

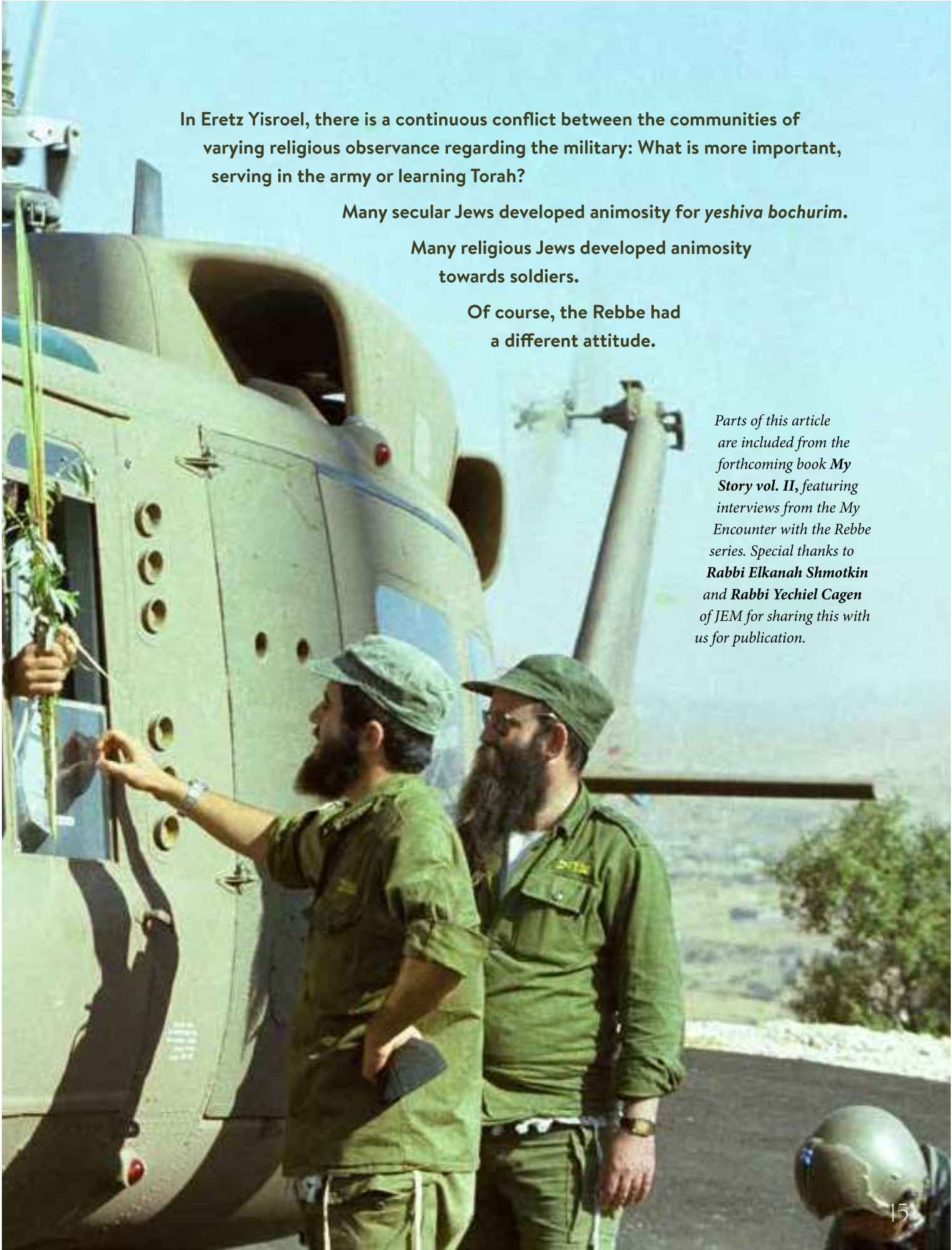
לזכות ילדינו היקרים
יצחק צבי, מנחם מענדל, אברהם מאיר,
יהודית, וישראל ארי' לייב שיחיו
שיגדלו להיות חסידים
יראי שמים ולמדנים

נדפס ע"י
הרה"ת ר' אליעזר וזוגתו מרת חנה שיחיו
וואלף

KEEP YOUR CAMP HOLY

THE REBBE
AND THE IDF

19 TISHREI 5744, TZVIKA FRIEDMAN VIA JEM 150368



In Eretz Yisroel, there is a continuous conflict between the communities of varying religious observance regarding the military: What is more important, serving in the army or learning Torah?

Many secular Jews developed animosity for *yeshiva bochurim*.

Many religious Jews developed animosity towards soldiers.

Of course, the Rebbe had a different attitude.

*Parts of this article are included from the forthcoming book **My Story vol. II**, featuring interviews from the My Encounter with the Rebbe series. Special thanks to **Rabbi Elkanah Shmotkin** and **Rabbi Yechiel Cagen** of JEM for sharing this with us for publication.*

THE SPECIAL HAKAFAH

It was Simchas Torah night in 5737*. 770 was packed to the rafters. The energy was palpable; as *hakafah* followed *hakafah*, the Rebbe encouraged the singing to ever greater heights.

