטוב יצאו להציל עשרות
יהודים מהיפך החיים לחיים, והראי' הכי
טובה שה' יתברך הצליח בידם, ואותם
למעלה ממאה חטופים נמצאים עתה
במקום בטוח .. ואין לך נס גדול מזה
בתקופה האחרונה!

ורחמנות גדולה על אלה שרצונם להעלים
ולהסתיר את האלקות שנתגלה בפרשה
זו.

Source 3 Talmud, Tractate Pesachim 50a

The following is the amazing story of Papus and Lulianus, which the Rebbe mentioned in the Sichah.

This is **like** the incident involving **Rav Yosef, son of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi**, who **became ill and** was about to **expire**. **When he returned** to good health, **his father said to him: What did you see** when you were about to die? **He said to him: I saw an inverted world**. **Those above**, i.e., those who are considered important in this world, were **below**, insignificant, while **those below**, i.e., those who are insignificant in this world, were **above**. **He said to him: My son, you have seen a clear world**. The world you have seen is the true world, as in that world people's standings befit them.

And I also heard that they were saying: Those executed by the government enjoy such an exalted status that **no one can stand in their enclosure**.

The Gemara asks: **And who are these** martyrs that Rav Yosef was referring to? **If you say** that he was referring to **Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues**, who were martyred, this cannot be: Is their elevated status **due** only **to** the fact that **they were martyred** by the Roman **government and nothing more**? These men were exceptional in their piety and sanctity during their lives as well. **Rather**, it is referring **to the martyrs of Lod**, Papus and Lulianus,, who gave themselves up to be martyred for the sake of the Jewish people. They falsely admitted to killing the king's daughter in order to prevent a harsh decree from being issued against the entire community. Although they were not known for exceptional piety before that event, they are considered to be extremely holy due to their martyrdom.

Rav Yosef experienced clinical death, when he recovered, he brought with him regards from the world to come. His father asked him what he had seen, and he shared that the people who are considered honorable in this world are not necessarily considered honorable in the next.

Who are the most honored people in the world to come? The Martyrs of Lod – as their story is told in the Talmud cited above and in Rashi (as cited in the explanations).

The Rebbe cites this story as a proof of the holiness of the Jewish people.

By citing this story, the Rebbe takes the soldiers a step forward. In the first segment, we learned that Rabbi Akiva viewed a person afraid of sins as a full-fledged repentant. Here, the Rebbe says that a soldier who is ready to risk his life for his people is considered not only a repentant but a saint.

כִּי הָא דָּרְבַּי יוֹסֵף
בְּרִיָּה דְרַבֵּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ
בְּוָ לֵוִי חָלַשׁ
וְאִיתְגַּדִּיד, כִּי הִדְר,
אָמַר לִיה אָבוּה: מָאִי
חֲזִית? אָמַר לִיה:
עוֹלָם הַפּוֹךְ רָאִיתִי,
עָלְיוֹנִים לְמַטָּה,
וְתַחְתּוֹנִים לְמַעְלָה.
אָמַר לוֹ: בְּנִי, עוֹלָם
בְּרוּר רָאִיתָ.

וְשָׁמַעְתִּי שְׁהִיוּ
אוֹמְרִים: הַרוּגֵי
מַלְכוּת אֵין אָדָם יְכוֹל
לְעֲמוּד בְּמַחֲצָתוֹ.

(וּמֵאן) גִּינְהוּ?
אֵילִימָא רַבֵּי עֲקִיבָא
וְחִבְרִיּוֹ מִשׁוּם הַרוּגֵי
מַלְכוּת וְתוּ לָא?
אָלָא: הַרוּגֵי לוֹד.

B. Preserving One's Dignity

What is the real reason those three categories (newly married etc.) are sent home? Let's return to the source we read earlier, and add some to it:

Source 4 Deuteronomy 20:8

The lower officers shall then continue speaking to the people and say, "Is there any man among you who is afraid or faint-hearted? Let him go home rather than have his cowardliness demoralize his brethren."

Rashi

Afraid or faint-hearted: Rabbi Yosi HaGlili says that [it means] one who is afraid of his sins. Therefore, the Torah gives him the excuse of attributing his return home because of a house, a vineyard, or a wife, to cover up for those who return because of their sins, so that people should not understand that they are sinners. [Consequently,] one who sees this person returning would say, "Perhaps he has built a house, or planted a vineyard, or betrothed a woman."

