

WOMEN IN THE IDF

A HALACHIC OVERVIEW

MIZRACHI - HENDON, MAY 2025

- This short overview shiur¹ will focus on the halachic and hashkafic issues. Issues which we will not discuss include: (i) military operational factors; and (ii) potential negative medical impact of combat roles on women
- At this time, the vast majority of poskim - across Charedi and Dati Leumi spectrum² - are opposed on halachic and hashkafic grounds to religious women serving in combat units. Most of these poskim are also opposed to women serving in the army at all. In the Dati Leumi world, Sherut Leumi - National Service - is pushed very hard in the Ulpanot as the desired option. In the Charedi world, Sherut Leumi is also NOT an option for most young women, largely for hashkafic reasons.
- Notwithstanding the opposition of most poskim and Religious Zionist leaders, and also of many of the Ulpanot, more and more³ observant girls are choosing to serve in the IDF. There are a number of organizations set up to advise and assist religious girls who are considering or have chosen to serve in the IDF. These include Aluma⁴ and Zahali⁵, Midreshet Lindenbaum and now Cheilech.
- A small (but growing) minority of religious women are interested in combat roles. Nevertheless, for most young dati women, the discussion largely concerns non-combat roles.
- This issue has expanded dramatically in the current war with around 3,500 dati women drafting per year, around 10% into combat roles. For the first time in Israel's military history, female combat soldiers recently entered Lebanon as part of an operational mission.

A] WOMAN AND WAR IN TANACH

- The Chumash does not explicitly address the issue of women fighting in a Jewish army, but it does give some indication of women's roles in the defence of the Jewish Nation and the conquest and defense of the Jewish State

A1] THE ISRAELITE ARMY IN THE DESERT

1. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּחַר־לָנוּ אֲנָשִׁים וְצֵא הִלָּחֵם בְּעַמְּלֵק מִאֲחֵר אֲנֹכִי נֹצֵב־עַל־רֹאשׁ הַגִּבְעָה וּמִטָּה הָאֱלֹקִים בְּיָדִי:

שמות פרק י"ט

Moshe instructed Yehoshua to choose men⁶ to fight against Amalek.

2. שָׂאוּ אֶת־רֹאשׁ כָּל־עֵדֻת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפָּר שְׁמוֹת כָּל־זָכָר לְגִלְגָּלָתָם: מִבְּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְיִמְעָלָהּ כָּל־יֹצֵא צְבָא בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל תִּפְקְדוּ אֹתָם לְצִבְאוֹתָם אִתָּהּ וְאִתְּךָ:

במדבר א"ב ג

The Jewish army in the desert is comprised SOLELY of men.

A2] THE CONQUEST OF ERETZ YISRAEL

3. וַיֹּאמֶר בְּנֵי־גַד וּבְנֵי רְעוּבֵן רָאוּבֵן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר עֲבָדֶיךָ נַעֲשֹׂוּ כְּאִשְׁרֵי אֲדֹנֵי מִצְרָיִם: טַפָּנוּ נָשִׁינוּ מִקְנֵנוּ וְכָל־בְּהֶמְתָּנוּ יֵהְיוּ־שָׁם בְּעָרֵי הַגִּלְעָד: וְעֲבָדֶיךָ יַעֲבֹדוּ כָּל־חֲלוּץ צְבָא לִפְנֵי ה' לְמִלְחָמָה כְּאִשְׁרֵי אֲדֹנֵי דִבְרֵי:

במדבר לב-כה כז

The proposal of the Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven, which was endorsed by Moshe, was that the men should go to fight in the war to conquer Eretz Yisrael, but the women should stay behind in the cities, together with the children and the livestock.

- Nevertheless, this does not say that ALL the women stayed home or that they had to do so. Most, but not all, women would be needed to nurse and look after the children. Also, with the children and the livestock at home, someone had to guard the Home Front, and it was only reasonable that the priority would be for the men to fight.

1. For two much more detailed shiurim with hundreds of sources and references see <https://rabbimanning.com/women-in-the-idf/>. See also https://www.jewishideas.org/article/women-modern-military-second-look#_edn42,%20footnote%2044.

2. Dati Leumi rabbis opposed to religious women joining the IDF include: R. Yaakov Ariel, R. Aryeh Stern, R. Nachum Rabinovitz, R. Eliakim Levanon, R. Menachem Bornstein, R. David Chai HaKohen, R. Yehoshua Shapira, R. David Avichiel, R. Menachem Perl. Even Rabbis on the left of the Dati Leumi hashkafic spectrum, such as R. Yuval Sherlow and R. Eliezer Melamed, are generally opposed to women's service, certainly in combat.

3. In 2010 the total number drafting was only 935, showing the significant increase in IDF recruitment from dati women, notwithstanding the almost total opposition of their teachers and community rabbis. See <https://ots.org.il/makor-rishon-womens-formation-religious-women-in-the-idf/>

4. <https://aluma.org.il/program/%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%AA%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%91%D7%90%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%94/>

5. <https://www.tzahali.co.il/6>. It is difficult to read this as a ban on women in the military effort. Clearly, able-bodied men were a priority in the fighting force against a merciless enemy such as Amalek.

