

Behaalotecha

June 10, 2017

זֹאת אֲשֶׁר לְלוֹוִיִּם מִבֶּן חָמִישׁ וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה יָבוֹא לְצַבָּא צָבָא בְּעֶבְדֹת אֵהָל מוֹעֵד

Numbers 8:24 *This is for the Levites who are 25 years old or older. They are to come to do service at the tent of meeting.*

Behaalotecha describes the active duty of Levites. From age 25 to 50 they served the people by carrying offerings and tools for ritual sacrifice to and from the priests who worked in the Holy of Holies. In the previous *parashah*, *Naso*, we read that the active duty of the Levites was from 30 to 50 years of age (Num. 4:24). Why do the texts disagree in the age of those in service? Rabbinic commentary tells us that the difference derives from time spent in training. Both Rashi and Rashbam assert that it would take 5 years for the Levites to learn how to do their job. Special training was clearly a necessity, whatever the length. The rituals associated with serving the Israelite community in the ancient temple were elaborate and, as we saw with Aaron's sons, potentially deadly! Connecting with the Divine through temple offerings was vital to the wellbeing and protection of individuals and the community, and the job of the Levites was of great importance.



In contemporary Israel, in the absence of the Temple, one of the most ubiquitous means of protecting the people is through military service. All Jewish, Druze, and Circassian males begin active duty at 18 years of age and continue to serve for three years. Bedouin men frequently also volunteer. Ultra-orthodox men often claim Additional References, an Israel Defense Forces Code of Ethics History of the IDF exemption that allows for the continuation of Torah study in place of military service - a mechanism that has been very controversial since 2009. Many of those who give time for mandated military or civil service believe no exemptions should be provided for those who want to study Torah. For Israeli Jewish females, the mandatory service commitment is two years beginning at age 18. Service duties range from administrative work to fighter pilots (in the IAF), the secret service, education specialists, and those who patrol transport routes into Gaza.

A code of ethics governs military personnel; this is part of their training. Entitled "*toharat haneshek*." This code mandates that the Israeli Defense Force will only use force when absolutely necessary and with the objective of limiting civilian casualties. *Toharat haneshek* is one example of how the IDF trains young recruits about the qualities of comradeship, discipline, and patriotism. Young service people, most of whom are 18 to 21, in particular serve as guards and patrols between the Palestinian and Israeli communities.

Training for IDF service includes special briefings on several governing values including "Purity of Arms." Their emphasis is defense and prevention of clashes, with the hope of minimizing casualties on either side of a conflict. To keep Israeli soldiers from abusing prisoners and noncombatants, the IDF drills the Purity of Arms code into recruits as well as inculcating this value to officers who are 20 to 24 years old. There are repercussions and punishments when a member of

the IDF violates these ethical codes. Understandably, cases in which individuals are charged with inappropriate military conduct, as in the case most recently of Elor Azaria, deeply trouble Israel's military leadership. With the IDF judicial system in place, there is both the hope and expectation that justice will govern this crucial element of Israeli society.

IDF members have said that while they could miss the mark on many training tests and be permitted to retry, when it comes to the standards of values for serving, there are no second chances. Riflemen and women, pilots and border guards can work to learn skills and procedures over a course of many months, but embodying loyalty, honesty, and upholding dignity of life should not require years of training, nor be tests you can fail.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Should all citizens of Israel share in military and national service to the state?
2. After decades of debate and legal ambiguity, in 2002, the Knesset passed the 'Tal Law,' which allowed military-aged Israeli "Yeshiva students whose occupation is the study of Torah" to officially defer, and often be exempted from, compulsory military service. The law, based on the recommendations of the Tal Committee, appointed in 1998, sparked widespread controversy, as many non-orthodox Israelis (roughly 80% of Israel's Jewish population) found this ruling to be an unfair imbalance of duty to the state amongst Israel's population. In 2006 the Israeli Supreme Court convened to review the efficacy of the law, finding it lawful yet a temporary solution. In 2012, following petitions to review the law again, the Supreme Court reassessed its 2006 ruling, ultimately deciding that Yeshiva students must complete their mandatory IDF or alternative national service, regardless of religious studies. Should Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel be conscripted into the IDF?

Romy Zipken, "[Israel Closer to Ultra-Orthodox Conscription](#)"

[Examining the Implications of the Tal Law, May 31, 2013](#)

3. Purity of Arms— How should this be taught? Selective targeting (or targeted killing) of terrorist leaders is a legitimate mode of operation and part of a state's counterterrorism, anticipatory, self-defense activities designed to prevent the continuation of terrorism. Paradoxically, this counterterrorism measure is the best way of preserving the military ethical conventions of "purity of arms." The concept refers to moral rules advocating the exercise of restraint and compassion in the course of a confrontation with the enemy. The "purity of arms" concept is debated extensively in democracies. Selective targeting of terrorist activists is a measure designed to hurt the real enemy while minimizing civilian casualties. Terrorist leaders and planners are targeted and an attempt is made, trying to avoid, so far as possible, the "collateral damage" that often accompanies any general military offensive. Customary international law permits targeting the enemy, provided that the criteria of necessity and proportionality of the attack are maintained. The relationship between the threat of terrorist attacks and the actual attacks carried out is shown in the study shared below. The study results reinforce the legality of selective targeting as a preemptive mode of operation, as they show that one should relate to a threat of an attack as to an imminent danger.

Abstract from Article in [Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Vol. 29 No 5, 2006](#)

For an excellent article on the topic for possible lengthy discussion, see

Benjamin Ish-Shalom, "Purity of Arms and Purity of Ethical Judgment. [Click Here](#)

Additional References:

[Israel Defense Forces Code of Ethics](#)

[History of the IDF](#)