

Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house. (20:8)

Torah is our source of life. The individual who commits himself to a life of Torah is assured that his observance of Torah and *mitzvos* will never be the cause of anything negative happening to him. On the contrary, his observance of Torah and *mitzvos* will protect him. This is why Rabbi Yossi *HaGalili* contends that one who fears that he might have sinned does not go to war. Without the spiritual fortitude engendered by *mitzvah* observance, one does not feel secure. While this does not mean that one who is observant should stand in harm's way, it does posit that as a Torah adherent Jew, he will not be diminished in any way as a result of his commitment to Torah.

We speak of *Toras Chaim*, a "Torah of life," and also a "life of Torah." A life of Torah is one which is built upon the foundations and principles of the Torah's *mitzvos*. Thus, the Torah directs a person's path of life. Every decision that one makes is directed by – and predicated upon – *Halachah*, the Torah's code of law and its directives. One who lives a life of Torah is constantly aware of Torah in his life. No activity, however mundane, is remiss of the Torah consciousness in which *Halachah* guides his every action. An observant Jew's value system – moral and ethical – is influenced and nuanced by the Torah which establishes the parameters for his thoughts, actions and attitudes. A true life of Torah does not sanction one to maintain a secular mindset and do whatever he pleases, as long as he does not transgress any exclusive rules of the Torah. A life of Torah does not concur with a life of secularism. One who lives a life of Torah has Torah coursing through his veins and breathing within him. It is the epicenter and nexus of his life. As David *Hamelech* says in *Sefer Tehillim* (27:4), "To sit in the House of Hashem all the days of my life." An inspired life is a life that is inspired by Torah. Thus, we understand why the soldier who felt spiritually inadequate would return home. His shortcomings in the spiritual sphere of life have demoralized him. He does not feel secure in warranting Hashem's protection on the dangerous battlefield.

Reb Moshe (fictional name) was traveling home to Bnei Brak, with traffic moving as slow as it always did on *Erev Shabbos*. With the Fridays getting shorter, it was a test of his patience to be able to navigate traffic in order to arrive home in a timely fashion. Friday was the day that he lectured in Rishon L'tzion. It was a *kiruv*, outreach, program which took precedence over his *Erev Shabbos* errands, because inspiring even one *neshamah*, soul, was of immeasurable value. He was lost in thought when he chanced upon a soldier standing on the side of the road seeking a hitch. *Reb Moshe* figured that the young soldier was also in a rush to reach his destination before *Shabbos*. He pulled over and offered him a ride. He told the fellow that he was on his way to Bnei Brak. He would be happy to have him join him as far as he was traveling. The soldier jumped into the car, happy that after thirty minutes of waiting, someone finally stopped for him. "There should be more Jews like you," the young soldier, whose name was Gabi, said. *Reb Moshe* countered that people were in a rush to make it home in time for *Shabbos*.

“How far do you have to travel?” R’ Moshe asked Gabi. He gave him the name of a *kibbutz* that was quite distant from Bnei Brak. R’ Moshe asked the obvious question. “How do you expect to reach your destination in time for *Shabbos*?” “I do not expect to make it, because I do not observe *Shabbos*.” “Why not join me and my family for *Shabbos* and continue on home after *Shabbos*?” “My family is expecting me for the weekend,” Gabi replied. “This is what a telephone is for,” R’ Moshe said. “Why not call them and say that you are late and have decided to spend *Shabbos* in Bnei Brak?”

Veritably, Gabi was exhausted and did not mind spending *Shabbos* with this kind, observant Jew. *Shabbos* was not really his “thing,” but if it meant sleep and a decent meal, why not? “Fine, I accept your offer of hospitality.” Gabi actually enjoyed the *Shabbos* experience with R’ Moshe’s family. The negative impression that the teachers in the secular school that he had attended as a youth had drummed into his mind was not consistent with this wonderful family and the warm, welcoming *Shabbos* experience that he enjoyed.

After *Havdalah*, Gabi turned to R’ Moshe and said, “I would like to take something along with me as a memento of the wonderful *Shabbos* I spent with your family.” “What would you like?” R’ Moshe asked. “Well, I do not want to become *dati*, observant, but I would like to accept upon myself to do something as a token of this *Shabbos*.” “Perhaps you would like to observe *Shabbos*.” “No, no, I am not ready for that” was Gabi’s immediate reply. “What about *kashrus*?” “Also not. It is much too difficult to undertake. Just suggest something simple and easy, and I will do it.”

Reb Moshe murmured, “No *Shabbos*, no *kashrus*, and you say that your *Tefillin* have not been touched since your *bar mitzvah*. I do not know what to suggest. We will open up the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, which is a collection of Jewish laws, and see what we can find.” He opened up the *Kitzur*, and the first *halachah* that struck him was the law concerning how one puts on his shoes and ties his laces. “There is a Torah concerning how one dresses himself?” Gabi asked. R’ Moshe explained that Torah encompasses every aspect and facet of life. Gabi agreed that following the rules of lacing his shoes would be his *mitzvah*, the *mitzvah* that would remain with him as a memento of his *Shabbos* in Bnei Brak.

Gabi bid R’ Moshe and his family goodbye and left for home. A week later, he was back at his base when he began a series of intense training courses. During this entire time, Gabi never failed to lace his shoes in accordance with *halachah*. [The right shoe is put on first; the left shoe is tied first.] One night, he was awakened from a deep sleep and instructed by his commanding officer to dress in full gear and board one of two training helicopters that would take the soldiers on a mission. As Gabi was running to the helicopter, he remembered that in his haste he had forgotten to lace his shoes properly. He had given his word never to deviate from the *halachah* of putting on one’s shoes properly. He told the commander that he must return to his barracks to put on his shoes properly. The commander thought that Gabi had lost his mind. “Absolutely not!” the commander shouted above the noise of the helicopter rotors that were warming up in anticipation

of their passengers. Gabi insisted on returning. The commander warned him that returning to the barracks meant ignoring a direct order, which was punishable by a week in the stockade. Gabi replied, "I will do what I must do, and you will do what you must do." That is exactly how the altercation played itself out. Gabi returned to the barracks, only to be arrested and placed in the stockade.

A few hours later, Gabi was lying on the hard floor of the stockade when the word of the tragic mid-air collision of two helicopters reached him. All seventy-three soldiers on board the helicopters were killed. This was a disaster of epic proportion. Had Gabi not returned to the barracks to lace his shoes in accordance with *halachah*, he would have been one of the victims. Commitment, altering his existing lifestyle by accepting upon himself to follow one of the Torah's imperatives in what many would consider a mundane, non-essential area of endeavor, saved his life. Torah saves.