

לזכות  
החיילת בצבאות ה'  
זעלדא רחל שתחי'  
לרגל יום הולדתה י"ד שבט

נדפס ע"י הוריה  
חיים אפרים חזגותו מרת  
ח' מושקא שיחי  
גאלדשטיין

# Let's Talk About Eretz Yisroel

THROUGH THE LENS  
OF THE REBBE'S TORAH

PART 5  
**Preserving  
Life**

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Special thanks to the Enduring Peace  
think-tank, JEM and Sichos in English.

**P**ikuach Nefesh—preserving human life—is one of the highest values in Judaism. Every mitzvah must be violated to protect life, with only the three exceptions of idolatry, adultery, and murder. Shabbos restrictions are waived when a health emergency arises, and a bris is postponed if there is the possibility of a life-threatening risk to the baby. In addition, Chazal proclaimed<sup>1</sup> that one who saves a life is considered to have saved an entire world.

However, there are times when applying this fundamental rule necessitates the taking of life.

The Gemara states<sup>2</sup>:

הָבֵא לְהוֹרֵגְךָ הַשֶּׁכֶם לְהוֹרֵגוֹ.

*If someone comes to kill you, rise up to kill him first.*

The same Torah which obligates a Yid to sacrifice his or her own life to not violate the prohibition against murder, obligates you to kill someone who is coming to kill you. The would-be murderer is designated as a *rodef* and everyone is obligated to stop the *rodef* at any cost, even to the point of killing the *rodef*.

If this is the case regarding individuals, how much more so is this the case regarding a community of over 5 million Yidden, *kein yirbu*. Ever since Lavan tried to destroy Yaakov Avinu and his family, our enemies have tried to do the same. As the Haggadah declares, “In every generation, there are those who seek to destroy us, but Hashem saves us from their hands.” However, we must employ every natural means possible to protect ourselves from those who seek to harm, and to do so preemptively.

This principle of preserving life through preemptively striking the enemy is enshrined in Halacha as an obligation to violate Shabbos. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, Siman 329:

נְכָרִים שֶׁצָרָו עַל עִירוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל... וְאִם בָּאוּ עַל עֵסְקֵי נַפְשׁוֹת וְאֶפְלוּ בָּאוּ סָתֵם וְיָשׁ לְחוּשׁ שְׂמָא בָּאוּ עַל עֵסְקֵי נַפְשׁוֹת, וְאֶפְלוּ עַד יוֹן לֹא בָּאוּ אֶלָּא מִמְשֻׁמְשֵׁים לְבֹא - יוֹצְאִים עֲלֵיהֶם בְּכָלֵי זֵיוֹן וּמַחֲלִלִין עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת.

*When non-Jews take up arms against Jewish towns... if they come to kill, and even if they come with no expressed intent, but there is concern that perhaps they come to kill, one should confront them while armed and desecrate the Shabbos because of them. [Indeed, these steps may be taken] not only when their arrival is imminent, but even if they are merely threatening to come.*

Since the lives of the Yidden living in Eretz Yisroel today are constantly threatened by our enemies, the supreme obligation of the government is to protect every single one of them.

While preemptively eliminating all lethal threats to preserve life may seem obvious and self-understood, recent

history has shown that other self-adopted principles can interfere with making the right choices, with devastating consequences.

In the spring of 5727, Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser banished the United Nations Emergency Force from Gaza and the Sinai and mobilized a force of 100,000 Egyptian troops at the southern border of Eretz Yisroel. He then closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. At the time, ninety percent of Israel's oil arrived at the southern port of Eilat, and blocking this narrow passageway to the oil tankers was aimed at crippling Israel's economy and capacity to wage war.

Earlier that year, Nasser signed a defense pact with Syria to Israel's north, and after closing the Straits of Tiran, he signed a similar pact with the Jordanians to the east. All three nations, backed by the entire Arab world, publicly threatened Israel with a war of annihilation, and the world did nothing to intervene.

Israel prepared for war but expected the worst. The military confirmed the only way to win such a war would be to strike the enemy first, but the Americans warned Prime Minister Levi Eshkol to not take the first shot, lest the Israelis be viewed as the aggressors.

The situation was very dire, and finally, the cabinet of the new unity government in Israel voted to attack preemptively. On the morning of 26 Iyar, the Israeli air force carried out a surprise attack destroying the entire Egyptian air force in a matter of hours. The war was on, and when the United Nations forced a ceasefire six days later, the miraculous victory astounded the world. All three enemy armies were destroyed, and Israel controlled territory over triple its original size. The nations of the world were highly impressed, and our enemies learned a bitter lesson. It was a clear victory for the Jews.

Six years later, early in the morning of Yom Kippur 5734, Israel's prime minister Golda Meir was notified that the Egyptians and Syrians would launch a coordinated attack that afternoon. The military establishment pushed for a preemptive strike, which was the winning strategy in the last war. However, the US ambassador to Israel delivered a message from Washington threatening the United States would abandon Israel if it started a war.

Despite the clear evidence that a preemptive strike or a full mobilization of the reservists would either avert the war altogether or, at the very least, tip the balance in Israel's favor and certainly save many lives, Prime Minister Meir bowed to American pressure for political reasons. Worried that a full mobilization of the army would be interpreted by the world as an act of aggression, she ordered only a partial mobilization at 9:30am. When the war started at 2:00pm, the nation was caught by surprise, and the results were devastating. Although

the war ended three weeks later with an Israeli victory, it came at an unbearable price. Thousands were killed, *Hashem yikom damam*, and many more thousands were injured and maimed.

Some tried to defend the decision of holding off on the preemptive strike to maintain good relations with the United States, by pointing out that nine days into the war President Nixon ordered an airlift of weapons and supplies to Israel to replenish their losses, known as Operation Nickel Grass. However, this justification is flawed. Had Israel ordered a full mobilization of the army in time, in all probability the war would have never started. Even if war was inevitable, had Israel utilized the opportunity to strike their enemies preemptively, the war would have been over in a few days and there would have been no need for the airlift. Besides, the weaponry and supplies that arrived on that airlift were not needed during the war, and when the war ended there were leftover weapons from Israel's pre war stockpiles.

Defense Minister Moshe Dayan told the international media that the decision to not strike preemptively was a political one. "It was the decision of the government not to strike first... in order to have that political... advantage at the expense of the military disadvantage."

Regarding this fatally flawed decision, Golda Meir later wrote in her memoirs, "The terrible knowledge [of the heavy casualties suffered during the war] will follow me all the days of my life. I will never be the same person I was before the Yom Kippur War."

These two case studies clearly illustrate that the guiding principle of "*hashkem l'hargo*" does not mean we respond to attackers only once we are attacked, rather we must preemptively neutralize all threats and deter our enemies from even trying to attack us.

In truth, this policy is one of compassion for all people, even for our enemies. The Gemara does not say "*hashkem v'horgo*—rise up *and* kill him." Rather the expression is "*hashkem l'horgo*—rise up *in order to* kill him." When the enemy sees you are willing to use your military superiority against them, they will back away from the fight—saving their own lives in the process! **1**

#### NEXT MONTH:

*How does the principle of Pikuach Nefesh dictate the moral way a war must be fought?*

Primary Sources: *Toras Menachem* vol. 55, p. 357; *Sichos Kodesh* 5738 vol. 1, p. 226; *Ibid.* 5739 vol. 1, p. 97; *Toras Menachem* *Hisvaaduyos* 5742 vol 3, p. 1743; *Ibid.* vol. 4. p. 1844, 1854.

1. Mishna, Sanhedrin 4:5.
2. Sanhedrin 72a.