Suddenly, the Rebbe motioned to the *gabbai*, Reb Moshe Pinchas Katz. He informed him that he would say a few words before the fifth *hakafah*.

As soon as the *gabbai* announced, “*Ad kan, hakafah daled*,” the Rebbe began making his way to the edge of his platform. In a loud voice, the Rebbe declared:

“During these days of *galus*, there are those who protect their fellow Jews in *chutz laaretz*, and those who protect their brethren in the Holy Land by risking their lives on the borders. They are the *levush* for Hashem’s constant protection...

“All those who are or were in the army should go to the fifth *hakafah*, with the *niggun*, ‘*Hoshia es amecha*.’”

As thousands of *anash* and *bochurim* watched, a large group of Chassidim — soldiers and veterans — made their way to the center of the shul. They were led by Reb Zushe Wilmovsky, who had fought in the War of Independence. The Rebbe personally led the *pesukim*, and then began singing, “*Hoshia es amecha*...”¹

That Simchas Torah came a short time after the Entebbe raid. Terrorists had hijacked an airplane full of passengers, and in a move that amazed the entire world, the IDF flew to Uganda and



REB ZUSHE WILMOVSKY (CENTER) WHILE SERVING DURING THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, CIRCA 5708-9.

rescued the hostages with minimal casualties.

As the Jews of Eretz Yisroel celebrated the soldiers and their victory, some rabbonim decried them. It was the work of the Satan, they said, because Hashem does not do miracles through “*reshaim*” — the secular soldiers of the Zionist state.

Over the next few months, the Rebbe publicly and forthrightly rejected those claims. It was a clear miracle by the hand of Hashem, the Rebbe said, and the soldiers who risked their lives for their fellow Jews had a tremendous merit.²

The Rebbe’s opinion came as no surprise. Throughout the years, the Rebbe’s high regard for the soldiers and their *mesiras nefesh* was well-known. They courageously placed themselves in harm’s way to protect fellow Jews, and that was a profound *zechus* — regardless of

questions regarding Eretz Yisroel and Zionism.

The Rebbe described their battles as a *milchemes mitzvah*. A well-known rav once asked the Rebbe how that could be so, if the Rambam writes that soldiers in a *milchemes mitzvah* must “have in mind to sanctify Hashem’s name?”³

The Rebbe responded, “They are not religious before they go out to protect and perhaps afterwards as well, but some of them are changed and inspired in times of clear danger. If so, at that moment, they are considered to be fighting Hashem’s wars.”⁴

The amazing miracles experienced by the soldiers in the IDF were specifically because of their special merit. “These are Yidden who go on complete *mesiras nefesh*,” the Rebbe said, “so they are clearly worthy *keilim* for open miracles to take place through them.”⁵

THE UNIT DOESN'T MATTER

After the Yom Kippur War, a soldier wrote to the Rebbe about his disappointment that due to health issues, he could not serve in a combat position.

The Rebbe responded:

“A soldier’s mission is obviously to be of the greatest benefit to the army (and not to find opportunities to display his power and fearlessness). Sometimes, it is specifically your unit that brings the greatest benefit, as long as you serve there **without** bitterness.”

(*Igros Kodesh* vol. 29 pg. 119)

WHOSE POWER IS IT?

After the amazing victories during the Six Day War, many people began seeing the IDF as a super-powerful force of protection, deliberately leaving out Hashem’s name.

But in the Rebbe’s *sichos* and letters, there is a recurring theme: The importance of remembering that their successes come directly from the hand of Hashem. And in order to merit Hashem’s continued blessings, the Rebbe often pointed out, it was important for the army to fulfill the obligations of “*Ve’haya machanecha kadosh.*”

As an army of Jews protecting the Jewish people in Eretz Yisroel, the Rebbe always looked for ways to enhance the level of Yiddishkeit observed in the military. Every Lubavitcher who served in the army was tasked by the Rebbe with ‘making a *sevivah*’ of Yiddishkeit around him, and the Rebbe strongly supported the Rabbanut of the IDF for their work in this regard.

A large number of the Rebbe’s *mivtzoim* campaigns actually began

in the army and remained a very large focus throughout the years. *Mivtza Tefillin* famously began for soldiers before the Six Day War.⁶ *Mivtza Chanukah* began in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, with a great emphasis on soldiers as well.⁷ *Mivtza Purim* — which began in the 5720s* — was a relatively minor project until the Rebbe expanded it to the military in 5731*.⁸ The *mivtzoim* of *bayis maleh sefarim* and *tzedakah* began with the Rebbe’s call following the Yom Kippur War that soldiers be given

sets of tefillin, siddurim, Tehillims and *tzedakah* pushkas [see later section].⁹ During the time of *Mivtza Sefer Torah*, which coincided with the time of the first Lebanon War, the Rebbe initiated a special campaign to write a *sefer Torah* for the soldiers.¹⁰

Many of these *mivtzoim* were personally subsidized by the Rebbe in part or in full, and the Rebbe always waited to receive detailed reports about them. On one notable occasion, when *bochurim* were stranded on *mivtzoim* in the Sinai Desert one Purim, the Rebbe waited until they arranged their own hookup before beginning the Purim *farbrengen* in 770!¹¹

These *mivtzoim* made a major impact. It bolstered the Yiddishkeit of the soldiers and gave them hope and encouragement during some very difficult times. The *bochurim* would bring the Rebbe’s words — sometimes messages directly from the Rebbe — to the soldiers, giving them strength from the knowledge



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that someone cared deeply for the sacrifice they were making.

