

Dvar Torah from Rabbi Baum

All of Us Being & Acting Like Soldiers and Medical Professionals

Last year, we had the privilege of hosting Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon for a Shabbat. In his stimulating and well received presentation, he presented halachic questions posed to him by soldiers of the IDF and his solutions to these probes. In one of these inquiries, a soldier going into battle in Gaza wanted to know if he should take his Tefillin with him, although it was likely that he would have to carry them on Shabbat. Another soldier asked him about waking up in time for davening after being up almost the entire previous night. One chayal presented a challenge of davening in a tank, in the presence of a bad odor, which generally would be a legal deterrent to prayer. One of our members asked Rav Rimon why the answers to many of these questions were so complex and why did they even have to be asked, inasmuch as the Talmud in Nedarim (27a) has a rule of *Ones Rachmana Patrei*; i.e. under duress your liability is waived. In fact, most of these questions could have been answered with a simple response of “considering the pressing conditions, you are absolutely not obligated to fulfill your responsibility”. Rav Rimon explained that, while that is often the case, these soldiers **were not** looking for reasons to not perform these obligations. Rather, they were searching for legal and emotional fulfillment. Even and particularly in the face of war, they were aspiring for more.

The Abarbanel in Parshat Kedoshim defines “You Shall Be Holy” as performing the mitzvot of the Torah with excitement and passion. Because this is not an easy task, one who accomplishes this is regarded as being holy. Rav Eliyahu Dessler (Yomim Noraim Lectures) mentioned that what we may regard as duress may actually be an effort to seek an excuse. All of us need to self-reflect on our motivations and justifications for Mitzva slippage, both in areas of ritual service and in human interactions. What is duress and what is an excuse? Clearly, these Israeli soldiers mentioned by Rav Rimon were not seeking excuses. They serve their country and their Creator with passion and eagerness.

Although we are not facing military battles here in Teaneck or throughout the United States, we continue to face the challenges of this awful virus. Many in our families and community have died or been sick, and many others are facing sudden and potentially catastrophic trials. However, we continue to see heroic responses to this crisis. Medical professionals, who are clearly under duress but go to work every day serving their fellow human beings, still find a few minutes to pray, act with kindness to others and judge their neighbors as positively as possible. They have all the excuses to act out, or to sleep in, but they get up and want to do more. Many congregants, despite ongoing pressures, have developed even more grit in being graceful, thankful and loving. We all have excuses, but we are a nation that doesn't look for ways out or justifications for acting out against others in person or in writing aggressive or condescending e-mails. Kol Hakavod.

This is not an easy time for anyone in our community. As we spend another Shabbat out of shul, with our families or totally alone, we try to find the inner strength and the connection to Hashem, as modeled by the Israeli soldiers mentioned by Rav Rimon, to continue to serve Hashem, our families and community with purpose and passion. We can do even more than we ever imagined was possible. For this we will achieve and acquire the status of being holy.

Shabbat Shalom