A3] WOMEN AS PROTAGONISTS

- In Nach we find in the battle of Barak against Sisera that women⁷ take center stage as protagonists - in the form of Devorah as an inspirational leader⁸ and Yael, who ultimately kills Sisera⁹.
- The story of Judith beheading Holofernes¹⁰ mirrors that of Yael and Sisera.¹¹
- Note also the account in Shoftim 9:53 of the woman of Tebetz who threw a grindstone¹² from the besieged city onto the head of Avimelech (son of Gidon), fatally wounding him. Avimelech then demanded that his aide finish him off so that people would not say that he had been killed by a woman!

A4] WOMEN AS SPIES AND STRATEGISTS

- We also see women fulfilling a critical role as spies, advisers and strategists. Note the following:
- Rachav hiding and encouraging the Jewish spies in Yehoshua Chap 2.
- The account of Yonatan and Achima'atz, loyal to David in the rebellion of Avshalom. Women were instrumental in hiding and supporting them, and misleading enemy intelligence - Shmuel 2 17:17-20.
- The Isha Chachama in Shmuel 2 Chap 20, who negotiates with Yoav on the release of Sheva Ben Bichri and arranges his execution.
- But we never find that women are drafted as soldiers.¹³ Rather women are portrayed in the Tanach as givers not takers of life.¹⁴

B] MILCHEMET MITZVA AND A WOMAN'S OBLIGATION TO THE ARMY

B1] THE TALMUDIC DISCUSSION

4. וְיִסְכְּנוּ הַשְּׂטָרִים לְדָבָר אֶל־הָעָם וְאָמְרוּ מִי־הָאִישׁ הִירָא וְרָךְ הַלֵּב יִלְךְ וְיִשָּׁב לְבֵיתוֹ וְלֹא יִמָּס אֶת־לֵבָב אֲחָיו כְּלָבָבוֹ

דברים כ"ח

The Chumash rules that, when recruiting troops for war, there is an exemption for those who are too afraid and who may weaken the resolve of others in the army.

5. **משנה ה': וְיִסְכְּנוּ הַשְּׂטָרִים לְדָבָר אֶל־הָעָם וגו' - רבי עקיבא אומר הירא ורך הלבב כמשמעו שאינו יכול לעמוד בקשרי המלחמה ולראות חרב שלופה. ר' יוסי הגלילי אומר הירא ורך הלבב זהו המתירא מן העבירות שבידו**
משנה ז': במה דברים אמורים? במלחמת הרשות אבל במלחמת מצוה הכל יוצאין. אפילו (יואל ב:טז) חֲתָן מִחֻדְרוֹ וְכֻלָּה מִחֻפְתָּהּ.

משנה מסכת סוטה פרק ח

The Mishna makes it clear that, in fact, the exemptions from the draft into the Jewish only apply to a 'Milchemet Reshut'¹⁵. In a Milchemet Mitzva¹⁶ (which we will define below) ALL men and women are drafted - even the chatan from his 'room' and the kalla¹⁷ from her 'chupa'.¹⁸

6. דדרכו של איש לעשות מלחמה ואין דרכה של אשה לעשות מלחמה

קידושין ב'

Chazal however state that 'it is not the (normal?) role of women to fight in wars'.

7. See Shoftim 4:8-9

8. Devorah may be exception that proves the rule. She did not wish to be the military leader and only agreed when Barak begged. She was very clear how disgraceful this in fact was!

9. With a tent-peg and not with a sword - see below for possible implications of this in halacha.

10. See the Apocryphal book of Judith 13:1-11.

11. Except that Judith actually uses a sword!

12. Note the imagery of the woman using an item for food preparation to kill in battle.

13. This point is stressed by R. Avigdor Nevensahl in an article in Techumin 5 p 364: 'Nashim Bemilchemet Mitzva'. R. Nevensahl takes an unequivocal stand that the Tanach clearly shows that women are not to be drafted into the Jewish army, even for a Milchemet Mitzva.

14. This point is stressed by Rabbanit Michal Nagen, the head of Tzahali, a mechina training religious women for Zahal. She makes it clear that they are not training fighters to take life, but soldiers who can restore life.

15. A Milchemet Reshut requires the sanction of the Urim and Tumim and, as such, is inapplicable in our times.

16. The Mishna continues with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda, who distinguishes between Milchemet Mitzva and Milchemet Chova. In practical terms, there is little difference between the opinions, although some of the mefarshim (eg Rav Goren) analyze how there could be implications to the two approaches.

17. There are manuscripts (eg Munich) of the Bavli which omit the wording וְכֻלָּה מִחֻפְתָּהּ. Nevertheless almost all include it and the Rambam certainly has that version.

18. A reference to the rooms that the chatan and kallah were in before the wedding with their friends and attendants, meaning that the wedding is postponed for the war. Alternatively, the yichud room where they are together as man and wife, only to be interrupted by the call to war!

