

Lomdim

El Ami - El Atzmi
Learn Together

IDF's WOUNDED SOLDIERS

Our Sages taught us that "all Jews are responsible for one another".
This is the ideal that guides IDF soldiers when they go out to battle
to protect their fellow Jews.

Though the mission may have been accomplished, for some of these soldiers
the battle has not ended; they will carry their wounds in their souls
and on their bodies, for many more years.

Day in and day out, they courageously struggle with immense physical
and mental difficulties.

These are the Jewish People's superheroes.

צה"ל - THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES

The mitzvah of establishing an independent Jewish State in Israel, entails building an army
whose task it is to liberate the Land of Israel from any non-Jewish sovereign entity.

1. Devarim, Chapter 1, 21

ראה, נתן ה' אלהיך לפניך את הארץ. עליה רש פאשר דבר ה' אלהי אבותיך לך. אל תירא ואל תחזק.

Behold: HaShem your G-d has placed the land before you; go up and possess, as
HaShem G-d of your forefathers has spoken to you. Do not fear and do not lose
resolve.

Ramban [Nachmanides] understands this to be a Mitzvah De'Orayta [ordained by Torah]:

2. Ramban on Sefer HaMitzvot (born - 1194)

In this verse there is a mitzvah to conquer the Land of Israel.

This is what our Sages call 'A Mitzvah War'...

or as the Sifri Midrash says: Conquering the land will enable you to dwell in it.

Liberating the land from foreign rule is one mitzvah performed by IDF soldiers.

Another mitzvah is **protecting Jews wherever they are**, as stated by the Ramban
[Maimonides]:

3. Ramban, Laws of Kings, Chapter 5, 1 t (born - 1135)

Which war is "a Mitzvah War"?

Wars against the 7 nations (= that lived in Canaan prior to our arrival there), and
against Amalek, And wars for saving Jews from enemy attacks...

Our army is called the Israeli **Defense** Forces, emphasizing that we are not bloodthirsty warmongers – all we want is to protect ourselves from enemy attacks. We seek peace with our neighbors but unfortunately many of them still behave in the same way described in Psalms by King David:

4. Tehillim, Chapter 12, 7

I am peace (=I seek peace with them – Rashi); but when I speak, they are for war.

5. Rav Shlomo Aviner, Tal Chermon (born - 1943)

We only go to battle when there is no choice. Baruch HaShem, our situation today is so much better than it was during the 2000 years of exile prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, when all we could do was pray to HaShem and mourn our losses. It is hard to describe the tremendous change that brings us so much pride and joy: today our State has an army that can respond to threats against Jews.

QUESTIONS:

1. From which source do we learn that there is a mitzvah to serve in the IDF?
2. Which special mitzvot do IDF soldiers preform?
3. What are your feelings regarding IDF soldiers? What would you want to tell them?
4. What was the Jewish People's situation during the 2000 years of exile, compared to today?



OUR FATHER YAACOV - יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ

Yaacov is the first wounded person mentioned in the Torah. After raising a family for 20 years in Charan, Yaacov is commanded by HaShem to return to Canaan. He's concerned about the upcoming encounter with Esav, and prepares for it:

6. Beresheet, Chapter 32, 4-5

(4) וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל עֵשָׂו אָחִיו... כֹּה אָמַר עֲבָדְךָ יַעֲקֹב... וְאַחַר עַד עָתָה...
(5) וְאַשְׁלָחָה לְהַגִּיד לְאָדֹנָי לְמַצָּא חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ.

(4) Then Yaacov sent messengers ahead of him to Esav his brother... so said your servant Yaacov: ... I have lingered until now...

(5) I'm sending this to find favor in your eyes...

The messengers return and tell Yaacov that Esav isn't interested in peace; to the contrary—he's coming towards Yaacov with 400 warriors:

7. Beresheet, Chapter 32, 7

וַיָּשָׁבוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים אֶל יַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר בָּאנוּ אֶל אָחִיךָ אֶל עֵשָׂו וְגַם הִלְךָ לְקִרְיָתָךְ וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ עִמּוֹ.

And as Rashi (born - 1040) explains: "He is still behaving like the evil Esav; he still hates you"

The night before this encounter, Yaacov fights against Esav's guardian angel:

8. Beresheet, Chapter 32, 25-26

(25) וַיִּנְהַר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוֹ וַיֵּאבֶק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר.

(26) וַיֵּרָא כִּי לֹא יָכַל לוֹ וַיַּגַּע בְּכַף יָרְכוֹ, וַתִּקַּע בֶּף יָרֵךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּהֶאָבְקוֹ עִמּוֹ.

(25) Yaacov was left alone and a man (Esav's angel – Rashi) wrestled with him until the break of dawn.