Through these campaigns, the Rebbe was able to create a personal connection with countless Yidden in Eretz Yisroel; a connection that continued long after they finished their military service. For the rest of their lives, people recalled and cherished these positive experiences, and they influenced many aspects of their lives.

FINDING THE MIRACLE

In good times, the public sometimes needed to be reminded that success comes from Hashem. But the Yom Kippur War wasn't exactly a shining success, and people quickly remembered that

the IDF wasn't infallible. Many felt that the war didn't have miracles like the Six Day War, and began saying the opposite: "Why did Hashem abandon us, *r"l*?" This time, the Rebbe encouraged them, saying that Hashem's hand was still guiding them. The Rebbe pointed out that there were miracles that actually surpassed those of the previous war:

"After the Egyptians successfully crossed the Suez Canal, there was absolutely nothing stopping them from advancing all the way to Tel Aviv... For some inexplicable reason they stopped after advancing only 12 kilometers!

"History proves how great this miracle was. During World

GET USED TO THE LOOKS

The following paragraph was written in the Rebbe's letter that was sent to many injured soldiers.

"After you recover with Hashem's help, and return to normal life, you will no doubt need to get used to the way people react upon seeing you and your body's state...

"However, every upright, honest and grateful person will immediately recognize that you are someone who protected him and his family with literal self-sacrifice, to the point that an everlasting remembrance of your self-sacrifice was engraved in your body..."

(*Igros Kodesh* vol. 29
pg. 37-8)

War II the French built an impregnable defense line called the Maginot Line. A line of concrete fortifications, obstacles, and weapon installations so strong that the Bar Lev Line in the Sinai was nothing in comparison to it. The Nazis *ym*'s burst through the line with their powerful armor (similar to what the Egyptians did to the Bar Lev Line) and within a day they conquered all of France!"¹²

During the same period, the Rebbe spoke at length¹³ about the soldiers' morale. Thousands of young soldiers had died and many

more were injured, and as a result, the survivors' morale was very low. The army's view was that the soldiers needed entertainment. The other view — which the soldiers themselves expressed — was that they needed to be spiritually uplifted.

Instead of considering the issue theoretically, the Rebbe said, it must be approached scientifically. When finding the solution to a problem, the question is not what could or should work; it's what has worked in an identical situation in the past.

Throughout the generations, the Jewish people have sought strength in different ways; sometimes they looked for it in Torah, but other times — many other times — they searched other avenues, as far back as the golden calf.

History has shown that the single thing that has kept the Jewish nation alive was not a common language (there isn't one) nor a common dress (we don't have one), but the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvos. Anyone veering from that path either found their way back or assimilated. So when there is an issue of morale in a Jewish army, we must use the tried and true solution — strengthening Torah observance among the soldiers, thereby tapping into the secret weapon of the Jewish people.

More specifically, the Rebbe proposed that they should be given sets of tefillin, siddurim, Tehillims and tzedakah pushkas. Having them around would give the soldiers access to these materials, as well as serve as a physical reminder

to fulfill these mitzvos. Providing for their spiritual needs, the Rebbe said, will give the soldiers true meaning in their lives and energy in fulfilling their mission.

CONSTANT CONCERN

The Rebbe's profound love and concern for the soldiers was expressed in countless ways. When the Rebbe would speak about the question of returning land, he would often mention that soldiers had lost their lives conquering it. When soldiers and former soldiers would visit the Rebbe, they all felt the Rebbe's deep concern for their well-being. When the injured soldiers visited 770, the Rebbe extended an unprecedented welcome, delivering a *sicha* in *Lashon Hakodesh* and then approaching each one individually, heaping praise and encouragement on them.

This love was also extended to the families of the soldiers.

Several months after the Six Day War, the Rebbe's secretary Rabbi

Hodakov sent a letter to Tzach in Eretz Yisroel.

“I was informed that some 70 *almanos* of fallen soldiers are expecting children... Obviously, giving birth and taking care of the home and other children is all the more difficult without a husband and father... You will surely bring up the matter with the Chabad women who are active in this regard and figure out how to be of assistance. Obviously, when the children are born, Tzach will assist with arranging a *bris* with the full *hiddur* and joy.”¹⁴

After the Rebbe's instructions came to Eretz Yisroel, Mrs. Shifra Marozov — who lost her husband Dovid (see next section) in the fighting just two weeks earlier — took it upon herself and began reaching out to her fellow widows, encouraging them and finding ways to assist them.