B2] THE RAMBAM

7. במה דברים אמורים שמחזירין אנשים אלו מעורכי המלחמה? במלחמת הרשות. אבל במלחמת מצוה הכל יוצאין ואפילו חתן מחדרו וכלה מחופתה.

רמב"ם הלכות מלכים פרק ז הלכה ד

The Rambam appears to rule clearly that women are drafted to fight in a Milchemet Mitzva.

8. (לו) מלחמת מלואה היא מלחמה בז' עממין ובעמלק ומכש"כ מלחמת יחושע לכבוש ח"י ועיין ציצמות (ס"ה) 'דרכו של איש לכבוש ואין דרכה של אשה לכבוש', וכן בקדושין (ז) 'אין דרכה של אשה ללכת למלחמה'. ולפי"ז ל"ע הלשון שצבאן 'אפילו כלה מחופתה'. ול"ל דאין הלשון בדוקא, אלא הוא ע"ד מליצת הכתוב (יואל ז) 'לא חתן מחדרו וכלה מחופתה'. והכוונה שנשצבה כל שמחה עד שהכלה שבה מחופתה לביתה מפני שחתנה יולא למלחמה.

תורה תמימה הערות דברים כ"ז הערה לו

The Torah Temima understands that the language of the Mishna in Sota is not halachic at all, but rather a poetic style to express that all simcha is halted so that the chatan can go to war.

9. בד"א שמחזירין וכו'. ברייתא כלשון רבינו. אלא דקשה – וכי דרך הנשים לעשות מלחמה דקתני וכלה מחופתה? והא כתיב (תהלים מה"ד) 'כָּל-כְּבוֹדָהּ בַּת-מֶלֶךְ פְּנִימָה! וי"ל דה"ק – כיון דחתן יולא מחדרו, כלה יולא מחופתה שאינה נוכחת ימי חופה. ואפשר דמלחמת מלואה הנשים היו מספקות מים ומזון לבעליהן. וכן המנהג היום בערציות.

רדב"ז על הרמב"ם הלכות מלכים פרק ז הלכה ד

The Radvaz¹⁹ raises a question on the kallah going to war, even for a Milchemet Mitzva. First, he points out the statement of Chazal that women do not normally go into combat²⁰. Secondly, he raises a question from the verse in Tehillim (see below). He gives two answers: (i) maybe the kallah is leaving²¹ because the chatan has now gone so the wedding cannot continue; (ii) maybe women do indeed go to war, not into combat but to logistic support - giving food, water etc to their husbands²². He also points out that this was the custom in his time with Arab women²³.

10. וכלה מחופתה - משמע שגם נשים יולאות למלחמה, וחידוש הוא. ואולי אינן יולאות אלא לאפות ולבשל וכדומה ללורך הגברים ואנשי המלחמה.

חידושי הרש"ש סוטה מד:

The Reshash²⁴ also mirrors this understanding, although seems to broaden the women's role to general support of the men fighting, and not necessarily their husbands.

11. (ג) וכלה מחופתה - אשה לאו בת מלחמה, רק לספק מזון ולתקן הדרכים אף היא יולאת.

תפארת ישראל - יבין מסכת סוטה פרק ח משנה ז

The Tiferet Yisrael give a similar explanation - women went to a Milchemet Mitzva in support, not combat, roles. He adds the task of fixing the roads, which is in fact an incredibly important military role as the sappers.

• Rav Kook²⁵ did not accept this interpretation of this specific halacha²⁶ which limits the role of women in war since it does not appear in the Mishna or Rambam. This was reiterated by his son, R. Tzvi Yehuda Kook:

12. נמלאת צין מפרשי הרמב"ם דעת הרדב"ז לפרש את לשון המשנה והרמב"ם, שיולאת אפילו 'כלה מחופתה', שהוא יולא מפשעו אמנם דברי חז"ל ושאר רבותינו הראשונים והמפרשים סתמו ולא פירשו כך. וגם ספר החינוך ... סתם ולא פירש כן ...

הרב צבי יהודה קוק, לנתיבות ישראל עמ' 120

Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook, Rosh Yeshiva of Merkaz HaRav after his father, writes that the first explanation of the Radvaz goes against the straightforward meaning of the words!

19. Rabbi David ibn Zimra, 16C Spain/Egypt/Eretz Yisrael.

20. Women were only formally admitted as officers in any military in the 20th Century. In the UK some restrictions on women in combat roles were only lifted in 2018!

21. Some mefarshim suggest she is leaving in daven for the chatan, hence the connection with the original verse in Yoel.

22. It is not clear if this specifically means their husbands. Some poskim have insisted that it can only mean that no contact with other men is permitted. Other poskim have limited this specifically to cooking and laundry - but see below.

23. This additional comment is interesting and may suggest that the prevailing custom in the wider community could be relevant. In today's world, women's involvement in the military has vastly increased, mostly in roles which do not involve physical combat. Nevertheless, in a world of techno- and cyber-warfare, these roles can be critical and lethal!

