



Bet Horaah

בית הוראה

Shaarei Ezra

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Parshat Ki Tisa

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Candle Lighting: 5:29pm

Shabbat ends: 6:30pm

R"Y 7:02pm

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EXPLORING THE DEPTHS OF SOLDIERS' FEAR IN WAR.

WRITTEN BY RABBI SHAY TAHAN

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Soldiers in war zones face a myriad of challenges that evoke deep existential fear. The constant exposure to life-threatening situations, where survival is uncertain, is a primary source of this fear. Combat stress compounds this, inundating soldiers with the overwhelming sights, sounds, and chaos of battle. Witnessing suffering, the fear of injury or death, and the loss of comrades all contribute to intense emotional distress.

Moreover, soldiers often experience traumatic events that leave lasting psychological scars. Whether it's the loss of friends, civilians, or innocent lives, these experiences deepen the sense of fear and anxiety. In the midst of war, soldiers often find themselves in situations where they have little control, such as being outnumbered or unable to predict enemy movements. This powerlessness and uncertainty heighten feelings of vulnerability.

The moral and ethical dilemmas of war add another layer of fear. Soldiers may grapple with following orders that conflict with their values or witnessing atrocities committed by their own or enemy forces. These moral quandaries induce feelings of guilt, shame, and existential dread.

The unpredictability of war zones contributes significantly to fear. From ambushes to improvised explosive devices (IEDs), the fear of the unknown lurks in every corner. This pervasive sense of anxiety is further compounded by the possibility of facing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD, with its intrusive memories, nightmares, and hyper vigilance, can amplify fear and lead to long-term psychological distress.

Indeed, the Torah acknowledges these fears and recognizes that there are two types of people: those who can overcome their fears and are therefore guided by the Torah on how to do so, and those who cannot overcome their fear. Thus, they are excused and forbidden from joining the war.

The Gemara (סוטה מד, ב) explains that one can assess whether they are equipped to fight a war by observing their reactions during confrontations. If they find themselves trembling from fear or experiencing accidents, then they know they shouldn't

fight in the war. Such a person isn't completely excused to go home, as they are still obligated to assist the fighters by delivering food and preparing the roads for battle as needed (סוטה מד, א).



The Torah Commandment.

Although overcoming feelings of fear is extremely challenging, it remains a Torah obligation for those who are able to do so, as the Torah states: "כי תצא למלחמה וגו'... לא תירא מהם" (דברים כא, א). One may still ask how is it possible to overcome fear when a soldier is in battle, experiencing extreme conditions and scenes. The answer to this dilemma is found in the Torah, where one must strengthen their belief in Hashem at that moment. This belief and trust will pave the way for victory through Hashem's assistance.

Rabbenu Yona (שערי תשובה פי"ג אות לג) further elaborates on this concept: "This pasuk instructs us not to fear even when encountering formidable adversaries. It serves as a reminder that when facing adversity, one must internalize the belief in divine salvation and place trust in it. As it says in Tehilim (פ"ט, י): "His salvation is near those who fear Him," emphasizing the proximity of divine deliverance to those who hold reverence for Him. Similarly, Yeshayahu (נא, יב) poses the question, "What scares you that you fear man who must die," challenging the notion of fearing mortal beings rather than placing trust in the eternal power of Hashem." The obligation to not fear is emphasized to the soldiers before going to war by the priest called Meshuach Milchama. He gathers the people and declares to those with soft hearts to leave

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the battlefield, as the verse states: "The officials shall go on addressing the troops and say, 'Is there anyone afraid and disheartened? Let him go back to his home, lest his fear infect his comrades, causing their courage to falter like his'".

The Rambam (הלכות מלכים פרק ז' הלכה ג') says: When the armies assume battle positions and will shortly join in war, the Meshuach Milchamah stands in an elevated place before the array of the entire army. He addresses them in Hebrew: "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. Hashem, your God, is the One accompanying you to do battle for you against your enemies to deliver you [victory]" (דברים כ, ג-ד).

