

Who is the man who has built a new house and has not inaugurated it? Let him go and return to his house...and who is the man who has planted a vineyard and not redeemed it? ...And who is the man who has betrothed a woman and not married her?...Who is the man who is fearful and faithhearted, let him go and return to his house. (20:5,6, 7,8)

The *Torah* presents an unusual scene. The *Kohen* addresses the prospective soldiers as they prepare to go to battle. Those that are unsuitable for battle should leave the field, for fear that their own anxiety or lack of enthusiasm might erode the morale of their comrades. The *Torah* addresses four types of situations in which the individual ought to return home. First, the individual who recently built a house and has not yet had the opportunity to live in it. His fear is that someone else will move in to his home; second, is the individual who did not yet redeem his vineyard. Once again he is anxious that someone else may take his rightful place in the field; then is the one who has betrothed a young woman, but has not yet married her. He is afraid that someone else will ultimately marry his betrothed. Last is he who is "afraid" of battle. *Chazal* tell us this refers to the individual who feels his spiritual level is somewhat lacking, a situation that will undermine his courage in time of danger.

We see that the Jewish army was composed of a unique group of soldiers. Indeed, in an attempt to heap scorn and derision on the *Torah*, a group of *maskilim* defined the "Jewish army" in farcical terms. They showed how a large group of soldiers lined up to be drafted into the army. The *Kohen* came out and made his proclamation. One by one, the men dropped out. Hundreds of strong prospective soldiers left for varied reasons of anxiety or fear. Finally, a small group of men remained, eagerly awaiting their call to be selected. Then the *Kohen* made his last announcement, asking those who feared battle, whose sins hung heavy on their hearts to also leave the select group. They also left, leaving two people - the *Shaagas Arye* and the *Vilna Gaon* - standing there bracing themselves on their walking sticks, holding their *Talmuds* in their hand. "These two old men are what is left of the great Jewish Army!" scoffed the *maskilim*.

When this incident was related to **Rav Chaim Brisker, zl**, he said, "True, very true, but they failed to add that it was precisely these two men who waged war with the enemy and triumphed! They did not overwhelm their enemy through conventional tactics. Their weapons were a *Sefer Tehillim* and *blat*/foliio of the *Talmud*. They knew what it takes to win. We Jews have a unique strategy for success. While the *maskilim* intended to deride the *Torah*, their critique turned into a *Kiddush Hashem*. Their scorn evolved into an opportunity for people to see that our strength lies in our prayers and good deeds. Interestingly, these men seemed more concerned with their material possessions than their own lives. After all, should not the fear of death be the overriding source of anxiety? **Horav Shimon Schwab, zl**, comments that ostensibly anyone who went out to battle was

at peace with his Maker and with himself. He was an individual who enthusiastically performed *mitzvos* and energetically served Hashem.

What would "bother" such a person to the point that he could not fight the enemy? What concern could he harbor that was so overwhelming that he had to go home? It was the "*ish acher*", other man, who would take his place, who would move into his house, redeem his vineyard, marry his betrothed. Contrary to popular opinion, *Horav Schwab* contends that it was not jealousy that motivated his anxiety. Rather, it was something radically different. The soldier's concern was that someone would take over his possessions and not act appropriately with them. The house would not be open to guests; kindness would not be its hallmark. The other man would marry his betrothed and have children that would not be reared in the *Torah* way. He would not perform *mitzvos* with his property. Yes, the "*ish acher*" was a very real fear.

A father who is taken ill and is suddenly confronted with his mortality. What does he fear? What is his overriding concern? Is it death, the unknown, or is it something more profound? Is it the fear that his family will not continue along the path he had charted for them? Obviously, this is a real source of apprehension. Perhaps, if we prepare the foundation correctly, if we avail our children an excellent *Torah* education that will imbue them with *Torah* values and perspective, our most basic fears will not be realized.