24. Samuel ben Joseph Strashun, 19C Vilna.

25. As reported by his son, Rav Tzvi Yehuda,

26. Which does not of course mean that Rav Kook supported the concept of women in combat roles.

13. ולא מקשה מכח האיסור שצדצר חלל שמקשה שאין דרכה צד. כלומר שאינה יכולה לעשות מלחמה ולא תהא תיפארתה על דרך זו. ולזה הוא מציא הכתוב שפירשו שצדצר של האשה אינם יכולים להתצטל צדצר הקרצ חלל צדית פנימה.

הרב שאול ישראלי - התורה והמדינה ד' עמ' 223 הערה 2

Rav Shaul Yisraeli, Rosh Yeshiva of Merkaz HaRav after R. Zvi Yehuda, explains that the second explanation of the Radvaz is not suggesting that there is a prohibition of women going to war, based on kol kevuda bat penima. Rather, since women are not trained in war, there is no kavod in them going out to battle. Their efforts are more productively dedicated to helping the war effort in areas in which they have expertise.

B3] SEFER HACHINUCH

- The position of the Sefer HaChinuch²⁷ is unclear. The Minchat Chinuch appears to conclude that he follows the psak of the Rambam.
- Other mefarshim resolve this apparent contradiction in different ways and conclude that the position of the Chinuch is in fact that women are NOT obligated to fight in a war, even a Milchemet Mitzva (such as against Amalek).

B4] DEFINING MILCHEMET MITZVA IN LIGHT OF THE ISRAELI/ARAB CONFLICT

14. ואי זו היא מלחמת מצוה? זו מלחמת שבעה עממים, ומלחמת עמלק, ועזרת ישראל מיד צר שבא עליהם.

רמב"ם הלכות מלכים פרק ה הלכה א

The Rambam defines Milchemet Mitzva as (i) the wars against the 7 Nations in the conquest of Eretz Yisrael; (ii) the war against Amalek; and (iii) a defensive war to protect the Jewish people against enemies who rise against it.

- This third definition - a defensive war to protect the Jewish people against enemies - is most applicable to our times.²⁸ Clearly, any defensive war fought by the IDF - 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973 and our current war from 2023-2025 falls under Milchemet Mitzva.
- Rav Soloveitchik goes further and sees any war in which the enemy was trying to destroy the Jewish people or the Jewish Yishuv in Eretz Yisrael as a Milchemet Mitzva, like the war on Amalek²⁹. This would certainly apply to all wars the IDF has fought since 1948.
- Based on this, many in the Kibbutz Dati movement argue that women are OBLIGATED in army service and may not refuse.

15. שמלחמת מצוה הינה חובה מקודשת מן התורה. המצוה על העם ללא יוצא מן הכלל למסור את נפשו למען השגת מטרתה של המלחמה, ללא התחשבות עם הקרבנות בנפש האדם שמלחמה זו תביא בעקבותיה. אין עוד מצוה אחרת אשר בכוחה לדחות את כל המצוות של התורה כולל מצות פקוח נפש כמו מצות הלחימה במלחמת מצוה מצות לחימה במלחמת מצוה ... חובה מקודשת על כל יחיד למסור את נפשו על כך ללא כל אפשרות של התחמקות מאי קיומה ע"י שב ואל תעשה'.

הרב שלמה גורן צבא ומלחמה לאור ההלכה, מחניים קכ"א (1969) עמ' ז-ח

Rav Goren is very clear that the mitzva of fighting in a Milchemet Mitzva overrides in principal ALL halachic concerns (see below) and devolves upon every Jew to the best of their ability. Nevertheless, on a personal level, he did not ignore issues religious growth. In fact he expressed real concerns³⁰ about women drafting in the army in certain situations.

16.

"מלחמת מצוה היא אחת מתרי"ג²⁵ המצוות אשר כולם חייבים בה. אפילו חקן מחדרו וכלה מחופתה. כלשון המשנה. גם נשים שייכות למלחמת מצוה כמו שהעיר על כך במנחת... לשון הרמב"ם כלשון המשנה... מצבנו עכשיו מוגדר במלחמת מצוה הן לדעת הרמב"ם בהיותה מלחמת כיבוש הארץ, הן לדעת הרמב"ם בהיותה עזרת ישראל מיד צר, הגמשהבת מצוה התורה 'לא תעמד על דם רעך' אמנם, 'איש דרכו לכבוש ואין אשה דרכה לכבוש', לכן הרמב"ם רוצה לרבוך דברי הרמב"ם ואמר ראפשר דבמלחמת מצוה הנשים היו מספקות מים ומזון לבעליהן... אבל חיידשו לא מחבר לא במשנה ולא בגמ' ולא ברמב"ם שהעתיק את המשנה בלשונה. ברור שכוונת הרמב"ם לכל תפקידי המלחמה...²⁶

27. He discusses this in Mitzvot 425, 525, 526, 527, 603

28. Rav Goren understands that it is rooted in the mitzva of 'Lo Ta'amod Al Dam Raecha' - to come to the aid of another Jew. (Tzava veMilchama LeOr HeHalacha 121 p 8)

29. See Kol Dodi Dofek pp 92-95 note 25 where he brings this definition of Amalek from his father, Rav Moshe Soloveitchik.