Sifsei Chachamim¹

Rabbi Yosi HaGlili said...:

In other words, Rabbi Yosi is of the opinion that death is always a result of sin. Therefore, if a person does not sin, he has no reason to fear warfare. Thus, the Torah's description of someone who

וְיִסְפוּ הַשְּׂטָרִים לְדַבֵּר אֶל-
הָעָם וְאָמְרוּ מִי־הָאִישׁ הַיָּרֵא
וְרַךְ הַלֵּבב יֵלֶךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב לְבֵיתוֹ
וְלֹא יִמַּס אֶת־לֵבב אָחִיו
כְּלָבְבוֹ:

הַיָּרֵא וְרַךְ הַלֵּבב: רַבִּי יוֹסִי
הַגְּלִילִי אוֹמֵר הַיָּרֵא מֵעֲבִירוֹת
שְׂבִידוֹ, וְלִכְךָ תִּלְתֶּה לוֹ תוֹרָה
לְחֹזֵר עַל בַּיִת וְכָרֶם וְאִשָּׁה,
לְכַסּוֹת עַל הַחֹזְרִים בְּשִׁבִיל
עֲבִירוֹת שְׂבִידֵם שֶׁלֹּא יִבְיִנוּ
שָׁהֵם בְּעַלְי עֲבָרָה, וְהִרְוֵאָהוּ
חֹזֵר אוֹמֵר שְׂמָא בְּנָה בַּיִת
אוֹ נִטַּע כָּרֶם אוֹ אֶרֶשׁ אִשָּׁה
(סוֹטָה מ"ד):

רַבִּי יוֹסִי הַגְּלִילִי אוֹמֵר הַיָּרֵא
מֵעֲבִירוֹת שְׂבִידוֹ כו'.

רָצָה לוֹמַר: רַבִּי יוֹסִי הַגְּלִילִי
סָבַר אִין מִיתָה בְּלֹא חֲטָא,
וְלִכְן אִם אִין עֲבִירוֹת בְּיָדוֹ
מָה לוֹ לִירֵא מִפְּנֵי הַמְּלַחְמָה.
אֲלָא וְדַאי שְׂיֵרֵא מֵעֲבִירוֹת

¹ Sifsei Chachamim is a supercommentary on Rashi's commentary on Chumash. Written by Shabtai ben Yosef Bass (1641–1718) in Amsterdam, it is mostly a collection of other commentaries, in addition to the author's own insights, meant to give a basic understanding of Rashi. It is printed in almost all editions of Mikraot Gedolot. An abridgement of this work, entitled Ikar Sifsei Chachamim, appears in many editions of Chumash with Rashi.

fears is clearly about someone who fears due to his transgressions. This raised a question for Rashi: Since there is no death without sin, why are exemptions given for a home, vineyard and wife? If they have no sins, they have no reason to be absolved, according to Rabbi Yosi HaGlili. Therefore, he answers that despite having no sins to worry about, they return home to cover for those who leave because of their sins.

שְׁבִיבוּ וְעַכְשָׁיו קָשָׁה
 לְרַשׁ"י, כִּינּוּ דְאִין מִיִּתָּה
 בְּלֹא חֲטָא אִם כּוֹ, לְמַה אָמַר
 וְגִזַּר קְרָא לְחִזּוּר עַל בֵּית
 וְכָרֶם וְאִשָּׁה, אִי אִין בְּיָדֶם
 עֲבִירוֹת גַּם עַל בֵּית וְכָרֶם
 וְאִשָּׁה אִינּוּ חוֹזְרִין לְדַבְּרֵי
 ר"י הַגְּלִילִי. וּמִתְרַץ דְּוַדַּאי
 אִין בְּיָדֶם עֲבִירוֹת, וּמַה
 שְׁגִזְרָה רַחֲמֵנָא שְׁיַחֲזִרוּ כְּדִי
 לְכַסּוֹת עַל הַחוֹזְרִין בְּשִׁבְלֵי
 עֲבִירוֹת שְׁבִיבוּ וְכוּ'

Why does Rabbi Yosi HaGlili interpret this verse as a reference to a soldier afraid of sins, as opposed to natural fright of the battlefield? Because, in his opinion, death is always a result of sin. A person who does not sin has no reason to fear war. This brings him to the next point that the Rebbe will address: if non-sinners have nothing to fear, the other three categories of people who return home must be returning for a different reason – and that is to preserve the dignity of the sinners.

