

The Good Hearted Jewish Soldiers – Then and Now

How do Israeli soldiers make the difficult decisions, and who in Jewish history faced a similar situation?

War Zone!

This week, I visited Israel, and suddenly found myself in the middle of a war zone. Naturally, all my friends in the US wanted to know if I was safe, and whether I was also running back and forth into bomb shelters.

First of all, the Rebbe always repeated that the land of Israel is the safest place on the planet; it's like you are in G-d's living room. The Torah says that "It's the land which G-d's eyes are upon, from the beginning of the year until its end" (Ekev 11:12). Secondly, in my location, the war existed only in the media; thank G-d, it was peaceful throughout my entire visit.

The real hardship in these wars is for the soldiers on the front lines, whether in planes or on land. They are not engaging in conventional warfare; the terrorists hide behind human shields — their own wives and children — putting the soldiers into difficult moral dilemmas.

During my visit, I met a good friend, Rabbi Yigal Tzipori (Shliach to Kiryat Shemone) who served in Israel's paratrooper unit from 1979 to 1982, before he joined Chabad. He told me about his experiences fighting terrorists in just this situation.

In those years, the PLO controlled southern Lebanon, which they used as a base to send rockets into Israel.

Life in Israel's north became intolerable, and in 1980, the government decided to send soldiers into Lebanon to root out the terrorists. (This was before the First Lebanon War in 1982).

On the evening of August 18, Yigal and his friends swept through the territory of southern Lebanon, attacking all the known terrorist bases. What they didn't know was that the terrorists were prepared to 'welcome' them.

At one location, their instructions were to approach a certain house, stop about forty meters away, and bomb it into oblivion. But as they approached their target, the leader of the group, Muki Kenishbach — an only child to Holocaust survivors — heard voices of children. Hesitant to go ahead with the instructions, he decided to approach the house and decide for himself.

He had proceeded only ten meters when a hail of bullets erupted from the home and killed him on the spot. His Deputy, Nir Barkat (today the Minister of Economy), ran to save him, and was shot as well; Yigal and his colleagues needed to carry him to safety.

This story didn't happen in a vacuum. Not too long earlier, Muki Kenishbach and Yigal participated in a different incursion into Lebanon, where the soldiers were instructed to attack a red car that was passing on a certain road. According to their intelligence, it was carrying a group of dangerous terrorists.

According to IDF regulations, when a mission is accomplished, the head of the group must inspect the site to see whether the target was reached. After securing a direct hit on the car, Muki approached, and to his horror, discovered that it was carrying a father and three small children. It turned out that their Arab informant had used them to kill a personal rival.

Muki was devastated by the result of his actions; so, the next time he was faced with a similar situation, he decided not to shoot until he ensured kids wouldn't be killed in the process. And he paid with his life for that decision.

These are the sorts of decisions that the IDF needs to make every day.

The Rivalry

This week, we read a Haftorah that was not chosen according to the usual protocol . Typically, the Haftorah reflects the theme of the Torah portion; on special occasions such as holidays, we read a Haftorah which reflects the holiday. The only exception is a day like today, where the Haftorah is chosen based on the Day After. Tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh, so we read the story from the prophets that begins with the word, Machar Chodesh - Tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh.. (See Bamidbar 5739, *Sichos Kodesh* v. 2 p. 674.)

The story is part of the saga of King Saul's rivalry with King David.

After the young David killed Goliath, he experienced a string of successes which brought him widespread popularity. Saul

became extremely paranoid, worrying that David would usurp the monarchy, and began a protracted attempt to have him assassinated. Nothing David did was enough to prove his loyalty; ultimately indeed, Saul was killed in battle and David became the reigning monarch.

Mercy for Amalek

The Book of Shmuel relates that G-d commanded King Saul to annihilate the nation of Amalek. These were the quintessential anti-Semites; when the Israelites left Egypt, they immediately came and attacked, despite the fact that the Israelites had no plans of conquest for them, and had no plan of even entering their territory. They were just always ready to attack a Jew. Now, G-d instructed King Saul to annihilate them once and for all.

King Saul waged a successful war against them, but he made two mistakes; he was instructed to kill even the livestock, but that he failed to do, and he also didn't kill their king, Agag, because he felt bad for him.

G-d was upset with Saul's decision and sent the prophet Shmuel who asked him. Why did you not carry out the word of G-d? . The response was disappointing; King Saul said that he had planned to carry out his instructions, but the people had wanted those changes. He had submitted to public opinion.

That decision made Saul lose the monarchy. You see, during the single night that he allowed the Amalekite king to remain alive, he managed to impregnate a woman with his progeny, and the nation of Amalek was able to continue. Generations later, the

Jewish people were put in grave peril in Persia when the king agreed to annihilate them all—and it was a result of that decision; Haman was a direct descendant of Agag.

King Saul wanted to show mercy to Agag, and ended up (almost) bringing calamity upon the entire Jewish people.

The New Moon

However, my friends, let's conclude on a positive note:

The Jewish people are compared to the moon and its fluctuations. The moon is at times bigger and at times smaller, but we are always confident that it will shine again. The day before the new month is a particularly dark time; not even a sliver of the moon is visible. But we know, with confidence, that its rebirth is just around the corner. It will reappear the next day, and once again reach its full brightness. So, there is no reason to be discouraged even from a particularly difficult moment for the Jewish people; if things seem particularly gloomy, and we all wonder what the future will bring, it just means that a new stage of illumination is imminent. (*Toras Menachem* v. 39 p. 380, v. 19 p. 126).