



GEULAS YISRAEL

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Is Celebrating Tzahal a Lack of Emunah?

Growing up in the 70's, in the aftermath of the Six-Day War, I heard a comment which, even as a young boy, troubled me. A rabbi mentioned that, initially, the great nissim of 1967 carried Messianic potential. Tragically, this opportunity was squandered because too much credit was attributed to Tzahal. The ensuing parades declaring “kol haka-vod l'tzahal” reflected a lack of *emunah* and closed any Messianic window. Though I was too young to fully process my disagreement, something struck me as mistaken.

As ma'aminim or believers, we always trace success and failure to divine decisions. Whether it be financial prosperity, personal health, or military success, we believe that everything is in the hands of Heaven or הכל ביד שמים. Given this perspective, is it appropriate to celebrate the heroism of our soldiers? Does belief in Hashem as an איש מלחמה clash with our culture which venerates the bravery and courage of IDF chayalim?

EMUNAH AND BITACHON

By referring to the generic term “faith”, we often confuse two related but very different theological principles: *emunah* and *bitachon*. *Emunah* is an immutable philosophical conviction, whereas *bitachon* is a policy decision.

Emunah acknowledges fundamental articles

of faith, including the role of *hashgacha*: events aren't random or haphazard but part of a larger divine trajectory. Events which may appear to be natural are deliberately authored by Hashem. Sometimes Hashem decides to intervene in a supernatural and overt manner, but, more frequently, He scripts history through seemingly “routine” or “natural” events, thereby concealing His authorship. *Emunah* demands unconditional belief in an absolute set of theological principles including divine *hashgacha*.

Unlike *emunah* which is unchanging, *bitachon* is an ever-changing decision about balancing human effort alongside divine intervention. Though *emunah* affirms that Hashem CAN supernaturally intervene, we don't have the automatic right to rely upon His miracles, and therefore we must take appropriate human measures to achieve success. Additionally, Hashem often delivers success in response to prior human initiative. Either way, human investment, referred to as *hishtadlut*, is not a lack of *emunah*. Though our *emunah* is unflinching, we don't possess the right to entirely depend upon Hashem at the cost of diminished or nonexistent human effort. Cautioning us against overreliance upon miracles, Chazal warn that, despite *emunah*

אין סומכים על הנס. *Bitachon* is a constantly changing calibration of human effort and divine assistance.

Ya'akov provides the paradigm for steadfast *emunah* coupled with calibrated *bitachon*. Facing a murderous and vengeful brother, he refused to rely solely upon Hashem's supernatural miracles for protection. Various concerns drive him to greater *hishtadlut*: perhaps he already received too much divine benevolence to continue to “draw from the well”. Perhaps his minor transgressions (as he views them), will hinder divine intervention. Because of all these concerns, and despite his stout *emunah*, Ya'akov prepares for battle rather than passively trusting Hashem for protection. Though his *emunah* confirms that Hashem will decide the outcome of this skirmish, he feels that, at this moment, he shouldn't be fully reliant upon miracles.

While *emunah* never wavers or fades, *bitachon* depends upon the person and the circumstance. All that being said, whether we take greater human initiative or completely rely upon miracles, we always trace success back to Hashem.

WAR IS DIFFERENT

Yet, evidently, war and military success are still different. For some reason, during war, Hashem Himself encourages soldiers to take partial credit for their success, provided they don't completely ignore His role.

On the one hand, we are cautioned against exclusive attribution or even excess attribution to human effort. The 7th perek of sefer Shoftim describes Gidon's preparations for the war against the *Midyanim*. Though initially numbering 32,000 soldiers, his army is whittled down to a puny 300, to avoid false pretensions that the victory was



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due to military skills. Concerned that the victorious army would completely forget Him, Hashem preferred a tiny army so that His role would be unmistakable.

On the other hand, the Torah's well known warning against human attribution or כחי קד יעצם is not issued surrounding military success but regarding self-aggrandizing financial prosperity. The Torah never explicitly warns against attributing military success to human efforts. Prior to war, a Kohen reminds our armies that Hashem battles with them. However, this isn't a warning against self-attribution but a “pep talk” to boost morale by informing worried soldiers that Hashem “takes the lead” against our enemies.

More so, a striking midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim 724) illustrates that if we recognize Hashem's authorship, we are also allowed, and even encouraged to

celebrate human military feats. After his vanquishing of the giant warrior *Golyat*, Dovid Hamelech was paraded as “a conqueror of tens of thousands”. Immediately, Dovid reroutes the credit to Hashem אמר דוד לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא אתה עושה המלחמה ונצחון, ולך הוא הנצחון acknowledging that any victory was solely Hashem’s provenance.

Surprisingly, Hashem responds by sharing the “credit” with Dovid:

א”ל הקדוש ברוך הוא דוד, נתת לי הנצחון, אף אני נותן לך הנצחון : “you attributed the credit to Me I will attribute it to you”.

Though, typically, all credit is assigned to Hashem, military success is assigned both to Hashem as well as to human agents. What makes war different? Typically, we attach full responsibility to Hashem, whereas on the battlefield, credit is “shared”.

WAR IS A “MENTALITY”

Success at war doesn’t just demand talent and skill. To be successful at war, a soldier must deeply believe in their abilities and toughness. Courage and bravery demand not just vision of a larger purpose but also self-confidence and deep belief in your abilities. Success at war can’t be achieved without mental toughness and inner strength.

A gemara (Mo’ed Katan 16b) captures the hard-edged emotions necessary for military success. The gemara marvels at kindhearted and “tender” scholars morphing into soldiers and becoming as “hard as wood”. Success at war demands not just external skills but inner conviction and inner bravado. For that self-esteem and boldness to develop, a soldier must believe in himself and his potential. For an army culture to succeed human heroics must be celebrated and military feats honored.

Every human project demands human initiative or *hishtadlut* alongside *emunah*. In general, *hishtadlut* demands the application of human skills and talents. Unlike other spheres though, *hishtadlut* in war requires self-esteem and personal pride for courage and bravery. Though it feels like excess self-attribution, military pride and celebration of the courage of IDF *chayalim* are all part of the necessary *hishtadlut* Hashem desires during war. Without human beings feeling pride at their accomplishments our military *hishtadlut* would be hollow and ineffective and we would be fully reliant upon miracles.

Ironically, serving in the army is the one area of religious experience in which belief in Hashem and attribution to human effort don’t clash. We know that Hashem wages war. We also know that he wants us to take the initiative. To take the initiative which He desires it is insufficient to merely apply skills and talents. We must also believe in the human courage and bravery which Hashem endowed in us.

We hope one day for overt miracles and war fought entirely through supernatural means. In the absence of these miracles, we continue to invest *hishtadlut* in the battles we know Hashem fights on our behalf. Ideally there should be absolutely no contradiction between our *emunah* in Hashem as an *מלחמה* and the celebration of human courage.

כי הוא הנותן לך כל לעשות חיל
אף אני נותן לך הנצחון

The two are one. ■

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