(26) When he perceived that he could not overcome him, he struck the socket of his hip.

But despite his wound, Yaacov didn't let go:

9. Beresheet, Chapter 32, 27-29

(27) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחֲנִי כִּי עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר, וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁלְּחֶךָ כִּי אִם בְּרַכְתָּנִי:

(28) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מַה שְּׁמֶךָ, וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב:

(29) וַיֹּאמֶר, לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמָר עוֹד שְׁמֶךָ כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל, כִּי שָׂרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹהִים וְעַם אַנְשִׁים וַתִּגְבַּל:

(27) Then he (= the angel) said: let me go, for dawn has broken. And he (= Yaacov) said, I will not let you go unless you bless me.

(28) And he said to him: what is your name? And he replied: Yaacov.

(29) And he said: no longer will your name be Yaacov, but Israel; for you have striven with the divine and with man, and you have prevailed.

10. The Kli Yakar (born - 1540) explains:

The name *Israel* connotes worshipping HaShem honestly and wholeheartedly. During that night Yaacov merited a divine revelation of HaShem's angel because of those traits.

QUESTIONS:



1. Why did Yaacov send messengers to meet Esav?
2. Who was the "man" who wrestled with Yaacov?
3. What happened to Yaacov during that battle?
4. From which words do we learn that Yaacov continued to fight even after his injury?
5. What did Yaacov gain from that struggle?

Just like Yaacov, many of the IDF's wounded soldiers continued their fight even after sustaining injuries! Here are a few examples:

BRIGADIER GENERAL AVIGDOR KAHALANI

Avigdor Kahalani commanded a platoon of tanks in the Six-Day War (1967). They fought in northern Sinai against the Egyptians, where he was severely wounded. He suffered horrible burns throughout 60% of his body, was hospitalized for an entire year and underwent 12 plastic surgeries. For his bravery in the battlefield, he was decorated with the Medal of Honor. Once released from the hospital, Avigdor Kahalani went right back into active combat service in the IDF.

During the Yom Kippur War (1973), while commanding the 77th armored battalion, Kahalani led his men in difficult battles against the Syrians in a place later nicknamed "Valley of Tears". He formed a battle group made of tanks from various units, and was able to hold back the Syrian army (whose tanks outnumbered Israel's 470 to 150).

With the upper half of his body leaning out of the tank (an extremely dangerous practice in battle) to enable his soldiers to better spot him, he charged first into action. On one occasion he alone destroyed 3 Syrian tanks positioned a mere 50 meters away. His small unit of tanks succeeded in reclaiming the high ground, and went on to destroy an estimated 300 Syrian tanks!

For his leadership and courageous efforts in this decisive battle, Kahalani received the Medal of Valor.

CORPORAL JOHANN

Johann is a lone soldier from France, who served in an engineering company. At the start of operation Protective Edge [Gaza 2014] he took a bullet in his arm but didn't complain about it, fearing he will be evacuated at once, and consequentially "miss out on the fighting". Two days later his arm grossly swelled, but he told his commander that two of his friends were killed in action and that he would therefore "not evacuate before the mission is completed". He was eventually forced to go to the hospital, where the doctors did not allow him to return to his unit.

FIRST SERGEANT TAL KEDAR

Another incident from operation Protective Edge: Tal was wounded in his arms, legs and one of his eyes, by shrapnel from a grenade. He lost an eye but continued to partake in battle. He instructed his soldiers to provide cover fire from the windows of a house, while guiding another unit to shoot at the terrorists from the rooftop. While doing all this, he managed to report to his superiors, giving them a clear picture of the battle. During this battle, another soldier who took a bullet to his leg, ignored the pain and carried the wounded Sergeant Tal on his back, evacuating him under fire to the safety of a nearby armored vehicle.

BRAVERY - גבורה

Bravery is a good and important character trait. Our Sages teach us that bravery is needed in various forms, during hard and challenging times:

11. Mishna, Pirkey Avot, Chapter 4, 1

Ben Zoma says: Who is a true hero? He who conquers his own inclination.

As it says (Mishlei 16:32): He who is slow to anger is better than a strong man, and a master of his passions is better than a conqueror of a city.

The powers required to control our urges, and to practice doing good deeds, are expressions of bravery. Every morning during prayer we thank HaShem for enabling us to be brave:

'ברוך אתה ה', אלוקינו מלך העולם, אזור ישראל בגבורה.'

Rav Kook (born - 1865) explains that **bravery is a national trait, inherent to the Jewish People:**

12. Rav A.Y. Kook, Olat Reiya, part 1

The Jewish People's bravery is unique. It is characterized not by conquering others... but by the conquests of one's own inclinations... when we conquer our animalistic body's crude, wild cravings.

