

no Mitzvah to visit Egypt to see where we were enslaved, or to visit Spain to see from whence we were exiled, or to visit any of the many other countries where we suffered. Were there such a Mitzvah, it would have to be defined in the Shulchan Aruch. Were there such a Mitzvah, we would expect to have seen our greatest Torah luminaries going there, and even taking the strict approach of going there many times.

2. People claim that such trips have educational value, hence the trips are integrated into the school curriculum. And yet it cannot be that there are activities for wealthy students capable of paying 6,000 Shekels (\$1700) that are closed to poor students who will have to suffer financially to attain such a sum. Is this educationally sound?

3. And all the more so, it's not educationally sound that the Poles are going to benefit financially because of the extermination camps were located in their country. It was no accident that the Nazis chose this country, because the vast majority of Poles were anti-Semites. The Poles were happy to see us in these camps. They did not blow up the train tracks that led to them. They did not provide shelter to those who fled from them. They even carried out a pogrom after the Holocaust. They stole our homes and refused to return them to the Jews who came back from the extermination camps. Until today trials are going on over this.

4. Furthermore, fleeting emotions or transient shocks do not educate one to fear G-d or to adopt any other important characteristic. Emotions are easy come, easy go. Education involves a long-term yoke and constant hard work.

5. True, there are Rabbis who accompany their students and give them important Torah lectures along the way, yet for that there is no reason to leave Eretz Yisrael. We have Yad Vashem and similar sites here. We have got films and books, and camp survivors to whom we can listen directly, instead of seeing an artificial reconstruction of the shacks that housed them.

6. As for those survivors, we must realize that some of them are still living. Many are alone, poor, sick, suffering, and short of money to buy medicine, food or heat. It seems a lot more educational to give them the six thousand Shekels. In fact, it seems very uneducational to look for "thrills" far from here, instead of showing kindness to those who are suffering, which is a clear Mitzvah of the Torah. Locating the organizations that help the survivors takes five minutes on the Internet.

7. As for those holy Rabbis who are buried abroad, without a doubt, if anyone were to ask them, they would prefer that time and money be invested in learning their books rather than leaving Eretz Yisrael to visit their graves.

Here's a general principle to remember: Devote yourself to the Mitzvot G-d commanded us, and don't invent other Mitzvot.

Rav Aviner on...

How Many Fine Virtues the Army Has!

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

The ideal is, "They shall beat swords into ploughshares," but in the meantime, it is G-d's will that there should be wars, here in Israel and throughout the world. And if this be the

will of G-d, Who “is master of wars and causes salvation to flourish” [Morning Prayers], then a blessing shall derive from this as well. True, that blessing derives through suffering, but it is a blessing for all – Charedim, religious and secular. “For G-d is good to all, and His mercy is over all his works” (Tehilim 145:9). And indeed, how many fine virtues our army has!

1. **The Mitzvah of saving lives.** It is a great mitzvah to save someone who is in danger. “Do not stand by when your friend’s life is in danger” (Vayikra 19:16, Sanhedrin 73a, Rambam, Hilchot Rotzeah U-Shemirat Nefesh Chapter 1). It is also a great Mitzvah to endanger oneself to save someone who is in possible danger (*Hagahot Maimoniyot* and *Kesef Mishneh*), all the more so for the sake of the Jewish People as a whole.

2. **Protecting the Land of Israel.** The Mitzvah of settling the Land is equal in weight to all the other Mitzvot of the Torah combined. We were commanded to conquer the Land and not to leave it in the hands of any other nation (Ramban’s fourth footnote on Rambam’s Sefer Ha-Mitzvot).

3. **Sanctifying G-d’s name.** “I shall be sanctified amongst the People of Israel” (Vayikra 22:32). When the nations smite and wound us, pillage and rape us, exile and murder us, it is a profanation of G-d’s name, for we are G-d’s people. Yet when we defend ourselves, smiting our enemies fiercely, we sanctify G-d’s name (see Yechezkel 28).

4. **Holiness.** Mitzvot hallow a person. As our sages said, “Blessed are You, O G-d... who has sanctified us through His Mitzvot.” Obviously, not everyone who does one Mitzvah thereby turns into a *Kadosh*, a saint as defined in *Mesilat Yesharim*, yet every Mitzvah increases holiness, all the more so such a great Mitzvah as saving the Jewish People and sanctifying G-d’s name. Many of the Charedi newsmen and politicians are intentional liars, unfortunately no better than those in other camps. They say that the secular want to draft the Charedim in order to make them secular. This is a bold lie that does not deserve to be dignified by a response.

Unfortunately, every *Gadol*, every Torah luminary, has his Gehazi, and even several Gehazis. Every Charedi camp claims that the *Gedolim* of the other Charedi camps have Gehazis who deceive them, and that they also deceive a large portion of the public, who are naïve. They lie to their *Gedolim* and they lie in the name of their *Gedolim*, they incite and corrupt and cause divisiveness, as do a great many of the newsmen and politicians in the rest of the Nation.