>> The Rebbe

Rabbi Yosi Haglili's View

This is an amazing lesson in *Ahavat Yisrael*: The Torah is so careful to preserve the dignity of every Jew, that it allows the Jew who is ashamed of his sins to leave with a pretext that he is returning for his home, vineyard or bride!

The terminology of the Mishnah indicates that the people in these categories (with a new marriage, business or home) would not have been normally absolved of military service. It is only he who is fearful for his sins that

וכאן רואים דבר נפלא בגודל הענין
 דאהבת ישראל עד כמה מתחשבת התורה
 ומקפידה על כבודו של כל יהודי, שכדי
 שלא יתבייש לחזור על עבירות שבידו,
 תלתה לו התורה שיוכל לחזור בשביל
 בית כרם ואשה!

ליתר ביאור: מלשון המשנה "לפיכך
 תלתה לו התורה את כל אלו (בנה ונטע
 ואירס) שיחזור בגללן", מוכח, שמעיקר
 הדין לא היו חוזרים כל אלו, כי אם,
 "המתיירא מן העבירות שבידו", רק הוא

is fundamentally absolved. Nonetheless, the Torah instructs those other people to leave as well, for the express purpose of preserving the dignity of the person who sinned.

Weakening the Army!

Think about it: On one hand, being ashamed of transgressions can be a positive thing. It contributes to the wholesomeness of the repentance, and it helps a person avoid similar transgressions in the future – knowing that he will be ashamed when leaving the battlefield. On the other hand, adding three categories of people (those with new homes, vineyards and wives) to those who leave the battlefield diminishes, to some extent, the power of the military. We are commanded to wage war in a logical, physical way, and sending home three categories of people can do nothing but weaken the army – thereby endangering, at least from a physical perspective, the rest of the soldiers.

Nonetheless, due to importance of *Ahavat Yisrael*, the Torah is so careful to preserve a person's dignity that it creates three new categories of people who are absolved of battle duties, to avoid shaming the those who are afraid of their sins by allowing them to mingle with the other groups.

לבדו חייב לחזור, ואף על פי כן, אמרה תורה שיחזרו גם כל אלו, בונה בית, נוטע כרם ומארש אשה "כדי שיתלה בכך החזרה (שחזור בשביל בית וכרם ואשה) ולא יתבייש לומר מעבירות שבידו הוא ירא וחוזר".

והגע עצמך: מחד גיסא הבושה מעבירות שבידו יש בה ענין חיובי, הן בנוגע לגמרה ושלמות הכפרה, והן בנוגע להנהגה מכאן ולהבא "וכל העם ישמעו ויראו" שימנעו מעשיית עבירה כדי שלא יבואו לידי בושה שיצטרכו לחזור מעורכי המלחמה! ולאידך גיסא הוספת שלושה סוגים (בונה בית, נוטע כרם ומארש אשה) שיחזרו מעורכי המלחמה פועלת חלישות (במדה מסויימת) בכחו של הצבא, שכן, היציאה למלחמה צריכה להיות על פי דרכי הטבע, ומובן, שכאשר חסרים שלושה סוגי אנשים (לא רק שלושה אנשים, אלא שלושה סוגי אנשים), נחסר בכחו של הצבא, ובמילא, גדולה יותר הסכנה על פי דרך הטבע דכל אחד ואחד מעורכי המלחמה (אם כי "שומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע").

ואף על פי כן מצד גודל הענין דאהבת ישראל, מקפידה התורה על כבודו של יהודי, עד כדי כך, שכדי לשלול ענין של בושה על עבירה, מחדשת התורה ומוסיפה שלושה סוגים שיחזרו מעורכי המלחמה, "כדי שיתלה בכך החזרה (שחזור בשביל בית וכרם ואשה) ולא יתבייש לומר מעבירות שבידו הוא ירא וחוזר.

Source 5 Talmud, Sotah 44a

If someone speaks between tefillin and tefillin, it is considered a transgression and he leaves the battlefield.

Rashi

Between tefillin and tefillin: Between donning his hand tefillin and his head tefillin.

שח בין תפילה לתפילה
עבירה היא בידו וחוזר
עליה מעורכי המלחמה.