Afterwards, another priest of a lower rank proclaims them to the people in a loud voice. The officer announces on his own initiative: 'Is there a man who is afraid or faint-hearted? Let him go home...'

Those announcements are meant to separate the brave soldiers from those who are weak at heart and aren't able to face a sword without fear. Those who are naturally fearful cannot join the force, as they would not benefit the battle but rather cause defeat. If these individuals decide to stay and fight, they aren't allowed on the battlefield to retreat, because this will cause others to feel scared as well, leading to a downfall for the entire army.

The Rambam states (הלכות מלכים פרק ז' הלכה ד'): "After these individuals (the weak) depart from the battlefield, the army is arrayed again and commanding officers are appointed at the head of the nation. Powerful officers with iron axes in their hands are placed in the rear of each array of troops. If a person wants to leave the battle, they have permission to chop off his legs, for flight is the beginning of defeat."

Rashi as well emphasizes that very point (דברים כ, ט).

There are also various other distracting things that a soldier might have on his mind, such as a person who just married a new wife, built a new house, or opened a new business. These distractions can cause him not to focus on the war, thus leading to defeat (ח. וספורנו כ, ה וכן בגור אריה). The Torah recognizes these feelings and obligates him to leave the battlefield.

Managing Fear: Dealing with Soldiers Who Are Scared.

Since there are indeed many things to be afraid of, if the soldiers were to start thinking about all those things, they would become frightened and wouldn't be able to fight the war and emerge victorious. Therefore, they are commanded to remove all personal thoughts from their minds and concentrate solely on the battlefield.

The Rambam (הלכה טז) writes:

"Once a soldier enters the throes of battle, he should rely on the Savior of Israel in times of need. He should realize that he is

fighting for the sake of Hashem's Name. Therefore, he should place his soul in his hand and not show fright or fear. He should not worry about his wife or children. On the contrary, he should wipe their memory from his heart, removing all thoughts from his mind except the war. Anyone who begins to feel anxious and worry in the midst of battle to the point where he frightens himself violates a negative commandment, as it is written (דברים כ, ג) : 'Do not be faint-hearted. Do not be afraid. Do not panic and do not break ranks before them.'

Furthermore, he is responsible for the blood of the entire Jewish nation. If he is not valiant, if he does not wage war with all his heart and soul, it is considered as if he shed the blood of the entire people...

In contrast, anyone who fights with his entire heart, without fear, with the intention of sanctifying Hashem's name alone, can be assured that he will find no harm, nor will bad overtake him. He will be granted a proper family and gather merit for himself and his children forever. He will also merit eternal life in the world to come".

Tactics of War.

Another concept that the Torah reveals to us is that often the enemy, in reality, is weak but employs various methods to instill fear in us. These tactics include the use of loud sounds, displays of strength, threats, and warnings. Thus, the Torah advises us not to be alarmed by these empty threat methods.

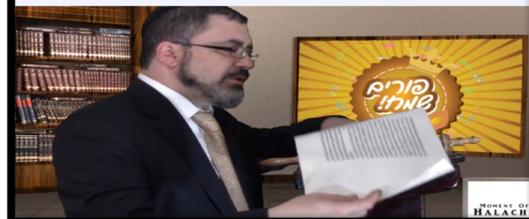
The Torah states: "Let not your heart faint; fear not, nor be alarmed, and do not be terrified of them" (דברים כ, ג). Rashi explains that the enemy employs four forms of psychological warfare, and the verse offers reassurance not to succumb to fear:

- "Let not your heart faint" in response to the neighing of horses and the sharpening of the enemy's swords.
- "Fear not" in reaction to the clashing of shields and the noise of their boots.
- "Nor be alarmed" by the sound of trumpets.
- "Do not be terrified" in the face of the enemy's shouts.

Since much of that fear is not genuine but rather a tactic to intimidate us, knowing that fear and retreat are the pathways to defeat. Once we understand that much of what the enemy does is empty threats meant to instill fear in us, we can overcome it much easier since we'll understand their tactics.

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RABBI SHAY TAHAN
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THE PARADOX AND ILLUSION OF VICTORY.