One of the most famous events she would arrange with Tzach was the annual bar mitzvah for the orphans. Each year, a massive



BAR MITZVAH FOR THE SONS OF THE FALLEN SOLDIERS IN KEAR CHABAD. 5737.

WHERE IS ABBA?

After the Yom Kippur War, a young widow wrote the Rebbe a letter:

"I have a 7-year-old daughter and a 5-year-old son. How should I explain to them that their father's death in battle was G-d's will? My son asks, 'Why doesn't Moshiach come already?' My daughter asks, 'Where is my father?' What should I tell them?"

On the letter, the Rebbe wrote a few short lines:

"Explain to them (the truth) that some souls are so pure that Hashem wants them in Heaven, after they completed their mission on earth and defended the Jewish people in Eretz Yisroel. In Heaven, they seek out the wellbeing of all those close to them and especially their children, and ask Hashem that they be successful in their studies and behavior, etc. And when the children behave well, it gives *nachas* and pleasure to the soul, which continues to live and exist."

celebration would be held in Kfar Chabad, attended by thousands of people. The top-tier politicians of the country always made sure to show up, and the Rebbe would send the boys a personal message.

Many of these women began a personal connection to the Rebbe.

"In 1973," Mrs. Marozov related, "I traveled to the Rebbe. Before I went, I told my friends they could write letters that I would personally deliver to the Rebbe. Before long, I had a stack of letters addressed to the Rebbe. One woman, however, had written a note directly to me: 'Shifra, tell the Rebbe how broken I am. I want to get married already.'"

"I handed the Rebbe that letter as well, and he blessed her to find a marriage partner and create a home with him. Two weeks passed and she met an eligible bachelor, whom she soon married.

"She later remarked, 'You know who my *shadchan* was? The Lubavitcher Rebbe!'"¹⁵

LEARNING TORAH OR ENLISTING IN THE ARMY

After the Six Day War, the fighting continued sporadically on the Egyptian front. One day, Chassidim in Kfar Chabad received terribly shocking news. One of their own, Reb Dovid Marozov, had been killed in action while serving in the reserves.

The news sent shockwaves throughout the Chabad world, and during a *farbrengen* a short time later, the Rebbe spoke in a choked voice about "Chonye's *ainikel*" who had passed on while protecting his brothers and sisters.



Before mentioning his specific story, the Rebbe raised a general question: Who is more worthy? Soldiers who protect at the front, or *yeshiva bochurim* who protect the nation through Torah learning?

Each is important, the Rebbe noted. The Gemara tells us that Dovid Hamelech's Torah learning facilitated Yoav's wars, and Yoav's wars facilitated Dovid's Torah learning, in a Yissachar—Zevulun style relationship.

But can one be considered more worthy than the other? In the relationship between Yissachar and Zevulun, Zevulun is considered more important for facilitating Yissachar's learning. "How much more so regarding the soldiers," the Rebbe said, "who put their lives on the line to protect their fellow Jews from their enemies."¹⁶

Several months later the Rebbe again spoke about this topic, this time emphasizing the importance of Torah learning:

"Without Dovid's Torah learning, i.e. without Torah's assertion that the Holy Land belongs to the Holy Nation, Yoav wouldn't have any claim [with which to go to war]! In order for the army to be successful, there must be a counterpart who makes the spiritual effort! Just as someone who abandons the front is a deserter from the army, so too, if someone is in a yeshiva learning Torah for the sake of the Jewish nation but then closes his Gemara to prove that he can be a warrior too, he is a deserter as well!"¹⁷

Indeed, from the IDF's earliest days, *yeshiva bochurim* were

absolved of army service due to their Torah learning, and the Rebbe strongly criticized any attempt to draft them even for short periods of time. In 5733*, members of the *Mafdal* (a religious-Zionist political party) voiced support of *yeshiva bochurim* enlisting even if only for short periods of time, and the Rebbe pointed out how absurd it was.

“Moshe Dayan and Ben-Gurion absolved *yeshiva bochurim* of army service, and specifically those who speak in the name of Judaism support drafting the *yeshiva bochurim!*”¹⁸

However, when individuals left yeshiva to work, they put themselves in a different situation. An individual once wrote to the Rebbe, asking for advice in obtaining a *petur* in order to go to work. When he didn’t receive a response, he asked a friend to bring it up in *yechidus*.

The Rebbe’s answer wasn’t what he expected. The Rebbe quoted the Gemara, “מאי הוית דדמא דידך—סמיק טפי—Why do you think your blood is redder than another’s?” If he would learn Torah, the Rebbe said, he would be eligible for a deferment, but what right does he have to go to work while someone else puts his life on the line for his safety...¹⁹

In those years, Israeli *bochurim* would often go through elaborate schemes to obtain deferments that would allow them to leave the country and come to the Rebbe. However, the Rebbe never voiced support for those actions and always rejected them when asked.



BAR MITZVAH FOR THE SONS OF THE FALLEN SOLDIERS IN Kfar Chabad, 5737.

