

In the Israeli military who has the say – the Rabbi or the commander

When the Torah conflicts with the military law.

הנחיות למנחה –

לפניך פעילות בנושא דילמות בצה"ל – מה מקומה של היהדות בצה"ל?

בחרתי להציג נושא זה על ידי שני מקרים – גידול זקן בצה"ל ושירת נשים באירועים רשמיים.

דרך מומלצת להעביר את הפעילות –

- לתת לחניכים להציג את כל אחד מהמקרים, החניכים יכולים להקריא את רוב הקטעים תוך כדי שהמנחה מסביר ומוסיף משלו.
- בסיום כל מקרה – להוביל את החניכים לדיון בנושא.

In Israel military service is obligatory. 75% of all Israelis serve in the IDF (ask Yoni where are the other 25% ?).

Some facts – over 90% percent of soldiers in the Israel Defense Force (IDF) are Jewish. The other 10 % are Druz and Beduin soldiers who proudly serve in the IDF. Being the only Jewish military in the world the IDF has to keep all of its kitchens strictly Kosher and to avoid unnecessary tasks during Shabbat. (ask Yoni about Israeli Arabs).

Growing a beard

What does the Jewish law say?

In Judaism, shaving with a razor is a prohibition that is based on rabbinic interpretation of Leviticus 19:27, which states; “You shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard”. The Mishnah interprets this as a prohibition on using a razor on the beard. This prohibition is further expanded upon in Kabbalistic literature.

The Zohar, one of the primary sources of Kabbalah (a form of Jewish mysticism), attributes holiness to the beard, and strongly discourages its removal, declaring that even the shortening of a beard by scissors is a great sin;

What does the IDF law say?

All IDF soldiers must shave their beards. A soldier shall be allowed to grow a beard only by the approval of an officer of the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and by the approval of the unit's rabbi. This rabbi must confirm that the soldier is conducting a religious way of life during his military service (at base and at home).

A Real Life Case -

February 2nd, 2013 – from the Israeli news:

Religious soldiers were kicked out of their unit due to unwillingness to shave their beards.

A unit commander (IDF officer) decided to raise the level of uniformity in his unit by ordering all soldiers under his command to shave their beards. The religious soldiers in his unit refused to do so, defending their right to have a beard for religious reasons. The commander then decided to test their religious backgrounds and understanding of Judaism. After doing so, he reached the conclusion that they were not religious enough, and ordered them to shave their beards. Once they refused to do so, they were kicked out of the company.

The soldiers submitted a complaint to the IDF general advocate, retired Major General Yitzhak Brik which said in response “We expect IDF commanders not to lead soldiers into situations in which they have to choose between a military order and a religious belief. The IDF orders explicitly prohibit commanders to order their soldiers to shave their beards without discussing the matter with an officer from a higher level of rank. This is based upon the understanding that shaving is an irreversible action. This commander acted in a dismissive way, disrespecting his soldiers. This commander should be punished by his superiors”.

Listening to females sing

What does the Jewish law say?

In Orthodox Judaism, men are generally not allowed to hear women sing, a prohibition called KOL ISHA (The voice of a woman). The Talmud classifies this as ERVAH (literally "nakedness"). The majority view of this authority is that this

prohibition applies at all times, and forbids a man to pray or study Torah in the presence of a woman who is singing. Similar prohibitions are classified as ERVAH.

There is debate between rabbis whether the prohibition applies to a recorded voice, where the singer cannot be seen, where the woman is not known to the man who is listening, and where he has never seen her or a picture of her. There are also opinions that exclude singing in mixed groups from this prohibition, such as synagogue prayer or dinner-table songs, based on the idea that the female voice is not distinctly heard as separate from the group. In these cases, two voices cannot be heard simultaneously.

Conservative Judaism interprets the relevant passage of the Talmud as expressing a rabbi's opinion rather than imposing a requirement.

Reform Judaism does not regard this traditional law as applicable to modern times.

What does the IDF law say?

There shall be no ban on female soldiers to sing in public military events in a mixed audience. Male soldiers who consider themselves to be religious and wish to avoid these events shall discuss the matter with their commanders. In situations like these, the commanders have the final say and the right to approve or disapprove the soldiers' requests to not attend the event.

A Real Life Case -

September 2011, from the Israeli media

About a week ago in the IDF officer school, an event of military culture and heritage took place under the title "Learn and remember the IDF 'Cast Lead' operation in Gaza of 2009". The event was held for the GEFEN, battalion which is consisted of combat cadets of the school. The cadets of GEFEN battalion are literally the future of the IDF. All IDF high rank officers started in GEFEN battalion. 50% of the battalion cadets are considered religious (with a Kipa/Yamaka on their heads).

Prior to the event, the battalion commander spoke to his cadets and mentioned some details regarding the upcoming program. Understanding that many of his cadets are religious, the commander ordered the base's band to ensure that all songs during the event were to be performed by men and women together.

Once the event started and the band went on stage, 30 cadets stood up and made their way out of the social hall due to the fact that female soldiers were singing on stage. The battalion commander made it very clear that this is an obligatory event, and they must stay in. Eventually, only 9 cadets decided to leave the social hall.

The battalion commander recommended that the school commander exclude these cadets from the course, saying "we expect future IDF officers to show respect to all IDF soldiers, at all times, regardless of their religious beliefs" (ask Yoni what happened at the end).

שאלות למנחה – שאלות שניתן להפנות לקבוצה

תחת הסוגיה של גידול זקן –

- איזו תופעות שליליות עלולות להיווצר כתוצאה מאי שוויון במראה החיצוני של חיילים?
- לאיזו התייחסות זקוק חייל דתי בצבא? מהם הצרכים שלו?
- האם זה לגיטמי שרב ידרוש לבדוק את "רמת הדתיות" של חייל גם כאשר הוא יוצא הביתה לחופשה?
- מדוע בוחנים אותי כחייל דתי רק לפי סטנדרטים אורתודוקסים? איפה השפעות הזרם הרפורמי והקונסרבטיבי?
- האם ייתכן שהצבא מסכן את העולם הרוחני של חייל דתי?

תחת הסוגיה של שירות נשים בצה"ל –

- מהו ההבדל המשמעותי בין שני המקרים שהוצגו כאשר בוחנים את פקודות הצבא?
- האם ביציאת החיילים הדתיים מהאולם יש הפגנה של חוסר כבוד או שאולי זוהי הוכחה לאמונתם והאמנים לא צריכים להיפגע מכך...?