Rambam [Maimonides] describes the psychological and spiritual preparations a soldier must make before going out to battle:

13. *Rambam, Laws of Kings, Chapter 7, 15*

And once he (= the soldier) enters the battleground, he should lean on HaShem, and know that he's battling for the oneness of HaShem, and he should expose himself to danger with no alarm or fear.

QUESTIONS:



1. Give a few examples of "conquering one's own inclinations".
2. How is Jewish bravery unique?
3. What must a soldier overcome prior to battle?

הגבורה היומיומית של פצועי צה"ל

THE DAILY BRAVERY OF IDF'S WOUNDED SOLDIERS

The daily life of wounded veterans is replete with limitations and challenges, above and beyond those faced by ordinary people.

SERGEANT DOR NAKASH

Dor Nakash (20) from Ramat Gan, fought in operation Defensive Shield in Gaza in 2002, while serving in an elite unit as part of the engineer corps. He was wounded in the arm, and was hit by shrapnel in the face. He underwent 6 operations.

"How was I injured? We were inside this structure, when shots were fired at us from the outside. My friend and I approached the window and returned fire. At that point I was hit by sniper fire; the bullet went right through the palm of my hand, and numerous pieces of shrapnel hit my face. I felt excruciating pain.

When the doctor came, I grabbed him by the shirt and demanded to know if they were going to amputate my hand. He calmed me down and said that we have great surgeons... but my hand will never return to what it was: two fingers can't move, and I can't bend my wrist upwards. The bullet ruined my hand so the doctors had to implant new flesh there. **But it was all worth it.** This is what I dedicated to the residents of the South. This is what they needed, since their life was not bearable. Now quiet is finally restored".

FIRST SERGEANT GAL GANNON

21 year-old Gal, from Beit Shemesh, served as a combat soldier in the IDF's Nachal brigade. He was wounded by a missile fired at him in Gaza during operation Defensive Shield. Was operated on 10 times, and was hospitalized for long rehab sessions.

"The most difficult thing is... routine. To get up in the morning for rehab, physiotherapy, and to be told that you've developed another inflammation, and that you must be rushed to yet another surgical procedure. You close your eyes as they give you the anesthesia, wondering if you'll ever wake up. Another operation on your left hand, your right hand, your head, your face, your legs. And then another round – week by week. Everybody else goes on with their lives, studying or working, while we – the wounded – are still fighting our wars daily.

From day one, I get psychological and psychiatric assistance. I suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and I can't sleep. I wake up at night, go outside, take a tranquilizer."

QUESTIONS:



1. Which character traits are required from the wounded in order to function on a daily basis?
2. In the above 2 stories, what moved you?
3. Why did Dor go to fight in Gaza in the first place?
4. What emotions do you feel towards the wounded IDF soldiers? What would you tell them?
5. What can we give these heroes back?

מצוייני צה"ל

THE IDF'S OUTSTANDING SOLDIERS

In August 1976, a group of wounded IDF veterans who were touring New York on a trip organized by the Israeli Ministry of Defense visited the Lubavitcher Rebbe's Beit Midrash at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn. Because of their wheelchairs, they commuted with ten large vans.

When they reached the Rebbe, he walked between their wheelchairs, shaking their hands. He smiled at them warmly and blessed each one individually. He then addressed the group, saying this:

"The way you conduct yourselves, attests to the fact that HaShem gave you special powers with which to overcome your limitations, and indeed to surpass and outdo the achievements of many others. You are not handicapped at all; you are all outstanding! You have tremendous potential which none of us have. Therefore, I suggest that from this day on you will be called 'The IDF's Outstanding Soldiers' – a definition that fits you well."

תפילה לרפואת פצועי צה"ל

A PRAYER FOR THE RECOVERY OF IDF'S WOUNDED SOLDIERS

מי שברך אבותינו אברהם יצחק ויעקב שרה רבקה רחל ולאה משה אהרון דוד ושלמה
הוא יברך וירפא את כל פצועי חיילי צבא ההגנה לישראל
ואת כל פצועי כוחות הביטחון וכל פצועי נפגעי האיבה
בעבור שהציבור כולו מתפלל למענם. בשכר זה הקב"ה ימלא רחמים עליהם.
להחלימם ולרפאותם להחזיקם ולהחיותם וישלח להם מהרה רפואה שלמה מן השמים.
רפואת הנפש ורפואת הגוף לכל איבריהם ולכל גידיהם בתוך שאר חולי ישראל.
רפואה קרובה לבוא השתא בעגלא ובזמן קריב ונאמר אמן.

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El Ami's Vision:

1. Enhancing the connection to our Jewish identity, through joint meetings around Jewish sources, in a joyful manner and an enlightening environment.
2. Every week, thousands of parents and children in over 160 communities learn El Ami's study pages, which are now available in English and Spanish!

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