30. See Rabbi Ari Shvat on Rav Goren's position - <https://www.yeshiva.co/ask/6516>. For a different view of Rav Goren (who's daughter was one of the first religious female officers in the IDF) see https://www.jewishideas.org/article/women-modern-military-second-look#_edn42

"כך הדין באופן יסודי ועיקרי, אבל כמובן יש הוראות פרטיות לפי מצבי העניינים של נסיגות ומכשולים בצניעות, בשרות צבאי לבנות קיימת סכנה של נפילה מוסרית..."

שיחות הרב צבי יהודה קוק, ערוכות בידי רב שלמה אבינר, חוברת איש ואשה עמ' 25-26

Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook was clear that the wars Israel has fought are to be categorized as Milchemet Mitzva. He also rejected the watering down of the Rambam's position to restrict in principal the obligation of women to participate in those wars. However he adds that, on a practical and individual basis, a women in IDF service must carefully consider the impact of that specific service on her religious commitment and growth, as well as be sensitive to the requirements of tzniut.

C] WOMEN AND WEAPONS

C1] WEAPONS AND CROSS-DRESSING

17. לא־יִהְיֶה כְּלִי־גִבֹר עַל־אִשָּׁה וְלֹא־יִלְבֹּשׁ גִּבֹר שְׂמֹלֶת אִשָּׁה כִּי תוֹעֵבֶת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ כָּל־עֲשֵׂה אֵלֶּה:

דברים כב'ה

The Torah prohibits cross-dressing and labels it a 'toeva'.

18. לא יהי תקון זין דגבר על אתא ולא יתקן גבר בתקוני אתא ארי מרחק קדם יי אלהך כל עביד אלן

תרגום אונקלוס שם

The Targum Unkelos³¹ translates this as a prohibition that women may not carry weapons.

19. לא יהיה כלי גבר על אשה - מאי תלמוד לומר? אם שלא ילבש איש שמלת אשה ואשה שמלת איש, הרי כבר נאמר 'תועבה' היא, ואין כאן תועבה! אלא, שלא ילבש איש שמלת אשה וישב בין הנשים, ואשה שמלת איש ותשב בין האנשים. רבי אליעזר בן יעקב אומר: מנין שלא תצא אשה בכלי זיין למלחמה? ת"ל: לא־יִהְיֶה כְּלִי־גִבֹר עַל־אִשָּׁה. וְלֹא־יִלְבֹּשׁ גִּבֹר שְׂמֹלֶת אִשָּׁה - שלא יתקן איש בתיקוני אשה

נזיר נט.

The discussion in the Gemara brings two views. The Tana Kama rules that the Torah prohibition on cross dressing is only where that serves as a means to gender mixing which will itself lead to sexual licence. R. Eliezer ben Yaakov rules that the very act of cross dressing, irrespective of context, is a Torah prohibition. For a women, he identifies this as taking weapons into war. For men - as performing feminine acts of person grooming.

20. לא תעדה אשה עדי האיש כגון שתשים בראשה מצנפת או כובע או תלבש שריון וכיוצא בו או שתגלח ראשה כאיש. ולא יעדה איש עדי אשה הכל כמנהג המדינה. איש שעדה עדי אשה ואשה שעדתה עדי איש לוקין

רמב"ם הלכות עבודה זרה פרק יב הלכה י

The Rambam rules that it is a Torah prohibition for women to wear military armor etc, but in all such matter we judge by the minhagim of the land (see below). Note that the Rambam does NOT mention actually going to war in this context. The prohibition seems to be the actual wearing of the weapon³².

21. (ה) לא יהיה כלי גבר על אשה. מנע כהתבז כלי זיין מן האשה כדי שלא תלא למלחמה ויהיה סכנה לזנות. וכן האיש אם ילבוש שמלת אשה ושיתערב עם הנשים, כל זה תועבת ה'. וכן דרשו רז"ל: כי תועבת ה' אלהיך, דבר המביא לידי תועבה.

רבינו בחיי דברים כב'ה

Rabbeinu Bachya identifies the prohibition of women carrying weapons as a means to avoid men and women mixing in the army, which will lead to znut.³³

31. Many of the poskim refer to the Smag, brought in the Beit Yosef OC 285, that the Targum Unkelos was written with ruach hakodesh.

32. The Kesef Mishne understands that the Rambam is ruling like R. Eliezer ben Yaakov - that the prohibition is objective and does not depend on the actual mixing of genders. Nevertheless, other mefarshim understand that the Rambam is in fact ruling like the Tana Kama. This would have significant implication as to whether the factor of actual sexual mixing should be taken into account in the psak or not. Rashi also points out that this is the reason that Yael did NOT use a sword to kill Sisera, but a tent-peg! The Tzitz Eliezer (Hilchot Medina 2:3:6) brings this as a proof that women may not violate the prohibition of Lo Tilbash, even in a Milchemet Mitzva.

33. The IDF keeps men and women in very separate dorms on base, but that does not deter significant social fraternizing. Also, in mixed units, although formal separation can be imposed when on base, it is often impossible to enforce in the field - eg in cramped pill-box watchtowers around Yehuda and Shomron.

