



VAYECHI

"People seek the comfort of the company of others."

Two years ago today, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert approved orders to begin operation Cast Lead. The next day Israeli troops entered Gaza and began securing the safety of the Jews of southern Israel. The operation was successful in that it stopped Hamas from continuing to fire rockets at Jewish cities in Israel. With minimal loss, Israel ensured that its southern citizens were not left to suffer. The Israeli army, the people of Israel, and the Jews of the world came to the defense of the south, showing how our people never abandon each other.

In this essay I'd like to look into our people never abandoning each other. This is referred to as the "No man left behind policy," which is often applied to the battlefield. I'd like to explain why we invest so much into not leaving anyone behind. As the crux of my investigation, I'll bring up Rashi's explanation of Yaakov's deathbed blessing to his son Gad. I hope by the end of the essay, the reader will have a better understanding of battlefield mentality and the importance of community.

When a soldier steps onto the battlefield a fear like none other grips him. Will he return from the battle safely? Will he be injured? Will he be killed? Will he ever see his loved ones again? The fear grows as he imagines the enemy behind every hill, around every corner, lurking in every doorway. The soldier imagines the absolute worst horror, being left alone, tending to himself without the help of his comrades.

The fear of being left alone on the battlefield extends to life off the battlefield as well. People tend to fear being alone, no matter what the circumstance. The thought of facing danger alone terrifies the average person. Even the thought of facing anything even remotely treacherous without others panics people.

People seek the comfort of the company of others. They feel that there is safety from all danger in numbers. While in certain circumstances there is safety in numbers, numbers alone do not guarantee safety. In the most common emotionally straining situations we face, the loss of a loved one, illness, or financial hardship, companionship doesn't solve the problem, but provides psychological relief to those who seek it most. Giving people relief from their fears is the great advantage that company provides.

In war, soldiers set the policy of not leaving anyone behind to provide morale to each other. Knowing that they will never be alone, this provides them the courage to battle their fiercest. As a nation, we provide support to our brothers and sisters no matter where they might be so that they'll have the strength to carry on.

Providing strength is the crux of Yaakov's blessing to his son Gad. Knowing he will go to war, Rashi explains that Yaakov blesses Gad, "All their troops will return in their own tracks to their territory which they took on the other side of the Jordan and not a single person will be missing." As each soldier of Gad knows, they will all return from battle, and even if injured, they will not be left alone. Yaakov provides his soldiers with the courage they'll need to wage war.

The Rishonim on the Sedra:

"After these events, someone said to Yosef, "Behold your father is ill." He took his two sons with him, Menasheh and Ephraim."

Yaakov was the first one to become ill, until that point everyone died by sneezing. This is why when a person sneezes he has to thank Hashem.

- Chizkuni to Bereshit 48:1

Interesting Sayings of Rambam

Thirdly, there are those creations which have a form but no shape. These are the angels, which have no bodies, but whose form vary from angel to angel. (Fundamentals of the Torah 2:3)

The Rambam's third category of creations are angels. While we normally consider angels in the realm of the mystical, the Rambam considers nothing mystical; rather angels are beings that have form but no physical shape. This differentiates them from creations like man and stars. The form of an angel changes depending on each angel.

From Pirkie Avot: Rabbi Shimon said: Be careful in the reciting of the Shema and in prayer. When you pray do not make your prayer a form of routine but a plea for mercy and supplications