

Soldier On

written by Yossi Katz
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The drive down from the hills of Jerusalem to Ben Gurion Airport is a lonely one. After having been privileged to travel to the Land of Israel and bask in its holiness for a few days, it isn't so easy to depart and return to "normal life." Thankfully, I remembered that I had a precedent. Reb Noson once traveled to be with Rebbe Nachman, but because of the opposition of his family at that time, the Rebbe told him, "To you we must say, '*Shalom aleikhem! Tzeis'khem I'shalom!*' (hello and goodbye) to keep the opposition to a minimum." The Rebbe then taught Reb Noson a lesson, and Reb Noson was forced to take leave of his beloved Rebbe and mentor.

This is the story of our lives. At times we feel tremendous yearning for and closeness to God. We are able to study much and pray with great concentration and emotion. But more often than not, we slide back into our usual routine and feel distant from God. We pray, but our mind is traveling

elsewhere; we have little time or peace of mind for genuine Torah study and spiritual pursuits.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that in order to gain the ability to always return to God, one must be an expert in both “running” and “returning” (*Likutey Moharan* 6:4). Being an expert in “running” means that when you’ve had a great spiritual lift, you must realize that God is great and that you have certainly not yet arrived at the ultimate level of spirituality—so you will spur yourself to keep on striving for even higher levels. Being an expert in “returning” means that when you feel distant and disconnected, you must remember that God is everywhere, even in the lowest of places—and reach out to and connect to God even there.

This week’s *parashah* counts the Jews, for what it refers to as “going out to the army” (Numbers 1:3). “Going out to the army” means that we are each soldiers in the army of God. Our mission is to attempt to connect to Him everywhere—at our jobs, in our relationships with friends and family, and in our study halls and shuls. But many times, things just don’t go right. So the Torah encourages us, “Be a soldier!” Learn to “go out” of your preconceptions for spiritual growth and elevate every aspect of life.

What stops us from doing something that seems so obvious and vital? The Torah tells us, “And the Jewish people should encamp, each person according to his camp, and each person according to his flag” (*ibid.*, 1:52). Later, the Torah praises the Jews for doing this: “Thus did they encamp according to their flags, and thus did they travel” (*ibid.*, 2: 34). What does this mean for us?

When Moses ascended Mount Sinai, God warned the rest of the Jews not to attempt to climb the mountain. The border was defined; the Jewish people were commanded to stay put. In our daily lives, as we experience moments of distance from God and moments of elevation, we need to “camp” and live according to

our own circumstances. Our unique lives and experiences are tailor-made from God to pave the road to achieving the ultimate relationship with our Creator. If we are careful not to overstep our boundaries by comparing ourselves with other people's lives or with "visions" of what our lives should look like, we, too, will merit joining the army of God.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhat HaPeirot 5

A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!