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One of the most divisive issues today in Israel politics is the drafting of yeshivah students into the Israeli army. It is not a new issue at all, being hotly debated for decades now. Those pushing for the draft have their reasons, and those against it have theirs, without any real common ground between them.

The Torah is not against yeshiva students going into the army. That is clear from this week's *parsha*, in which Moshe is told by God Himself to "draft" one thousand soldiers from each of the twelve tribes for the revenge war against the people of Midian. Since every male who could learn Torah learned it at that time, we can assume that they had to leave their learning for this *milchemes mitzvah*.

And that is the *balacha*. Any war that is considered to be a *mitzvah*, like wiping out the Canaanites when we first arrived at the land, or eradicating Amalek later on in Shaul *HaMelech's* time requires everyone to "enlist." An existential war, like Israel fought in 1973, was probably such a war as well. But short of that, the Torah limits who can fight and who can't.

What's at stake? Torah. Torah is the lifeline for the Jewish People and, according to the Gemora, the entire world (*Shabbos* 88a). If people don't learn Torah, it gets forgotten. If it gets forgotten, Creation ceases to justify its existence and null and void return.

That is not something to be taken lightly at all, although it is by many people in power in Israel today who don't even believe Torah was from God at Mt. Sinai. On the contrary, from their perspective, the faster Torah would be forgotten by the Jewish people the better off they would be... we'd all be. They certainly do not credit Torah learning with the miraculous survival of the State of Israel against all odds generation after generation.

These anti-Torah Jews certainly don't attribute their enemies' relentless attacks to their relentless attacks on the Torah world. How can they if they don't believe in Divine Providence and the value of Torah to God? There can be no common ground if one side does not appreciate the importance of what is at stake.

Another problem is that the IDF is designed to be a spiritual melting pot. It aims to make all citizens loyal to the well-being of the State by making it top priority in their lives. It's what gives living and dying for the state meaningful, at least for those who used are to live only for themselves.

The "State" in this week's *parsha* required the same kind of loyalty, but to God. It was also a melting pot of sorts, causing the soldiers to leave behind their personal concerns for the concerns of the greater good which, again, was God. How can the fate of the Torah world, and the world in general, be left in the hands of anyone *but* God and the God-fearing Torah leaders in each generation charged with doing His will.

I once asked someone for whom all of this was an issue, "What if Torah *is* from God, and the world does depend upon the learning of Torah to remain safe?"

He thought about it and said, "If we knew that Torah was in fact from God, we'd have to do everything in our power to protect it. . . even live by it."

"So," I said to him, "we're in agreement. You agree that if Torah is from God, we have to protect it, and protect those protecting it."

"Yes," he said.

"Then the issue is not really whether we should empty out the yeshiva's to fill up army barracks. If the Torah says yes, then you have to. If the Torah says no, they you can't. The real issue here is, is Torah from God. . . and that," I told him, is an entirely different discussion for which we have seminars to answer that question."

Then, smiling at him I casually said, "So, do you want to go to one?"

He smiled back and said, "Well, actually, no."

I believe Torah is from God and it directs my life. He didn't believe it did, and that guided his life. But admitting that if it *was* from God, the army issue would not be an issue at all but a *shaila* for those who know it best, which he was not, was enough common ground to end the discussion. . . peacefully.

That's why, in the words of one *Gadol* from the recent past, the best we can do with those who disregard the importance of Torah leaning while pushing to limit or end it, is to buy time. Their inability to understand the centrality of Torah learning to the Jewish people and our inability to convince them otherwise means an ongoing battle

until Moshiach comes.

In the meantime, all we can do is hang on for dear life, because the amount of people leaving Torah is greater than those returning to it. That's a crisis, maybe one that pushes off Moshiach, maybe one that brings him closer. In the meantime, it helps to understand the issues and proponents, if only to make it tomorrow and the next stage of the Messianic Process.

**Next Seminar: *Kabbalah & Tisha B'Av*, Tuesday, July 29, 8:30 Israel time.
To register, write to pinchasw@shaarnun.org.**

Have a great Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh,

Pinchas Winston

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