

Fascinating INSIGHTS

ד' כסלו תשפ"ד
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Israeli Soldiers

In an interview R' Ovadia Yosef gave when he was elected chief rabbi, the interviewer from the newspaper Yediot Achronot asked him if he believed that yeshiva students should be exempt from serving in the IDF? He answered, "Yes! We believe that the Torah over which these students toil day and night protects the IDF soldiers in whatever battles they may face, as it says (Zecharya 4:6), *lo b'chayil v'lo b'koach ki im b'ruchi amar Hashem* ("not through might or power but through My spirit said Hashem")."¹



During Operation Defensive Shield in 2002 (which was a large-scale operation during the second intifada) that occurred during the Pesach intercession, R' Ovadia Yosef publicly called all yeshiva students to cancel Pesach vacation and "report for duty at the 'army base' of Torah study." R' Ovadia said, "The soldiers of the IDF do holy work, safeguarding Israel. Only because the IDF soldiers put their lives on the line to guard us can we study Torah, can we daven in shul and the like. Without the army, would our enemies let us sit peacefully and learn Torah? No! Only

¹ When a Channel 12 News reporter spotted a secular Jew among the hundreds of thousands of participants at the funeral of R' Chaim Kanievsky, he asked him his reason for being there. The man said, "I merited to be by R' Kanievsky about 20 years ago in the middle of the night. It was an experience not possible to explain." He then said, "I view all the righteous *avreichim* here around us as indispensable. Toras Yisrael is what holds up the

world, what enables it to exist." The secular Jew then spoke aloud to the Chareidim surrounding him: "Chizku V'imtzu. Continue in your path. I served in the IDF for 25 years. I'm still friends with IDF Chief Aviv Kochavi. And I'm telling you that without you, Am Yisrael wouldn't continue to exist. Without the light that you spread, Am Yisrael couldn't exist."

through the kindness of the IDF soldiers is this feasible. May Hashem guard them forever! May they return to their homes to live good, peaceful lives! Everyone must appreciate this and bless and pray for them. If you see a soldier, you can only kiss him: After all, he is protecting every Jew in Israel with his very life.”

How should we view those Israeli soldiers who have been killed while trying to defend their Jewish brethren?

A student in the Kol Torah yeshiva in Yerushalayim approached his Rosh Yeshiva, R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, and asked him if he may leave his Torah studies in the yeshiva to travel to the North in order to daven at the graves of tzadikim in the Galil. R' Auerbach answered, “It is better to say in yeshiva, and study Torah.” The student asked further, “Isn't there a time I could go to visit the graves of tzadikim?” R' Auerbach answered, “In order to daven at the graves of tzadikim, one doesn't have to travel up to the Galil. Whenever I feel the need to daven at the graves of tzadikim, I go to Mount Herzl, [the national cemetery for fallen IDF soldiers in Yerushalayim], to the graves of the soldiers... who fell 'Al Kidush Hashem.”²



Universally Unified

Many times throughout our history, it has been our enemies who caused us to have unity and come close to Hashem. One instance of this is during the Holocaust. When the Jews were in the cattle cars, they were tightly packed for hours, without any food, drinks, or light. They endured terrible suffering. When the trains stopped, they disembarked in the freezing weather. The Nazis sometimes handed out one blanket to every sixth person to share with the others. The person who received the blanket had the option of keeping the blanket for himself or sharing it with five others. They chose to share it.

Such unity has been displayed in the war in Israel in 2023. The unity amongst the Jewish people as a result of this war is astounding, especially considering the fact that just prior to the outset of the war, the state of Israel was at the brink of a civil war.

Here are just some of the ways the unity was showcased.

1) Following the announcement that there were 6,000 families that needed housing due to being evacuated as a result of the war, all were swiftly

accommodated within the Jewish community in just 45 minutes.

2) Jews waited five hours in the hospital to donate blood.

3) Mothers who were nursing offered their mothers milk to those who needed it.

4) Since, at first, children were home from school, girls were paired up to help out whose husbands were learning.

5) Over 100 Tel Aviv restaurants quickly sought to acquire kosher certification so they could cook meals for soldiers, hospitals, survivors and the evacuees of the Gaza border communities. The city's Ha'achim restaurant alone managed to serve nearly 20,000 meals daily, with the help of around 300 volunteers. Additionally, various other Tel Aviv restaurants were also providing thousands of meals every day.

6) During this war in 2023, Israeli soldiers were thunderstruck at the abundant care packages sent from Jews in Israel and abroad.³ One soldier wrote, “People are sending a staggering amount of donations. Socks and t-shirts. Home-baked goods. Cases of food from restaurants. And it always comes with a note: ‘We appreciate you. We support you. We love you.’ I am hearing the same messages from my friends in America. Every text and note makes a big difference. And it's something everyone can do. It really matters.”

7) Avreichim and many others davened, learned and recited Tehillim for the protection of the soldiers and the Jewish people. Many were paired up with a name of a soldier or someone who was wounded in the war so that they can daven, learn and say Tehillim for them.



8) Many tens of thousands of pairs of tzitzis were requested for IDF soldiers who never wore them in their entire lives. Likewise there was a tremendous request for Tefillin and mezuzos from those in the army.

Based on what we said above, we can explain⁴ ופרעה הקריב — Paroh brought us close to Hashem, through our teshuva, as he and his army instilled fear in us.⁵

Likewise, in the story of Purim, Haman was the cause of our having unity. He is therefore called צר היהודים, which connects to וצרת הכסף,⁷ alluding to our unity which was brought about as a result of him. That unity is displayed with Mishloach Manos and Matanos L'evyonim.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of six books including the recently released Dazzling Money Insights. His writings, some of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kinyat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

² Sefer Oro Shel Olam, p. 380.

³ After the horrific attack in Israel on Simchas Torah in 2023, a Jew at work in the US was asked by a co-worker, “Do you have any family in Israel?” He responded, “Only a few million.”

⁴ Shemos 14:10.

⁵ Shemos Rabba 21:5.

⁶ Esther 3:10. The simple meaning is, “The enemy of the Jews.”

⁷ Devarim 14:25.