

POWER AND PEACE

The Sidra of Bamidbar tells us of the census that Moses conducted, under Divine command, of men of military age: פ'רש'ן | א'ן  
א'ן | א'ן . He counted all men capable  
of serving in the army, men of the age of twenty and over. There was  
one exception to this rule, and that was the tribe of Levi: א'ן | א'ן  
א'ן | א'ן  
"But the tribe of Levi you shall not count, and their sum you shall not  
take amongst the children of Israel." Levi was not included in the  
general count, but was numbered in a special census.

Why this exception? The Midrash gives us one answer: א'ן | א'ן  
א'ן | א'ן; the private legion of  
the King is of such dignity that it ought to be counted separately.

That is a good answer, but it does not account for a major  
difference between the general census and that of Levi. All other  
Israelites were numbered from the age of twenty years, whereas the  
Levites were numbered from the age of thirty days.

A contemporary Israeli Rabbi (Rabbi Ben Zion Firer) offers an  
answer that is full of insight. Levi, he maintains, was excluded from  
both military census and service precisely because this tribe was most  
prone to fight, most anxious to take to the sword!

This was an ingrained characteristic of the Levites inherited  
from the founder of the tribe, Levi himself. When his sister Dinah was  
ravished by Shechem, it was Levi together with Simeon who avenged their

sister's honor by destroying Shechem and his entire tribe, much to the displeasure of their father Jacob. And later on, when the children of Israel danced about the Golden Calf and Moses wanted to turn to those who were loyal to God to cut down the idol worshippers, he immediately addressed the tribe of Levi:

וַיִּדְרֹג אֱלֹהִים אֶת־לֵוִי בְּיָמָיו וְיָמָיו אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ  
וְיָמָיו אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ, kill each man his brother and his friend and his relative. Levi was perfectly suited to this task. This was the tribe that was courageous and strong, precipitous and <sup>d</sup>etermined.

What the Torah, therefore, meant by the exclusion of Levi from military service was this: in the Jewish conception an army, when it is necessary, must serve a higher and nobler end; it must never become an end in itself. Put a sword in the hands of Levi on a sustained basis, and you have moved beyond the military to -- militarism!

Momentary zeal, passion for a righteous cause, moral indignation, the use of armed might to achieve idealistic ends, all this is sometimes necessary and excusable. But as a general policy -- never!

אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ  
אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ

That is why Phineas, who slew those who defiantly and publicly broke the moral code of Israel, was acknowledged by God to have done a marvelous thing. But when God gave him a special covenant as a result, the Torah says: וְיָמָיו אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ, "I will give him my covenant of peace." I will give him peace -- the opportunity to express his idealism and his zeal, not in a one-time, bloody fashion, but on a sustained and peaceful basis.

Therefore, the rest of Israel, the <sup>103 1031</sup>, those who entered the army and dedicated themselves to fight, were numbered from the age of twenty years. But the tribe of Levi, dedicated to the Tabernacle, to teaching and to the ideals of peace, were numbered from the age of thirty days. Man must learn to temper his martial spirit with the pursuit of peace, and this lesson must begin from the cradle itself.

\* \* \* \* \*

The State of Israel today has been forced by circumstances to live by the sword. This is not natural or normal for the children of Jacob; the sword is more characteristic of Esau and his descendants. So this is a new phenomenon in Jewish history, almost unknown in the last 2,000 years of our people and its traditions.

In many ways, this is a positive development. Jews have determined that never again will they allow themselves to be led like sheep to the slaughter, and that they will, if necessary, defend themselves individually and collectively. Thank God for that! We are willing to dispense with the world's pity, and prefer their respect. We have nothing to be ashamed of in Israel's military accomplishments which have attracted the world's admiration. It was David, the same David who is the author of the Psalms, who declared the necessity <sup>הבדל בין יד ורגל</sup>, to teach the children of Judea the art of the bow and arrow. Theologically, this has signified the re-emergence of power as an element in Judaism, and has added a new dimension to the collective Jewish person-

ality. How we use this new-found power will reflect on our whole tradition, our whole past, our whole history.