22. לא תעדה אשה עדי האיש, כגון שתשים בראשה מצנפת או כובע או תלבש שריון וכיוצא בו (ממלכזשי האיש לפי מנהג המקום הכוא)

שולחן ערוך יורה דעה הלכות לא ילבש גבר שמלת אשה סימן קפב סעיף ה

The Shulchan Aruch rules the halacha of women not wearing weaponry, but the Rema qualifies this by ruling that this depends on the local minhag as to what men and women behave.

C2] DECORATION VS SELF-DEFENCE

23. **שאלה:** בישובי הספר מוטלת חובת השמירה בבתי הספר על המורות והגנות, האם מותר להן מצד ההלכה להתאמן בנשק, וכן לשאת נשק להגן על עצמן ועל תלמידי בתי הספר שבפיקוחן מן המרצחים המחבלים?
תשובה: הדבר ברור שבנידון שלנו שיש חשש של סכנת נפשות מפחד המרצחים המחבלים ששמו להם למטרה להרוג נפשות ולזרוע הרס וחורבן במדינת ישראל, מותר גם לנשים להתאמן ולישא נשק להגן על עצמן ועל תלמידי בתי הספר שבהשגחתן, מחשש פעולה זדונית של המחבלים, אשר לא יסאוו פנים לזקן ונער לא יחוננו. שאין לך דבר העומד בפני פקוח נפש. וכבר כתב רבינו יהודה החסיד בספר חסידים (סימן ר') וזו לשונו: עת לעשות לה' הפרו תורתך! לפיכך אם צרו עכ"ס על עיר מישאל, וכן נשים שהולכות בדרך, ויראות פן יפגעו בהן עכו"ם ויאנסו אותן, מותר להן ללכת בבגדי גברים ולחגור עצמן בחרב, כדי שיהיו סבורים העכו"ם שהם גברים.
 בנידון שלנו שאין כוונת המורות בנשיאת הנשק כדי להתדמות לגברים, אלא רק להגן על נפשותיהן ועל נפשות תלמידיהן שבפיקוחן והשגחתן, נראה שהדבר ברור שאין בזה משום לא יהיה כלי גבר על אשה.
בסיכום: מותר למורות ולגנות שביישובי הספר להתאמן ולאחוז בנשק בעת שמירתן על בתי הספר, ובלבד שיקפידו מאוד על כל כללי הצניעות בעת אימונן, כראוי לבנות ישראל הכשרות, ולא יתייחדו עם גבר זר בשעת האימונים בנשק.

שר"ת יחיה דעת חלק ה סימן נה

Rav Ovadia Yosef rules that women may carry weapons where needed for pikuach nefesh. He also points out the prohibition of Lo Tilbash applies in the context of women who want to look like men to encourage mixing, which is not the case in this context. He warns however, that they must be extra careful during training, and when in a mixed environment, to maintain appropriate standards of tzniut.

C3] LIGHT VS HEAVY WEAPONRY

24. והרמב"ם, שנקט כדוגמא לכלי גבר על אשה, שלובשת שריון, נראה שמפרש כן מה שכתוב ר' אליעזר בן יעקב 'כלי זיין למלחמה'. דהיינו כלים שאינם רגילים ללבושם אלא לשם הגנה בזמן מלחמה, שהסכנה מרובה. כי הוא כבד, מכביד על הנושא (שמואל א' י"ח-ל"ט). על כן, זה כלל כלי גבר. לא כן החרב, שהוא כלי נשק קל והיו רגילים לשאתו תמיד לשם הגנה עצמית, ולא דווקא בזמן מלחמה, וזה אינו כלי גבר במיוחד.

הרב שאול ישראלי, התורה והמדינה, ד' עמ' 222 בהערה

Rav Shaul Yisraeli³⁴ makes a distinction between heavy weaponry ('shiryon' - body armour) which is used only in combat³⁵ and light weaponry which is normal for people to carry around for personal protection even in peace time.

• **Conclusion:** the halachic prohibition of women carrying weapons, although relevant, is unlikely to be a deciding factor in whether women serve in the army. Although there are poskim to prohibit this strongly, even non-combat roles will often require personal protection with small-arms, and strong halachic basis exists to permit this³⁶.

D] KOL KEVUDA BAT MELECH PENIMA

25. **כל כבודה בת מלך פנימה** - כל המצנעת עצמה זכתה משבצות זהב לבושה. א"ר לוי זכתה שתעמיד ממנה לובשי בגדי כהונה גדולה שנאמר ועשית משבצות זהב. אמרו שבעה בנים היו לקמחית וכלם שמשו בכהונה גדולה. אמרו לה חכמים מה מעשים טובים יש בידך? אמרה להם העבודה! מעולם לא ראו קורות ביתי שערות ראשי. קראו עליה פסוק זה - **כל כבודה בת מלך פנימה**. וכן הזהיר המקום (בראשית א"כ) **מלאו את הארץ וכבשה** - האיש כובש את אשתו שלא תהא הולכת בשוק שלא תבא לידי קלקלה, דכתיב ותצא דינה בת לאה

ילקוט שמעוני תהלים רמז תשנ

The Midrashic³⁷, and therefore hashkafic, application of 'kol kevuda' is much more direct, and encourages women to pursue an internal and inside role, warning of the dangers of women straying to much into the public domain!