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REB BENTZION SHEMTOV (LEFT) AND REB MENDEL FUTERFAS SHARE A LIGHT MOMENT WITH A GROUP OF SOLDIERS, CHANUKAH 5734.

LEVI FREIDIN VIA JEM 288049

A *bochur* once wrote to the Rebbe regarding his legal problems as a result of those actions, and the Rebbe personally cut out that entire section of the letter before returning it with a *maaneh*. He wrote his answer (directing the *bochur* to consult with certain individuals) on a section of the letter which contained no incriminating details, and attached

it with a paperclip to the part of the letter which contained the *bochur*’s name.²⁰

WHEN WOMEN WERE DRAFTED...

When Rabbi Tuvia Blau was a young *bochur* and gradually becoming a Lubavitcher Chossid, he exchanged a fascinating correspondence with Reb Uriel

WHAT ARE THEY READING?

Rabbi Aron Noach Blasbalg served as a member of the board of directors of Poalei Agudas Yisrael for 25 years. In a 5716 yechidus with the Rebbe, he witnessed the Rebbe's great concern for the material and spiritual wellbeing of the soldiers of the IDF:*

I was among the delegation that was dispatched to meet with the Rebbe. The others included Rabbi Shabsi Shoenfeld, a Torah scholar who was a Gerrer chassid; Shimshon Heller, the secretary of the American branch of Poalei Agudas Yisroel; and Rolly Greisman, who was a major in the Israel army—he just happened to be in New York and he wanted to come along. The major was an imposing fellow, tall—six-foot-three, maybe—and he was dressed in a military uniform.

Soon he began to focus primarily on the IDF major about life in the IDF, for what seemed to me more than two hours.

When we arrived, the Rebbe invited us all to sit down, and he immediately started asking us questions, even before we had a chance to tell him why we were there. Soon he began to focus primarily on the major. He questioned him about life in the IDF for what seemed to me more than two hours. I believe we arrived at about 11 p.m., and the meeting lasted until about 2 a.m.

The Rebbe said to the major, “Soldiers have spare time. What do they read?”

The major answered that there is a kiosk on every base where newspapers and magazines are available practically for free.

“Are any religious newspapers available?” the Rebbe wanted to know.

It turned out that Hatzofeh was the only one.

“What about religious books?” the Rebbe pressed on. When he heard that they were not available, he said, “They must be made available. Maybe you can make it happen?”

The Rebbe started talking about military matters. He began to ask about the tanks and armored personnel carriers.

Then the Rebbe took the conversation in an entirely different direction. He started talking about military matters. He began to ask about the tanks and armored



personnel carriers. How thick were the protective steel plates on the sides? Were they straight or were they curved? Were they bent inwards or outwards?

The major wasn't sure about it all. He said that the light ones had plates x centimeters thick—I don't remember the numbers—while the heavy ones had plates double that.

“I don't understand it!” the Rebbe exclaimed, “Why don't they use heavier steel plates?”

The major had no answer.

Then he wanted to know what type of machine gun the Israeli army was using.

They had the Thompson machine gun at that time—American surplus from the Second World War.

“Why don't you buy machine guns from Sweden?” the Rebbe asked.

The major was surprised. “Why? What's wrong with this one?”

The Rebbe had a ready answer. The Swedish gun shoots many more bullets per minute than the Thompson. And it has a greater velocity also.

For two hours, the Rebbe went through all the armaments—the infantry, the armored corps, the paratroopers. He had questions regarding every single detail.

When we walked out, the major said, “I've never seen such a thing! Even in the IDF we don't have anybody who knows everything. Certain people know their areas, and others know other areas. But no one knows everything!”

But in that audience, the Rebbe did seem to know it all.

(Here's My Story, JEM, chabad.org/2599434)



Tzimmer,²¹ who served as a member of *mazkirus* at the time.

In one letter, he references one of the biggest issues of the day: *Giyus banos*. The Israeli army recruits women as well as men, and at some point, the government wanted to extend that obligation to religious women too. Needless to say, the entire *frum* world was up-in-arms. As far as they were

concerned, this was a matter of *yehareg v'aal yaavor*.

A massive solidarity-protest was held in New York for this issue — and a number of other religious concerns — but the Rebbe (obviously) didn't attend. In his letter, the young Tuvia asked why that was the case. Reb Uriel's answer sheds light on the Rebbe's broader perspective of the issue:

"First of all, although the Rebbe didn't attend, the *yeshiva bochurim* did — with permission... but on a more fundamental level, I happened to have a *yechidus* where the Rebbe shared his opinion of the matter with me. The *issur* of women in the military is in effect from when *any* woman is enlisted, whether religious or not, and the *issur* applies to men and women equally [to avoid being in an improper, mixed environment]. Why were they [the *frum* Jews] quiet a whole time, only speaking up when they wanted to draft the religious girls? If the mandatory draft of religious women will be abolished, the *frum* Jews will once again be quiet, *essentially agreeing to the general enlistment of women in the military...*"²²

As the Rebbe explained to Reb Uriel and also wrote in numerous letters,²³ the problem of *giyus banos* wasn't (only) about the effect it would have on the individual woman. In addition to the prohibition of *lo silbash*, it created a problem for everyone present. The Rebbe cited the *possuk* "*Vehaya machanecha kadosh*;" for the army to receive Hashem's blessings, it needed to be a holy place.