But in truth, and no one knows this better than the leaders of the State of Israel themselves, we must constantly beware of a creeping militarism, especially in the sense of a military mentality. We now have a generation of youngsters in Israel who have been born into a situation of military stress, of feeling surrounded and beleaguered. It is very easy for them to grow up with the feeling that the bomb, the bomber, the grenade, are all a normal part of life. This military mentality is but one step away from militarism.

Let me make it absolutely clear. We ought to be extremely proud that despite all these distressing and depressing conditions, such military mentality and such militarism have not yet reared their ugly heads. The typical Israeli soldier, even if he is a professional officer, is a different breed of army man. He is some one of whom the Jewish tradition and Jewish people can be proud. Three and a half thousand years of Jewish history have gone into making him the particular kind of human being that he is. And we can be even more proud at the national sensitivity of Israel that it is worried specifically about the possibility of militarism. Of how many nations can this be said? But the worry is there, and it is justified.

American Jews are not fully aware of the intense debate that is taking place in Israel concerning the "occupied territories," and whether or not to permit hitnahalut, the settlement of such areas as Hebron.

Almost no one in Israel admits to being either completely a dove or completely a hawk, but that in essence is the polarity that has gripped the country. The doves prefer peace to justice. In their extremes, they are willing to dissolve the State of Israel as it now exists, and to substitute for it a bi-national state. The hawks come in two kinds. There are those who want to settle the occupied territories for religious reasons, because of mitzvat yishuv Eretz Yisrael, the commandment to settle the Holy Land. And then there is the group that is known as the movement for Eretz Yisrael Ha-shelemah, the Greater Israel Movement. Here a nationalist mystique is at work, an attempt for psychological reasons, as it were, to restore the historic boundaries of ancient Israel.

Now, I do not want to enter into a political debate. As one who is reluctant to become involved in the politics of this country, although sometimes unsuccessfully, I certainly do not want to take it upon myself to utter judgment about the inner political controversies in Israel. However, this I will say: we must all beware of ideology. Now is not the time for ideology to influence the military and diplomatic policy of the State. Ideals -- yes; ideology -- no. Now is the time for pragmatic wisdom, aimed exclusively at the honorable survival of the State of Israel.

I fear the way-out liberals who have become the professional doves of the State of Israel. I do not trust them. They must be reminded of a diplomat who, several decades ago, announced that a new era of peace was at hand because he was willing to give up that which did not



yes. To be proud of their great achievements, certainly. But never militarism; of that we should be embarrassed should it ever come to pass.

Perhaps the best way to avoid an incipient militarism and military mentality in the State of Israel, is the way the Torah did. That means, not by writing articles for the New York Times or The Village Voice, not by hand<sup>w</sup>ringing or breast-beating, but by head-filling, by educating the most vibrant and zealous and dynamic element of Israel -- its youth -- in the ways of Torah. Levi was set aside, precisely because of its great emotion and passion and courage, to the service of the mishkan and to the teaching of Torah; and, in our tradition, both mishkan and Torah are symbols of shalom, peace.

Israel can avoid militarism by encouraging its youth a new openness to the study of Torah, a new receptivity to the word of the Lord, by reorienting its present form of life from that of an insidious agnosticism to a recovery of its ancient roots in Torah.

Perhaps this is the greatest contribution that we can make, as religious Jews, in addition to our normal contribution to the State of Israel simply as Jews amongst other Jews. We must learn to build bridges to the non-religious segment of Israeli society, so that together we can restore the harmony of Israel, and lead it back to recover its ancient eminence as a people of God who lives in this world -- fearlessly, but peacefully.

\* \* \* \* \*

An ancient and famous Agadah teaches us: 137' 1001 8"0

הספר והחרב יחד ירדו. The sword and the book came down wrapped together from Heaven.

The sefer (book) cannot survive without occasional recourse to the sayaf (sword). But the sword can be dangerous without the restraints imposed by the book, the Book of Books.

ה' יתן עוז וקוצ' ויברק אלה עמו בשלום.  
The Lord will give strength -- both spiritual and physical (קוצ' וקוצ'  
(אלה) to His people. The Lord will bless His people with  
peace.