

## Serving in the Israeli Army

This article will present three of the reasons why a religious Jew should serve in the Israeli army.

1. The Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 5:1) says that there are three types of wars that are categorised as a Milchemes Mitzva – A war against Amalek, a war against the seven nations, and a war against anyone who is oppressing Bnei Yisrael. In Hilchos Taanis 2:3, Rambam says that nations attacking Bnei Yisrael can be defined as a military attack, an attack on the economy or an attempt to take the land of Bnei Yisrael. In a Milchemes Mitzva, everyone is obligated to fight. Therefore, seeing as Israel is currently surrounded by enemies who are trying to attack it, we have a situation of Milchemes Mitzva in which everyone is obligated to fight. This view is presented by Rav Nachum Rabinovitch (Melumdei Milchama (page 3)), Rav Isaac Herzog (Techumin 4, page 20) and Rav Eliezer Melamed (<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/14647>).

2. There are a number of Hashkafic statements in the Chumash and in Chazal which imply that an army should be run to the highest standards of Halacha and Kedusha. In Ki Setze, the Torah says that there is a need for high spiritual standards in the army, because Hashem is found in the camp of those going out to war. (Devarim 23:15). The Ramban says that the Shechina comes to an army base to help the soldiers win the war. If Bnei Yisrael do not maintain high spiritual standards on the base, it is not a place where the Shechina will remain. (The Abarbanel makes a similar comment). The Ramban continues that an army base is like a Mikdash of Hashem, and this is why even the hygiene of the area must be excellent – in fact, the same level of hygiene required in the place where one prays is required in an army base (Ramban, Devarim 23:10) A high level of Shmiras HaMitzvos is also required to have the merits to be successful in battle. The Mishna in Sotah (8:5) says that the soldiers would be warned before battle to turn back if they were worried they would not merit to be saved in battle, due to their sins.

Out of respect for the Shechina that is found in an army base, and in order to have the merits to win battles, it is important that people who are Shomer Torah and Mitzvos should serve in the Israeli army. This second element is presented by Rav Hershel Schachter (he has expressed this viewpoint numerous times – for example, at minute 51 of this Question and answer -

[http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/790227/Rabbi\\_Hershel\\_Schachter/Q\\_and\\_A\\_-\\_Tanach,\\_Textual\\_Differences\\_in\\_the\\_Torah,\\_Deciding\\_Halacha,\\_Choosing\\_a\\_Profession](http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/790227/Rabbi_Hershel_Schachter/Q_and_A_-_Tanach,_Textual_Differences_in_the_Torah,_Deciding_Halacha,_Choosing_a_Profession))

3. Rav Schachter has also said that a citizen of Israel is obligated to serve in the army as the ability to conscript soldiers is a right of the government. This is based on a Gemara in Sanhedrin 20b which teaches that King has the right to conscript people to the army (This can be found in the first 3 minutes of this Shiur - [http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/728907/Rabbi\\_Hershel\\_Schachter/Military\\_Duty\\_in\\_the\\_State\\_of\\_Israel](http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/728907/Rabbi_Hershel_Schachter/Military_Duty_in_the_State_of_Israel)).

This opinion of Rav Schachter's relies on the view that a modern day government has the same status as a King did in the time of the Gemara – this view was held by Rav Kook (Mishpat Cohen 144:22).

This article has aimed to delineate the Mitzva of serving in the Israeli army. As with all Mitzvos, one must first analyse the definition of the Mitzva before moving on to a broader set of issues. For example, one first must define the Mitzva of Tefillin, before one can discuss potential complications, hiddurim, stringencies and exceptions to the rule. Similarly, there are a number of issues that must be discussed once one has defined the Mitzva of serving in the army. These include whether one can serve in the army if they believe the army is performing actions that are incorrect, how one balances the service in the army with their commitments to Talmud Torah, amongst other issues. These will hopefully be discussed in a later article.