One young woman wanted to enlist in the army out of her own free will. In response, the Rebbe noted that based on the above-mentioned *pesukim*, "it is as if someone wants to put out a fire, *Rachmana litzlan*, by pouring kerosene on the flames, because kerosene is liquid—just like water..."²⁴



AVOIDING COMMITMENT

An American Jew once enlisted in the Rabbanut of the IDF and later came to the United States for a short visit. While on break, he decided to remain in America and abandon his remaining service. The Rebbe responded to his letter with the following *maaneh*:

כותב שהתחייב לצבא הגנה לישראל שבמשך זמן קצר יחזור לשרת שם בצבא משך כמה חודשים. כיוון שהמדובר ב"הגנה לישראל" - על כל פנים ספק דפיקוח נפש - וכבר התחייב - יברר פסק דין רב מורה הוראה בפועל מומחה - על פי שולחן ערוך מה יעשה.

2. הדגשתי על פי שולחן ערוך - כי ישנם אנשים שמבטלים התחייבות זו על ידי תעודה בלתי אמיתית וכיוצא בזה.
3. פשיטא שאין להנזכר לעיל שייכות כלל להיסח לציונות וכיוצא בזה - כי אם אך ורק בתוצאות התחייבות למוסד המגין בפועל על בני ישראל משכניהם ממש...

"You write that you committed to return to the IDF to serve for several months. Since they are the "Defense of Israel" — for at least a *safek pikuach nefesh* — and you already committed — you should ask a competent rav what you should do according to Shulchan Aruch.

"I emphasized according to Shulchan Aruch — because there are those who avoid this obligation through false documentation, etc.

"Obviously, this has nothing to do with the attitude towards Zionism, etc. — rather, it is specifically about your obligation to an institution that actively protects *B'nei Yisrael* — from their literal neighbors."

A rav was consulted and ruled that he didn't need to return because a) there was no active war, b) a *neder* that puts one in danger is void, and c) the IDF takes into account that new *olim* will fill in for those who return to their homelands.

The Rebbe responded as follows:

א... שהמדובר בהגנה ומשכניהם ממש - היינו מהעריבים השכנים (בירושלים העתיקה, ברמלה הסמוכה לתל אביב, בשכם וכו') שחלק חשוב מהם או רובם - מחבלים כדמוכח ממעשיהם, מדיבוריהם וכו' - מהיראה ללכת בירושלים

העתיקה בלילה וכו', ורק הידיעה שיש צה"ל (הגנה) מעכבתם. - ולא הזכרתי מלחמה כלל.

ב) התחייב (היינו - לבני אדם) להיות רב צבאי בצה"ל בירושלים וכו'. היינו: א) לא נדר לשמים ויכול לשאול להפירו, כי אם התחייב לבני אדם וגם להם שייכות בזה. ב) שאין בזה כל סכנה כלל בשבילו (כי אם רק כמדת כל בני ישראל תושבי ירושלים).

ג) בהנ"ל אין מקום לשאלה הכל [האם כל] אחד ואחד מחוייב להתחייב... שכבר התחייב ונתקבל.

ד) אפילו אם מנהל המשרד [הצבאי] שקיבלו - יבטל התחייבותו - קרוב לוודאי שעל פי שולחן ערוך - אין לזה תוקף, כיוון שתוקפו על פי שולחן ערוך תלויה בהנהגתו על פי חוקי המשרד - ובהם שאסור לבטל מפני רגש ידידות דהמקבל להמבקש, או נוחיות דהמבקש וכו'.

"We are dealing with protecting [them] from their actual neighbors — from the neighboring Arabs (in the Old City of Yerushalayim, Ramle near Tel Aviv, Shechem, etc.) of which many or most are terrorists, as evident from their actions and words, etc. — from the fear of walking in the Old City of Yerushalayim at night, etc., and only their awareness of IDF ("defense") restrains them. — I didn't mention war at all.

"You committed (i.e. to people) to be a military rabbi in Yerushalayim, etc. Meaning: 1) It is not a *neder* between you and Hashem which you can revoke, rather a commitment to human beings who have a relation [to the matter] as well. 2) It poses no danger at all to you (more than the danger posed to all Jewish residents of Yerushalayim).

"There is no place here for the question as to whether all people are obligated to enlist... because you already committed and were accepted.

"Even if the chief of the department who accepted you will absolve you of your obligation, it is very likely that according to Shulchan Aruch it has no validity, because its validity according to Shulchan Aruch depends on the laws of the Ministry — including the fact that it is forbidden to absolve a commitment based on a personal relationship, or the petitioner's convenience, etc."

LESSONS FROM THE MILITARY

In many letters, the Rebbe points out several lessons we can learn specifically from an army. Here are two of them:

“The training of a military imbues the soldiers with a nature to immediately carry out the mission with *kabbalas ol* and self-sacrifice... *naaseh* before *nishmah*.