34. See also Igrot Moshe OC 4:75:3 who rules that a woman may carry a pistol for self-defense but not a rifle. In the modern context, an M16 would be treated as a 'light' weapon and most female soldiers would be required to carry one.

35. Women in charge of remotely operated drones and other similar techno-weaponry would not appear to be prohibited at all under this mitzva.

36. See also *Nesiat Neshek Al Yedei Nashim VeSherutan BeTzava* - R. Yehuda Henkin, Techumin 28 p271. Although Rav Henkin give strong halachic support for women carrying weapons, he makes it very clear (beginning of section 2) that he opposes in principle religious women drafting into the IDF.

37. This Midrashic source (Yalkut Shimoni) is quite late - around 12C. Nevertheless, it reflects themes in much earlier midrashim. See for example Vayikra Rabba, Acharei Mot 20:11 on the connection with Kimchit, and Bereishit Rabba 8:28 on the issue of a man preventing his wife from leaving the home.

26. לפי שכל אשה יש לה לצאת ולילך לבית אביה לבקרו ולבית האבל ולבית המשתה לגמול חסד לרעותיה ולקרובותיה כדי שיבואו הם לה, שאינה בבית הסוהר עד שלא תצא ולא תבוא! אבל גנאי הוא לאשה שתהיה יוצאה תמיד (משלי י"ב) *פְּעַם בְּחוּץ* *פְּעַם בְּחֻזָּה*.³⁸ ויש לבעל למנוע אשתו מזה ולא ייחנה לצאת אלא כמו פעם אחת בחודש או פעמים בחודש כפי הצורך. שאין יופי לאשה אלא לישב בזוית ביתה שכך כתוב (תהלים מה) *כל כבודה בת מלך פנימה*.

רמב"ם הלכות אישות פרק יג הלכה יא

The Rambam brings this idea in the halacha too, and attempts to strike a balance. On the one hand, a woman must not be a prisoner in her home³⁹ and she must be able to get out into the public domain to perform mitzvot and necessary jobs. But for a woman to be 'constantly out' (not for mitzva reasons) is deemed inappropriate. In the Rambam's world⁴⁰, he rules that the husband should not allow his wife out more than once or twice a month (again, for non-mitzva purposes).

27. והנה בדבר הדין אין לי מה להוסיף על דברי הרבנים שקדמוני בתורה בנביאים ובכתובים, בהלכה ובאגדה, הננו שומעים קול אחד - שחובת עבודת הצבור הקבועה מוטלת היא על הגברים. "שהאיש דרכו לכבש ואין האשה דרכה לכבש". ושתפקידים של משרה, של משפט ושל עדות, אינם שייכים לה, *וכל כבודה היא פנימה*. וההשתדלות למנוע את תערובות המינים בקבוצים היא כחוט חורו במהלך התורה בכללה. וממילא ודאי שנגד הדין היא כל התחדשות של הנהגה צבורית המביאה בהכרח לידי התערבות של המינים בהמון, בקבוצה ובמסבה אחת, במהלך החיים התדירים של הכלל.

מאמרי הראיה - על בחירת נשים

When Rav Kook⁴¹ was asked about women voting in, and standing for, election in the first Yishuv elections in the early 1920s, he responded, as did almost all other poskim, that it was prohibited. One of his arguments is 'kol kevuda'.

28. ועוד נראה שגבולות ה'כבודה בת מלך פנימה' תלויים במנהגי המקומות. ורק במקום שדרכן של נשים שלא לצאת לגמרי מביתם יש בזה משום פרצת גדר ואך בדורותינו עובדות בנות ישראל כשרות במשרדים שונים, בבתי חולים, בגני ילדים ובתי ספר ואין פוצה פה ומצפצף!

רב שאול ישראלי התורב והמדינה ד' עמ' 226 בהערה

Rav Shaul Yisraeli points out that, in a time when women are very present in the workplace⁴², the parameters of 'kol kevuda' must reflect the norms and practice of the religiously observant women of the time.

• When applying these concepts into our contemporary lives, It seems clear that 'kol kevuda' is a halachic and hashkafic principle which cannot be ignored, but which must be translated into the context of the actual life of men and women in our times. No posek would apply the psak of the Rambam literally today and rule that a husband may not allow his wife out of the home for non-mitzva purposes⁴³ more than once or twice a month!!

E] TZNIUT

F] THE UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHICAL BATTLE

29. We love the army and value it tremendously ... We want to integrate as equals in all units. However, the IDF, led by the chief of staff's adviser on gender issues, is trying to re-educate us and to force us into a culture we are not accustomed to. And this we cannot accept. ... I believe in the army. I served in the army, including in the reserves, until the age of 59. All my children served in the IDF – all my boys in elite units. I believe in the army. And I tell you that in the past two years something terrible has occurred which is taking us backwards. We sat for many months ... and came up with a resolution called 'proper integration'. This was our final position... Now everything has been undone⁴⁴ and we have 'mixed service'. ... The danger is also for boys, but primarily for girls. I am not saying they should not enlist, but we must all fight vocally against this.