In the Nachal Charedi and in the Charedi Army unit “*Shachar*” there are no female soldiers, and the Kashrut there is on the highest level. The standards here are even higher than inductees adhere to in their private lives. The Army meets the needs of the Charedim on every issue, and keeps its promises, even without an agreement in writing.

5. **Becoming stronger in Torah.** People become stronger in Torah in the army. True, there are some who deteriorate in the army, but that is due to their low level of commitment before they arrive there. The fact is, however, that most yeshiva dropouts become religiously stronger in the Nachal Charedi. Unfortunately, the “Yeshivot for strengthening people” have almost no success in strengthening anyone religiously. That is not the case with the Nachal Charedi. Thank G-d, the relationship between the Nachal Charedi and the Charedi public is improving.

6. **Good character.** Responsibility, seriousness, helpfulness, determination, steadfastness. In a word, army service turns you into a “Mentch”, a decent human being. And the more combat-oriented the unit is, the more it builds the soldier’s character. This

is what I meant when I said that in any case, the army also infuses the soldier with blessing and holiness. The army is not just a duty. It is a privilege. It is painful to see how much those Charedim who do not go to the army lose out. Certainly the Torah is our life, but good character is our life as well.

7. Torah for the sake of heaven. One has to learn Torah sincerely, and not just go through the motions to evade army service. Rambam said (Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:10): "It is forbidden to benefit from Torah learning in this world. Our Sages said, 'If someone benefits from Torah learning, it removes him from this world.' They further commanded us, 'Make it not into a crown for self-aggrandizement, nor an ax with which to chop.'" Ha-Gaon Ha-Rav Yechezkel Abramsky said that if someone does not learn and does not enlist, the laws of the "*Rodef*" [assailant] apply to him. In other words, he is considered to be endangering all the others who learn Torah sincerely.

8. Learning a trade. In the Nachal Charedi, soldiers learn a trade during the third year, and the same is true with the Charedi "*Shachar*" program.

The army likewise saves people from poverty. Poverty is a terrible thing that causes religious and moral deterioration. It poses a grave danger which cannot be circumvented through spiritual shortcuts or superstitions. Poverty deprives a man of his senses and of a knowledge of his Creator. What man's intellect does not do, not even the intellect of Torah, necessity will accomplish. Yet how much better is it for one to plan on his own to learn a profession in the army.

9. Gratitude. We must show our gratitude to the soldiers. Ingratitude is a terrible thing. See Chovot HaLevavot. We must say the "*Mi Sheberach*" blessing for soldiers presently serving, as well as the *Yizkor* for the soldiers who have fallen in battle. And one has to enlist himself. One should not say, "Anyway there are too many soldiers, so I'm superfluous." That isn't true. There's no unemployment in the army aside from the "functional unemployment" of any gigantic system. There is a shortage of soldiers required to bear the security burden. It is therefore ethical for everyone to join up.

10. Loving One's Fellow Jews. In the army, everyone gets to know one another and everyone admires one another. Otherwise, we are in danger of becoming two peoples who are entirely alienated from each other, each group viewing the other as having horns. In the army, they can get to know one another. The Charedim will see the good traits of the secular, their values and ideals, and they will cease their systematic defamation which desecrates G-d's name and causes the secular to respond in kind. It is a mistake to think that the Torah will be strengthened by our blackening the name of the secular. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter said, "If you want to grow taller, don't dig a pit for your fellow man. Instead, build him a mountain." Such an approach will lead the secular, as well, to see that the Charedim are very fine people, that they provide a healthy, natural foundation for the Jewish People, and that ultimately, everyone is going to have to be Charedi. This will end the false, mutual estrangement between the secular and Charedi worlds. If you repeat a falsehood enough times, it becomes the truth. It is true that every group has people who are not normal. Yet they represent a minuscule minority. The exception to the rule, not the rule itself.

A story is told of a Polish landowner who got drunk in a tavern and came to an agreement with another landowner that the following week each one would bring his bear and the bears would fight each other. When the first landowner returned to his estate and sobered up, he remembered that he did not own a bear, so he summoned a Jew to go to the

marketplace, buy a bear skin, and disguise himself with it so that he could pretend to be the bear. The Jew begged him not to make him do this, arguing that it represented a death sentence for him, yet the landowner insisted, threatening the Jew that he would expel his family. On the appointed day, the Jew stood in the bear suit trembling with fear before a frightening bear, freezing in place. Yet the crowd of gamblers pushed him towards the awesome creature. Understanding that his last moments had come, he cried out, "Hear O Israel, Hashem is our G-d..." Much to his amazement, the other bear completed the passage, "Hashem is One!" No one is really a bear. Everyone is amicable. "Who are like Your people Israel, one Nation in the Land!" (Shmuel 2 7:23).

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim P.O.B. 1076 Jerusalem 91009 Tel.02-6284101 Fax.02-6261528

www.ateret.org.il To subscribe, send e-mail to: toratravaviner@yahoo.com

