



From the teachings of the  
Rosh Yeshiva of Ateret Yerushalayim  
Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner

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## Bar Kochba, from Then Until Now

[from "Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah" – Emor 5769 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Between Pesach and Shavuot, we decrease our joy slightly, because according to tradition, twenty-four thousand students of Rabbi Akiva died at that time. Rabbi Akiva was one of the greatest scholars of his generation, and simultaneously he supported the national rebellion of Bar-Kochba. Rambam writes: "Rabbi Akiva was a great sage of the Mishna, and he was the armor bearer of Bar-Kochba, the king. Rabbi Akiva would say of him that he was the Messianic king. He and all the sages of his generation envisioned him being the Messianic king" (Hilchot Melachim 11:3). True, it turned out in the end that he was not the Messiah, yet we have to understand that there was no mistake here. Rabbi Akiva envisioned the POSSIBILITY of his being the Messiah. Rambam codified as law that if a Jewish king emerges, immersed in Torah and mitzvoth, and he rules the people according to the Torah and fights G-d's battles, he should be related to as the Messianic king. If he succeeds in everything, it will become clear that he is the Messiah for certain. Otherwise, he will turn out to have been a king of Israel who did the best he could (ibid.).

Rambam also proves from the support of Bar-Kochba given by Rabbi Akiva and the sages that we needn't require the Messiah to perform miracles. Rather, he can operate by non-miraculous means, such as through wars. That same Rabbi Akiva

was a spiritual giant in his generation, but at the same time he was a militarist on behalf of the Jewish People, and he saw no contradiction between the two. In the same way, the Hasmoneans were both holy men and warriors. In his day, Maran Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook wrote that we are certain that when Rabbi Akiva in his time encouraged support for every vision of Jewish national liberation, he was expressing a doctrine of truth. Precisely from the fact that the attempt failed at that time and the Jewish People fell from the standpoint of their national freedom, we know that the time for this vision will come, and that time is approaching now, and Israel will not suffer again. Not in vain did Israel fight the battle for their survival. (Ma'amarei HaRe'iyah 202-203).

And indeed, our Jewish State arose and it stands strong. Here we are safe both spiritually and physically. True, we have enemies around us, but psychologists have determined, contrary to the prevalent view, that the Israeli citizen leads a safe life and relies on our country and our army. Quite the contrary, the security threat strengthens our national cohesiveness, as well as the sense of safety of the people dwelling in Zion. Indeed, the most important thing for us to preserve faithfully is our brotherhood and unity.

When French-Jewish historian and writer Andre Maurois (nee Emile Herzog), who died a hundred years ago, was asked to what extent it was possible to allow political quarreling in a democratic regime, he responded: "The heads of our political parties may be compared to rival officers in charge of a large ship. As a passenger on that ship, I can allow them, at most, to hate one another, but under no circumstances will I consent to their hatred causing the ship to sink."

Thank G-d, generally speaking there is a lot of love in our nation, yet we mustn't fall asleep at the watch. Obviously, our army is strong, but at the same time, contrary to what all the libelers and anti-Semites among the nations say, it is a moral army. There's a story about the recent Gaza Campaign that the soldiers of one of the reserve battalions found amongst one enemy force a very large sum of money. When the battalion commander heard about it, he moved his operations room there so that no one would mistakenly take the money.

Let us take this opportunity to mention another story about a unit that entered a home, and found cartons of fruit clearly marked as being headed for the “mehadrin” Shemittah market. In that same home, Kassam missiles were found. Obviously, orders were given to immediately destroy that house and the adjacent hothouses. It thus turns out that those who had claimed that buying fruit from the Arabs of Gaza was indirectly supporting the bombing of Israel were mistaken. It was DIRECTLY supporting it. The main point is that fear of the Jews befell those terrorists. We encountered almost no resistance. Rather, those murderers fled to hiding places like hospitals. Obviously, the role of the Jewish army chaplain changed dramatically. No longer was he just an army chaplain dealing with the religious needs of the soldier as an individual. Rather, he also worried about that soldier’s functioning as a soldier, and about the success of the fighting. He was not just a partner in the education corps. Indeed, the Chief Chaplain of the I.D.F. wrought a change in this realm. He, himself, was a high-ranking military officer, and he brought in fighting army chaplains who were together with the fighters and strengthened the fighting spirit. He likewise founded, within the army chaplaincy, a department for strengthening the fighting spirit.

Therefore, if Bar-Kochba heard that in our day there are people who are disappointed with the country, and who say that we have to nullify Israel Independence Day or the prayer for the Jewish State’s Welfare, or that we have to change it, he would not understand what he was hearing.



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