

CHIZUK & IDUD

Rabbi Yerachmiel Roness

Summer days are upon us and the drums of war thunder once again in our region of the world. The wars and battles fought by Tzahal demonstrate that its troops must exhibit strong motivation and fearlessness.

In Devarim 20:8 we are told that: "And the officers shall speak further unto the People and shall say 'what man is fearful and fainthearted, let him go and return unto his home lest his brethren's heart melt as his heart'". The two operative phrases are "haish hayareh"(fearful one) and the "rach haleivav" (fainthearted) Rabbeinu Bechaye suggests that the fearful one is the one who is afraid to engage in violence. The fainthearted he says is the one who cannot bear 'makat acheirm' cannot bear violent action against his own person. Interestingly, the Chizkuni says the opposite- "hayareh", the fearful one is the one who can't bear the blows of others while, the "rach haleivav", he says, can't bear beating others. Rav S.R. Hirsch sums it up by saying that " this demand that every man who lacks the physical courage and steadfastness which are required to stand firm and keep his place jn the ranks at the shock of the charging enemy, and fearlessly face the drawn swords should go home, so that he does not infect others with his fears and panic."

On the issue of fighting wars, the People of Israel today are still engaged, as in 1948, in the continuing internal battle of whether or not Yeshiva

Bachurim are to be exempt from fighting. It would be wise to refer to a famous article, signed anonymously as 'one of the Rabbis' but always attributed to Rabbi Zevin ZL. In this article, found in Tradition of Fall 1985, one can hear the pain and wonder of the author as he writes:" What is the source for exempting Yeshiva students and Torah scholars from an obligatory war fought to defend Israel from those who come to destroy her, G-d forbid. How can we pass it off as if it were Halacha or Daat Torah , that Yeshiva students need not register or serve? Have we not learned that when it comes to saving a life – not many lives, just one, 'these things are done by the leaders of Israel and by the Scholars (Talmidei Chachamim)' in order to teach the Halacha to the nation..... Why have you excused only the Yeshiva students? How do you know that your blood is redder than that of your fellow man?..... Surely there is no need to review the unanimous opinion that a defensive war to save Israel from her enemies is an obligatory one, of which it has been said 'all must go even the bridegroom from his room and a bride from under her chupa'. How have we arrived at the conclusion that Scholars are not included in this obligation? If our generation merited everyone studying Torah, would we allow our enemies to ravage our Land and kill our People without taking up arms to defend ourselves?"

Rabbi Marc Shapiro, writing in the Seforim Blog of August 2013, comes to the tentative conclusion that, indeed, Rav Zevin (might) have authored the above article. Yet, for reasons known

only to him (Rav Zevin) he decided not to sign it. Some of the circumstantial evidence is that once before , Rav Zevin seems to have signed an Halachic piece as Achat Min Harabanim. Secondly twice the "Shulcan Aruch Harav" is cited in the article. It is known that Rav Zevin was associated with Chabad and only one with such a background would be familiar with such an opus In this regard, it may be of interest to know that I once met Rav Zevin in his home in Geula. My Chabad uncle visited me at the Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva (in 1966) where I studied. He asked me whether I would like to accompany him on his visit to Rav Zevin. I readily agreed and, as introductions was made in Rav Zevin's book-lined library (with floor- to ceiling books.). My uncle told over Chidushim that the Lubavitcher Rebbe espoused at a siyum on Masechet Nazir , Rav Zevin's keen mind absorbed the three key points and he responded after climbing a ladder to retrieve two Seforim from his library. He stated that the first point was to be found in one of the Sefarim. The second point is found in the other Sefer he took down. But, he said, the third point is a real chidush, not found in any Sefer. Only one with encyclopedic knowledge of the Talmud would be able to do this. (This is not surprising since Rav Zevin was the first editor of the Encyclopedia Talmudaica.)

While on the topic of drafting Yeshiva students , Rabbi Shapiro thoughts may be of interest" Think how public opinion would have been different if the haredim in Israel had acted like American haredim. Just think how people in Israel would view the haredi community if, when the rockets started

falling in certain places, instead of yeshivot leaving, young men came to these cities precisely in order to learn Torah. Imagine how people would have reacted if great yeshivot devoted days of Torah study specifically in the merit of the soldiers, or if yeshiva students en masse attended funerals of soldiers, or visited wounded soldiers in the hospital, or paid shiva calls to grieving families to let them know how much they value the sacrifice of those in uniform. Just think how much better the haredi situation would be at present if in past years the haredi community as a whole had simply shown that it cared about what was going on in the rest of the country. One would have thought that this approach would have been followed if only from a purely utilitarian perspective, but again, as Isaac Breuer pointed out, being proactive in meeting challenges has never been a strong point of this community.

A number of years ago I asked someone in Merkaz ha-Rav how his yeshiva differed from the haredi yeshivot, since in both yeshivot one could find people learning instead of going to the army. He replied that there is a great difference since in Merkaz those learning are doing so for the sake of the nation, while in the haredi yeshivot those learning are doing so for themselves. I can't say how true this statement is, but I mention it to show the sentiment that existed even twenty years ago."

To the question raised: what will be if all the population will be Chareidi? We can look to Tishbi to solve this

supposedly insoluble problem because
" Tishbi yetaretz kushiot v-abayot "

May he come speedily in our days!!