“And another important point: A mission is not the soldier's personal matter. It impacts the survival of the entire army... Therefore the soldier carries it out without questioning whether it or its components are important. Only the commander-in-chief truly understands the importance of every single detail.

“These two concepts are the fundamental rules of life for every Yid who lives his day-to-day life in accordance with Hashem's Torah and mitzvos...”²⁵ **T**

1. Similar *hakafos* took place in the following years, as described in *yomanim*. For the full *sicha*, see Likkutei Sichos vol. 14 pg. 444.

2. For the Rebbe's approach to Entebbe, see “*Against All Odds*,” Derher Sivan 5775

3. Hilchos Melachim 7:15

4. Hiskashrus issue 41 pg. 14

5. Toras Menachem 5742 vol. 3 pg. 1731

6. See “*Reconnecting*,” Derher Iyar 5777.

7. See “*Illumination*,” Derher Kislev 5776.

8. See “*Orah Vesimcha*,” Derher Adar 5775.

9. See “*Redefining the Home*,” Derher Teves 5777..

10. See “*Peace in the Galilee*,” Derher Nissan 5779

11. See Derher Adar 5775 pg. 20.

12. Sichos Kodesh 5734 vol. 1 page 136

13. Sichos Kodesh 5734 vol. 1 p. 148-158.

See also Igros Kodesh vol. 29 pg. 41

14. Hiskashrus issue 41 pg. 14

15. chabad.org/4077108.

16. 14 Tammuz 5727. Toras Menachem vol. 50 pg. 241

17. 6 Tishrei 5728. Toras Menachem vol. 51 pg. 72-4

18. Vayakhel 5733. Toras Menachem vol. 71 pg. 205. See also pg. 233, and vol. 72 pg. 31

19. Hiskashrus issue 41 pg. 13

20. Heard in first person. Name withheld upon request.

21. To read about this fascinating personality, read “*Devoted Chossid, Man of the World*,” Derher Sivan 5778.

22. Igros Chossid pg. 35-6

23. See Igros Kodesh vol. 15 pg. 252 and vol. 12 pg. 33

24. Igros Kodesh vol. 23 pg. 89-90

25. Igros Kodesh vol. 29 pg. 35



2 KISLEV 5734, LEVI FREIDIN VIA JEM 273953

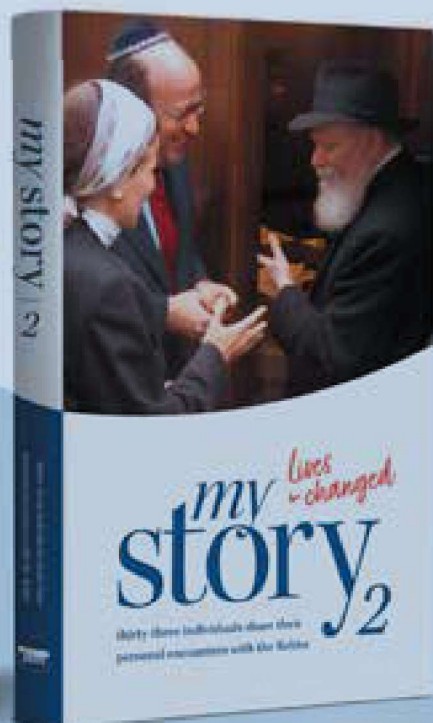


28 KISLEV 5744, TZVIKA FRIEDMAN VIA JEM 150475

One of the individuals through whom the Rebbe had a major impact on the wellbeing of the IDF soldiers was **Rabbi Mordechai Piron**, the Chief Military Rabbi of the IDF from 1971 to 1977. Rabbi Piron enjoyed a longstanding close relationship with the Rebbe, and he related some of the details of the programs the Rebbe initiated with his help.

His full story will be released in the upcoming *My Story* vol. II published by JEM, based on his interview with JEM's *My Encounter* team.

The following are some selections of his story from the upcoming book:



During one audience – in 1973 – the Rebbe spoke about how I could instill the spirit of Torah into the soldiers of the IDF. He said, “By force, you will achieve nothing. The way to persuade people is by showing them the richness of the Torah.” I recall that he also said, “The State of Israel exists today, but it faces many challenges, because so many of the gentile nations are not ready to accept the fact that the Jewish people have a state and that we will continue to flourish here.”

In practical terms, he convinced me – because he was so adamant about it – that every unit in the IDF must have a pair of *tefillin* (in addition to a small library of Jewish holy books, as well as a charity box), so that whenever a soldier wanted to don *tefillin*, it would be available to him. As a result, we brought in Chabad *chasidim* to Tzrifin, the main IDF base, to stand there and offer *tefillin* to many soldiers, who accepted the idea good-naturedly, even happily, and were willing to do it.

At that time, as now, there were many Chabad *chasidim* serving in the IDF, and the Rebbe asked me more than once: “Did you meet Chabad soldiers? How do these soldiers behave? What do they do? How are they? How can we help them?”

