

BATTLES AND MIRACLES AT WEST POINT MILITARY ACADEMY

This was told by Rabbi Benjamin Blech, of Aish HaTorah in Yerushalaim.

One of Rabbi Blech's friends is a Rabbi named Asher Wade — quite a fascinating fellow. This Asher Wade was born into a non-Jewish family, he was ordained as a minister and he was a pastor of a church for many years. He is extremely bright and well-educated. When studying for one of his doctorates he was in Germany and happened to be there for the anniversary of Kristalnacht. He read about the treatment of the Jews and this started him on the long road to converting to Judaism. He learned at Ohr Same'ach in Yerushalaim for many years and after his Giyyur he was the Rabbi of a number of Shules in the United States. Rabbi Wade was very much into "Kiruv," ("outreach") trying to bring back to the fold those Jews who had wandered far away from the Jewish People and from Torah and Mitzvos.

One of the families in his congregation was of the "three times a year" Shule-goers (two days Rosh HaShonoh plus Yom Kippur) who felt that if they ate a bagel now and then they were Jewish enough. They had a son (who was even less interested in Yiddishkeit than his parents were) who was accepted to West Point Military Academy, which made his parents very proud.

The son went off to West Point — and comes home after his first year wearing a Kappel and Tsitsis. He'd become religious! