

Question: Did anyone ever search for the vessels of the Beit Ha-Mikdash?

Answer: Many certainly searched, but they did not find them. There are different stories and fables.

Question: What about those people who claim to have seen the Ark?

Answer: Anything is possible. Nevertheless, everything that they saw also disappeared. Do not worry, there are others. Incidentally, my daughter who studies art made a relief of the Arch of Titus. She brought to my attention the fact that those who are walking in the relief are not walking in the direction of Yehudah to Rome, but the opposite: from Rome to Israel! And this is true today, too: we are all returning home!

Rav Aviner on...

The Army's Response Hierarchy

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Beshalach 5774 – translated by R. Blumberg]

People ask: Bombs are falling from Gaza and a million people in the area have to stay home and flee into their bomb shelters. Why does the army remain silent and not respond with force?

Obviously, it is not the army who decides but the government. To the point, however, every attack certainly does deserve a forceful response, just as King David went to war because the enemy removed half of soldiers' beards and cut off half of their garments. Yet things are different now. The army operates according to a response hierarchy. Responses are proportional, tit for tat. The army cannot respond any differently, due to international war conventions, whether signed or not. In Latin this is called, *Jus in Bello*, the Law in Waging War.

Why must we uphold the Law in Waging War?

For three reasons:

1. Commitments: We have made commitments in the United Nations, explicitly or inexplicitly.
2. Morality. Not all the people in the Gaza Strip are evil. There, too, you'll find unfortunates.

True, we say, "War is War," but as King Shaul said to Kenites, "Come, withdraw at once from the Amalekites, that I may not destroy you along with them" (Shmuel 1 15:6). In other words, "even though you are my friends, if you are there, I might hurt you. You are best off leaving." Taking pity on those not at fault requires morality.

3. Mutuality. How we behave is how others will treat us. It is not a matter of worrying about the enemy, but of worrying about ourselves. We require the assistance of the nations. We cannot live alone. True, it says, "Israel shall dwell alone" (Bemidbar 23:9), but in practical affairs it is not like that. For example, during the Yom Kippur War, we ran out of ammunition. It was very embarrassing, but the Americans organized an airlift for us and transferred ammunition to us. If they had not, it would not have been the end of our country, for we had thirteen missiles suited with nuclear warheads. Still, such

things cannot be done in secret. There are satellites that see everything. The Russians already had ships in the region with nuclear bombs, and that's no picnic either. It was the Americans who told the Russians to desist. Until the Messiah comes and we are responsible for the entire planet we are not alone. In the meantime we are dependent.

Some people say: Since we are dependent on the nations, it is impossible for us to say Hallel on Israel Independence Day, for we are not independent. That is wrong. There is no country on Earth that is not dependent on others, not even the Americans, the Russians or the British. They don't do anything without taking others into account. They, as well, are not alone in the world.

One particular Rabbi, not a defeatist coward by any means, related that one time when Israel's foreign minister returned from a visit to America, he was criticized for having capitulated to American pressure. Rav Tzvi Yehuda told that Rabbi, "Do you think we *never* have to take the Americans into consideration?"

We also have our tension with the Iranians. We need world support against them. The fact is that at present the nations are working on our behalf against Iran. You can't always be fighting on all fronts.

In education, as well, you cannot be fighting on all fronts. You pick the most important front and you ignore the others.

In one of the Yeshivot, the *Mashgiach* [spiritual director] suddenly entered a room and found students playing checkers. They quickly hid the game under the table. The *Mashgiach* said, "I will explain to you what checkers is about. You always move forward. When you get to the top, you can do what you want. You sacrifice one in order to win two." He turned it into a lesson about behavior.

In running the country, as well, you sometimes sacrifice one in order to win two. We are not alone on this Earth.

A major principle regarding the Nation living in Zion is this: We go to war only when there is "no choice". According to the statistics of the World Health Organization, every year 800,000 people are killed in the world by terrorists and other murderers. So why do we have the impression that more are killed here? It is because we know and love one another. An American living in New York is not connected to somebody killed in Miami. Yet when a Jew is killed or suffers, that creates large ripples.

Still we cannot go to war over such incidents. And the Nation dwelling in Zion would not agree to it either. Our soldiers are our citizens, and we cannot send soldiers who are not convinced that we must fight. Such wars are called "elective battles". When there is a war of no choice, everyone goes out to battle, the Right, the Left and the Middle Ground. And they fight with self-sacrifice. It is not just the government who thinks we shouldn't go into battle over every incident - the Nation dwelling in Zion thinks it too.

Some say: "But there a million people stuck there!" True, but you must look at matters in proportion. There are worse problems still. When I was born, I had to be hidden away so I would not end up in a concentration camp. My paternal grandparents on my father's side died in such camps. *That* is suffering. The rule is this: we must thank G-d for what we have, and not bare open wounds over what we don't have. Sure there are problems, but we don't have to go overboard. We must increase our national fortitude. This is not accomplished by shouting at our Prime Minister and army.

In conclusion, we must strengthen the residents of the South, and in general, strengthen our Nation and believe in our country, our government and our army. If we are always

saying that the army is weak and the government is weak, we are weakening them. “What I have dreaded has come upon me” (Iyov 3:25). In other words, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. A source for this is Berachot 60a. The Mishna there states: “If someone enters a bathhouse he should say, 'May it be G-d's will that You save me from this and other such things. Let no corruption or sin befall me, and if they do befall me, then let my death be an atonement for all my sins.’”

Abaye responded to this, “A person should not say this prayer, so as not to give the devil any ideas.”

Now we might ask: How could Abaye, a Talmudic sage, dispute the Talmudic ruling of the Mishnaic sages who preceded him?

Rav Kook answers this in Ein Aya: The Mishnaic sages were heroic men who feared nothing. Hence they could say, “I am going to the bathhouse and I hope not to die. If I do die, then I shall die.”

Yet the Talmudic Sages were weaker, and could not talk that way. Had they said, “If I fall prey to sin, let me die as an atonement,” they would have been dead.

Therefore, one should not express himself this way. Rather, we should say that we are strong and heroic, and that is the truth. The army is on the right course with its self-restraint. Sometimes, the army waits in order to be able to attack more forcefully later.

Let us be strong and courageous.



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