שח בין תפילה לתפילה -
בין הנחת תפילין של יד
לתפילין של ראש.

>> The Rebbe

Big Transgression, Little Transgression

Also: A person is absolved of warfare for any type of transgression, whether major or minor. Even if someone “speaks between donning his hand tefillin and his head tefillin,” he can leave the battlefield, because this transgression alone may cast doubt in his spiritual ability to be victorious in the war. Therefore, his life is at risk in battle (unlike the individual with a new home, vineyard or wife).

ועוד ענין בזה: “הירא מעבירות שבידו” כולל כל סוגי העבירות, מעבירות הכי חמורות, עד לעבירה קלה, כמו “שח בין תפילה לתפילה”⁸ (בין הנחת תפילין של יד לתפילין של ראש⁹), ש”עבירה היא בידו וחוזר עליה מעורכי המלחמה”, שכן, עבירה זו לבדה דיה להטיל ספק בזכותו לנצח במלחמה, ובמילא, יציאתו למלחמה היא בגדר של פקוח נפש (מה שאין כן בונה בית, נוטע כרם ומארש אשה).

This teaches us about the importance of *Ahavat Yisrael* – in two ways: First of all, even someone who transgressed the most severe sins is given a way to leave the battlefield without disclosing his actions. On the other hand, the absolution is granted even to he who transgressed merely by speaking in-between donning the two pairs of Tefillin. This implies that the rest of his behavior is impeccable – for example, with regard to Tefillin, his mind and his heart are fully dedicated to G-d, and his only deficiency is that there is a disconnect between the commitment of the mind and heart (this is the spiritual version of the above-mentioned transgression). The shame and embarrassment from such a transgression is minimal. Nonetheless, to allow him to avoid such a minor shame, the Torah instructed that another three categories should return from the war. That's how careful the Torah is to preserve the dignity of a Jew!

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In summary: According to Rabbi Yosi, soldiers with transgressions are detrimental to the war effort. They are not worthy of miracles themselves, and their fear will serve to demoralize their comrades. Therefore, the officer would announce that anyone afraid of his sins should go home and not hurt the war effort.

The problem with this approach is that it would embarrass all of those soldiers and force them to either face the shame of leaving or face the battlefield unprotected. Therefore, the Torah absolves three more categories of soldiers: those who have new homes, vineyards, or wives. They are battle worthy and G-d will protect them, but they are absolved of the battle to allow the soldiers with transgressions too leave for home in dignity.

ומכאן באים להדגשה יתירה בענין דאהבת ישראל בשני הקצוות: אפילו מי שעבר עבירות חמורות תלתה לו התורה שיוכל לחזור בשביל בית כרם ואשה, ולא יתבייש מהעבירות החמורות שבידו, ולא ידוך, גם מי שאין בידו אלא עבירה קלה ד"שח בין תפלה לתפלה", היינו, שבכל שאר הענינים עבודתו היא בשלימות, וגם בנוגע למצות תפילין, כולל שעבוד המוח והלב¹⁰, החסרון היחידי אינו אלא שישנו הפסק בין העבודה דשעבוד המוח לשעבוד הלב (שזהו התוכן הפנימי ד"שח בין תפלה לתפלה") אשר, הבושה מ"עבירה כזו" היא קלה וקטנה כו', ואף על פי כן, גם כדי למנוע בושה קלה כזו אמרה תורה שיחזרו מעורכי המלחמה עוד שלוש סוגים, עד כדי כך, מקפידה תורה על כבודו של יהודי!

This is an amazing lesson in Ahavat Yisrael. The Torah is willing to weaken the army just for the sake of preserving someone's dignity.

In other words, the internal damage that will be caused by shaming a group of Jews is more dangerous than the external threat of an invading army. Therefore, it is worthwhile to weaken the army for the sake of preserving peace among the Jewish people.

(At the very beginning of this year, we read a famous talk which focused on the fact that we don't pray for rain until the travelers from the Temple reach their homes. The Rebbe used this concept to demonstrate the importance of Ahavat Yisrael.

However, it seems that this talk takes it to a new level. First of all, the sacrifice is greater. They are not only withholding their prayers for rain, but are actively weakening their army during wartime. Secondly, they are not doing it for holy pilgrims returning from the Temple, but for people that are afraid of their destiny because of the sins they committed).