When Moshe Rabenu was ready to descend from Har Sinai to the nation, he met Yehoshua on the way. Suddenly, they heard the sound of people shouting. Yehoshua turned to Moshe and said, "This is the sound of battle in the camp." Although the sound was actually the people celebrating around the Egel HaZahav, Yehoshua mistook it for the cheering of people who had just won a battle (רש"י- שהיו מריעים ושמחים) (וצוחקים).

Upon hearing this from Yehoshua, Moshe was taken aback and rebuked him, saying ירושלמי (תענית פ"ד ה"ה) "How will you lead the people after me if you cannot differentiate between sounds? This isn't the sound of people cheering for victory or people screaming from a lost battle.

It is a distressing sound of people committing various sins (רש"י). Moshe knew that this wasn't the sound of a battle because he had godly knowledge and was equipped with all the knowledge of the world (רמב"ן). This raises a couple of questions. Firstly, the sound of people cheering for victory and people crying for defeat is very different. So why couldn't Yehoshua tell the difference, and why did Moshe need godly knowledge to distinguish it?

If the sound was distant and faint, which is why Yehoshua couldn't discern it, then why did Moshe rebuke him? If it was too far away to tell the difference, why correct Yehoshua at all? Additionally, Yehoshua only perceived it as the sound of people cheering and not crying for defeat (רש"י), So why did Moshe tell him it wasn't a sound of winning or defeat, especially when Yehoshua didn't think it was a sound of defeat?

Here we come to a profound understanding of psychological war-



fare that we are very familiar with in today's era. In the war of Israel against their enemies, even if Israel completely destroys them in every aspect, leaving them totally defeated, on the day the war ends, the few enemies who are left may come out to the streets celebrating their "victory." This can leave you scratching your head, wondering what type of victory this could be. Regardless of the actual results of the war, we often see this as the final result.

Of course, they weren't victorious in any way, but in order to keep going on and to elevate their shattered honor, they feel the need to celebrate. This is a fascinating aspect of human psychology, where even in the face of defeat, the need to save face and maintain a sense of pride can lead to actions that seem paradoxical to an outside observer.

This seems to be what is going on in the conversation between Moshe and Yehoshua. As the sound emerged, it was one of cheering and happiness. Yehoshua says he hears the sound of people celebrating victory, but Moshe tells him he is wrong. It's not a sound of people celebrating victory or being defeated, but rather making a belief that they are victorious. Instead, it's a sound of people sinning.

This also explains what the Gemara says, that Moshe had the godly knowledge of recognizing the different types of sounds. Since the people who bitterly lost a war were expressing the same happiness as if they had won, it was hard to tell the difference.

DEFENDING THE FAITH: HALACHA AND HASHKAFAT ON SELF-DEFENSE IN A DANGEROUS WORLD.

Previously, we have discussed the importance for the Jewish community to apply for a gun permit, emphasizing the necessity of being able to defend oneself and one's family should circumstances deteriorate, chas veshalom. In light of recent events and the growing demand within the Jewish community to seek gun permits, there are several halachic considerations that need to be addressed.

Armed with Halacha: Women, Weapons, and Self-Defense.

Firstly, let's examine the question of whether women are permitted to carry a gun.

The Torah prohibits men from wearing women's clothing and vice versa דברים אשה, ולא ילבש גבר שמלת אשה- (ב, ה).

One example is brought down in the Gemara (נדר נט, א): From where do we derive that a woman should not go out to battle with weapons? The Torah says, 'A man's attire shall not be on a woman.' And the Rambam specifies this as stated in the halacha (שולחן ערוך יו"ד סימן קפב ס"ה): "A woman may not clothe



herself in men's clothing, e.g., put on her head a mitre or helmet, or wear armor, and so on." The rationale behind this is as the Gemara states (קדושין ב, ב): men are the ones who engage in warfare, not women; therefore, arms are designated for men, and women should not carry them under this restriction.

Of course, the primary allowance for a woman to be armed is for protection. When Chazal initially prohibited her from carrying a gun, it was not in situations of danger, as in such cases almost all the mitzvot of the Torah are overridden to save one's life. Therefore, if a woman lives in a dangerous area or travels through such places, she must be able to protect herself if needed.