I was happy to report that the Chabad soldiers were sturdy, serious, obedient, and that they wanted to continue in the spirit of Chabad.

When I did meet such soldiers, I would tell them, “I visited the Rebbe,” and I could see how impressed they were by that – for them, this was a tremendous thing. And they would ask me, “What happened? What did you talk about?” So I would tell them what I could, and this strengthened them.

The *tefillin* campaign was very successful, as was the Rebbe’s campaign to affix *mezuzot* throughout

the IDF. The Rebbe considered this very important, and he urged me to get it done. And so I did. In a joint effort with Rabbis Ephraim Wolff and Shlomo Maidanchik, I put up about 60,000 *mezuzahs* throughout the IDF facilities. Afterwards, I got a letter from the Rebbe indicating that he was pleased.

One day during the thick of the *mezuzah* campaign, I received an urgent message that I must appear before the Chief of Staff. When I arrived, I found him sitting there with the head of the budget department. Both had very grim expressions on their faces. “We’ve discovered a major case of corruption in connection with the *mezuzahs*,” the budget head began. “We’re paying a great deal of money for each of these *mezuzah* scrolls. This is excessive – we can get them printed through our vendors for a fraction of the price!”

I had been nervous going in, but now I relaxed. I proceeded to explain that printed *mezuzah* scrolls could never be kosher – they had to be hand-written by a scribe or they would be worthless.

I made sure to pass on that story to the Rebbe so he could get a chuckle out of it. But, in truth, it wasn’t amusing – it was all very serious. This was an important, holy campaign which we launched on the Rebbe’s insistence. The Rebbe made it clear to me that just as the *mezuzah* guards the Jewish home, it also guards the barracks where the soldiers live. It guards the guardians of the Nation of Israel.



Among the Israelis who headed various ministries and departments, I was not the only one who would come to see the Rebbe. Indeed, I would venture to say that everybody who was anybody came.

I know for sure that there were officers at the highest level of the IDF, officials at the highest level of the Defense Ministry, and government ministers who were routinely in touch with the Rebbe. And they were impressed by him, just as I was. They asked his advice, which they took very, very seriously.

I assumed, though I cannot be sure, that from these visitors the Rebbe received his clear and up-to-date information of what was going on in Israel's armed services. He even had knowledge – which surprised me – about strategic and tactical matters. When I'd begin to explain to him some issue or another, he would already know all about it and even add to my words. When I'd look at him in surprise, impressed by how much he knew, he would just smile.

Once, he asked me what was happening with the peace talks. In my answer, I explained that if we decide to retreat from some places, it's possible that, by way of compromise, the Arabs might agree to a peace treaty – the hope being that if we show good will, so will they.

The Rebbe was completely opposed to this approach. He held that this was downright dangerous from a security perspective, and that we had no right to give up any portion of the Land of Israel. He explained that the Land belongs to G-d, and He chose to give it to the Jewish people. So what right do we have to annul His gift?



More than a few times, the Rebbe wrote to me. Some of these letters have been published, some not. Again and again, he pointed out that the IDF can be a forum for instilling Torah values in the youth of Israel.

In one letter, written in the summer of 1974, the Rebbe wrote: "As we discussed many times, soldiers are



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RABBI PIRON RECITING KADDISH AT THE FUNERAL OF PRESIDENT ZALMAN SHAZAR, 5734.

inclined and ready to receive guidance in matters of Torah." He went on to explain that just as our ancestors declared at Mount Sinai, "we will do and we will hear," putting action before understanding, so too soldiers follow orders first before understanding the reason for them. Secondly, in the army, the commanders make determinations based on the needs of entire battalions, or even the needs of the country at large, rather than on the needs of individual soldiers.

These are the prerequisites for receiving the Torah and its *mitzvot*: 1) putting action before understanding; and 2) that all Jews are responsible for one another. In the words of the Rambam [also known as Maimonides] it is a matter of Jewish law: "A person should always look at himself as equally balanced between merit and sin, and the world as equally balanced between merit and sin. If he performs one *mitzvah*, he tips his balance and that of the world to the side of merit and brings deliverance and salvation to himself and others."

In his correspondence, the Rebbe always urged us to seize the opportunity we had to make a difference and supported all of our efforts.

His support meant the most to me after the Yom Kippur War, when I was responsible for burying 2,300 fallen soldiers. That was my fate; that's what Divine Providence wanted of me. It was a very difficult period for me, as I had to visit many widows and mothers and tell them the catastrophic news.

It was a terrible time, and the Rebbe understood the toll this took on me. He tried to strengthen my spirits so that I shouldn't falter, telling me that what I did during the war was a very big *mitzvah*. And he predicted that Israel would continue to get stronger. After going through this horrendous war, in which we defied the odds and were victorious, we would become even stronger, with G-d's help, going from strength to strength. He emphasized this several times. To hear this was so important to me.

When the Rebbe passed away, I felt as if a member of my close family had died. Like my own father was no longer around... really and truly. I was devastated and lost for a long time. I couldn't grasp that he was gone. For some reason, I had convinced myself that such a great Jew would live forever.