

The Importance of Jews Honoring Vets

By Rabbi Yehudah ben Shomeyr

Sometimes in Judaism, out of a phobia of assimilation, or a fear of perhaps condoning violence, some Jews do not recognize civil holidays of countries of their exile here in the Diaspora, such as Remembrance Day, Veterans Day or Memorial Day. I feel it is imperative that we Jews remember, thank and honor veterans, especially of World Wars I and II because if it wasn't for their brave service perhaps all that would be left of us Jews is ashes in ovens, bones in mass graves and archeological remnants scattered or buried and left to be forgotten in the cold silence of the earth. Many European and American Jews owe their lives to soldiers who liberated camps which held their ancestors. It would be a sin not to show our gratitude for how God used them as divine plagues against the Pharaoh called Hitler and parted the sea of anti-Semitism and their fallen soldiers became the dry ground for our people to cross out of Nazi territory to freedom. Many of us are alive today because of the sacrifice of righteous Jewish and Gentiles soldiers. May God punish us if we dare ever forget.

As I have already stated I feel gracious, indebted gratitude toward the WWI-II Vets for reasons I have so clearly expressed and I do my best to take the time when the opportunity presents itself to personally approach them, shake their hand and thank them for their service.

I try and thank the Korean vets, for it is almost as if it is a forgotten war, not as publicized and recognized as the other wars; yet their conflict helped keep communism at bay. I will never forget a disabled Korean vet that I had a weekly Bible study with when I was first married and lived in Springfield Tennessee.

I have a special place in my heart for Vietnam vets, one of the most unpopular wars in which to our shame, many of them returned without honor, being spit upon and labeled baby killers. Regardless if I agreed with the war or not I make it a point to try and give them the honor that was wrongfully withheld from them upon their return home from Vietnam. I do the same with our Gulf War, Afghanistan and Iraqi War vets who many of them have been treated as were the Vietnam vets. I have had the privilege on a few occasions to be at Bangor Maine's airport to greet and thank service men and women just returning for the Middle East. We don't have to support the war, but we MUST support our troops. Supporting the troops isn't the same things as agreeing with or endorsing the war.

We are fast approaching Chanukah which is a celebration of Levitical Priestly Soldiers who liberated the Temple that Messiah Himself celebrated Chanukah in and fulfilled prophecy in. It's not war and bloodshed we celebrate, but the freedom, liberty and peace that necessary bloodshed paid for and secured. I am neither a pacifist or a warmonger, but a Maccabean Jew who understands when Ecclesiastes says that there is as time for war and a time for peace.

I now live in Canada, where in 1919 King George the V dedicated November 11th, one year after the Armistice was signed by Allied Forces, to be a day of remembering and honor those who served and died during the war. I live near the small village of Plaster Rock where each year at the center of the village stands a monument to 50 fallen soldiers from that area who lost their lives in World Wars I and II. The average age was 20 something, barely able to call themselves men, who lost their lives in these conflicts; who never fathomed that they would be remembered and honored nearly 100 years later by surviving comrades and by men and women who weren't even born at the time of the wars. I stood as a citizen from the United States admiring the Canadian patriotism that was tempered with a healthy dose of humility and thought how often U.S. patriotic pride can cross the line into arrogance and conceit. I looked as virtually every lapel had a poppy on it as an elementary school girl read the poem "In Flanders' Field" and relished in the beautiful way Canadians remember their vets. I held back tears as I was introduced to and shook hands with a Canadian POW of WWII. I held back tears and with voice quivering thanked him as a Jew for his service which helped save my people. I told him if it wasn't for him and men like him, my people would be but ashes in the ovens. He teared-up and replied that he realizes that. I told him what an honor it was to meet him. I applauded as the vets from all ages and almost all the wars who marched in the parade and I recalled the precious vets who saluted my father at his graveside over a year ago and how much their service of honor means to me on top of their sacrifice on the fields of combat.

Soldiers can sometimes be men with sailor's tongues and rough edges. Soldiers are just ordinary men who became extraordinary men and unlikely heroes and all their imperfections seem to be forgiven and forgotten as we recall their life's blood that stained the fields of combat and how their blood was the price for the freedom we now enjoy daily.

We Jews regardless of your orthodoxy or lack there of must see the obligation to recognize and honor those who fought for the freedoms we enjoy here in the Diaspora.