Rabbi Yehuda HaChasid writes in Sefer Chassidim (סימן ר'): "Women who are traveling on the road and are concerned lest gentiles encounter them, it is permissible for them to walk in foreign clothing and to gird themselves with a sword."

However, there are some more leniencies for women to carry a gun, as discussed by Rav Moshe Feinstein (אגרות משה או"ח ח"ד) and Harav Ovadia Yosef (יו"ד ח"ה סימן נה) (סימן עה אות ג').

He explains that the prohibition mentioned applies only to

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those who wear clothing of the opposite gender in order to appear as if they are of that gender or to look pretty (ש"ך סימן ט"ז, קפב). However, if the clothing is worn for a different purpose, such as a person who wears a women's hat to protect themselves from the sun or cold weather (when they do not have a men's hat available), then they do not violate this prohibition. Accordingly, a gun, which is not for the purpose of looking good or appearing as a man, would be permitted.

Although halacha initially prohibited women from carrying guns, it was due to the historical context where men carried guns to show off and appear strong, which falls under the category of "for beauty."

Let's now explore the issue of carrying a gun on Shabbat.

The question here is divided into two parts. One question: there is an issue of Muktzeh (items that are forbidden to handle on Shabbat), whether it is permitted to move a weapon in general. And the second question is a matter of transferring an object from a private domain to a public domain where there is no Eruv (an enclosure that allows carrying on Shabbat).

Rav Elyashiv (קובץ תשובות ח"ג סימן נא) writes that a weapon's status is like a tool whose primary function is forbidden (כלי (שמלאכתו לאיסור), and it is permissible to move it for its own sake and its place.

Let us explain the matter.

The Rambam writes: "The Sages prohibited moving certain things on Shabbat in the manner that one does during the week. And why did they touch upon this prohibition? They said, 'If the prophets warned and commanded that your walking on Shabbat should not be like your walking during the week, and not your conversation on Shabbat like your conversation during the week, as it says: 'the more so, your carrying on Shabbat should not be like your carrying during the week, so that it not be like a weekday in your eyes, and one will come to carry [objects] and to repair vessels from place to place or from house to house, or to build walls.' And similarly [concerning] seeking things to involve oneself with, and he will find that he did not observe the Sabbath, and he nullified the reason stated in the Torah: 'So that you will rest.'"

The Ra'aved added that they decreed this due to concern lest one forget and carry the item that is being moved from one's hand to a public domain.

Now, there are several categories of Muktzeh, and for each category, there are different laws and regulations, and they are divided into three types, although there are more.

One of those categories of Muktzeh is a utensil whose primary function is forbidden, which is a tool designed for use in a forbidden manner on Shabbat. This type of Muktzeh is permissible to move for its own sake and its place. Meaning, let's take for example scissors, which are considered muktzeh. Although one isn't allowed to use them for their primary use, such as cutting paper or fabric, using them to cut vegetables is permissible.

Let's return to our matter. As we explained above, a weapon is a tool whose primary function is forbidden, still it is permitted to move it for its own sake, and included in this is carrying it so that it is available for use in a time of emergency, chas veshalom.

Regarding the law of carrying into a public domain, the Shulchan Aruch writes (או"ח סימן ש"ט): "A man may not go out with a sword, a bow, a shield, a spear or with any item that is not an adornment". So it turns out that it is prohibited to go out with weapons since they are taken out in a way that is not the normal manner of dress.

None the less the Aruch Hashulchan (או"ח סימן שא סעיף נא) explains that this prohibition was stated only for ordinary people, but a soldier, a police officer, and the like are permitted to carry weapons since they are considered part of their clothing. However, Rav Elyashiv disagreed with this opinion, so there is no permission for this.

Therefore the only permission to carry the weapon in a place with no eruv is where there may be danger or risk of terrorism, then certainly for the purpose of saving lives one is permitted to do whatever is necessary. However, in a city with an Eruv, there is no prohibition against carrying the weapon for self-defense.

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