R. Yaakov Medan (March 2017) - <https://www.timesofisrael.com/liberal-orthodox-rabbis-ban-idf-service-in-mixed-combat-units/>

38. The context of this verse from Mishlei is also a reference to a rebellious and predatory harlot who is out-of-control!

39. Chazal also address this theme in the account of Papos ben Yehuda, a tyrannical husband who locked his wife in the home so that she would not speak with other men. Eventually she escaped and started an affair with another man! This became more interesting in light of the Gemara in Shabbat 104b, which was censored by the Church. There, Chazal identify Papos b Yehuda as the husband of Mary (Magdalene?) who was the mother of Jesus! Mary escaped from the home to conduct an affair with a Roman, Pandera. The clear implication is that trying to lock up one's wife, may produce very long-term consequences for the world!

40. A mediaeval Islamic society in which the Rambam's position may have been quite lenient!

41. Rav Kook was very ahead of his time on many 20C issues, but had very conventional positions on women's issues and did not embrace modern feminism in any way. This line of thought has been continued through many of his talmidim. See for instance Ein Aya Shabbat 27a.

42. Rav Yisraeli refers to more traditional women's careers - nursing, teaching etc. 50 years later, this has expanded rapidly, even in the Charedi world, to include professional and more public-facing roles. Consider Ruchie Freier in New York - a judge in the New York Criminal Court, from the Bobov community.

43. One could debate whether and to what extent shopping is a mitzva and whether one even needs to leave the home to do it these days!

44. Rav Medan was battling against many of the changes imposed by the IDF, especially in combat roles, perceived by many as 'politically correct' mixing of genders. His issue here is not with women in the IDF in support and logistic roles.

G] CONCLUSIONS?

- Most poskim in the Dati Leumi (and certainly Haredi) community remain firmly against religious women enlisting in the IDF, certainly in combat. However, recent developing and important factors are:
 - the changing face of the military including the need for more soldiers and the opening of more crucial non-combat roles;
 - the openness of the IDF to accommodate the religious needs of young women.
 - the reality of many more dati women enlisting and the need to give them support in order to excel in their army service at the same time as in their religious lives.
- The IDF are VERY keen to encourage dati women to join for a number of important reasons. Unlike many others in their peer group, these women are usually self-disciplined, well-behaved, mature, idealistic, focused, unlikely to be involved with drugs, drink or boys, and determined to succeed in the army. In other words, perfect officer material!
- It is clear from speaking to women Seminary students in 2025 that, for many of them, their attitude to the army has fundamentally shifted and, notwithstanding the advice of their rabbinic mentors, they are enlisting. A number of factors play into this, including:
 - The recent focus on and support for the IDF across the Jewish world.
 - The feeling that Jewish history is happening in front of their eyes and their wish, as women, to be central to this. Even though sherut leumi is an essential contribution to Israel, many teenagers see the the army as a greater one.
 - In many cases, young men in their family have volunteered for the IDF and they also want to do so.
 - Many do not see the rabbinic concerns as halachic but as primarily hashkafic or sociological.
 - Many young religious Jews today are less concerned about psak halacha, even though they intend to lead committed Torah lives. Halacha represents for them a less compelling external influence, compared to their internal identity focus and more emotional connection to God.
 - Some of the women Torah teachers of these young women were themselves in the army and have demonstrated their ability to emerge religiously strong.
 - A feeling that there is sometimes more support for chayalet bodedot than for benot sherut bodedot. The IDF puts significant effort resources into supporting them, although this is improving for sherut leumi too.
 - Peer pressure and encouragement from other young women.
- New organizations are emerging to support lone dati chayalet who are olim or from Anglo backgrounds⁴⁵. However, there is an important line between encouraging religious girls to join the IDF, which is halachically and hashkafically problematic according to most poskim, and giving strong religious support to those who have made an independent decision to enlist, which is essential.

45. These include a new organization - Cheilech - which has recently been set up specifically to provide support for Seminary graduates and other religious English-speaking women who are enlisting in the IDF. Among other services, Cheilech intends to provide: (1) pre-enlistment information and guidance about how to make good choices concerning which units to join; (2) direct liaison with the IDF and assistance to get into the best units for them; (3) pre-army programming to prepare the women for the religious and practical challenges they will face in the military; (4) support for the women when in the army which will include: (a) a buddy system with other somewhat older religious women who are ahead of them in army service and have experience and advice; (b) a 'Mummy on the Phone' connection with an Anglo Israeli family in which daughters have been in the IDF and who can guide and support the women - emotionally, psychologically, with a place to stay etc. These families will also be a liaison with the parents of the soldier who will often be living overseas and less connected with the realities on the ground; (c) creating a social network of peers - religious Anglo women in the IDF; (d) Shabbatonim and other ongoing programming; (e) a Whatsapp group including poskim who are very familiar with the issues faced in the IDF and can give immediate and expert guidance and psak.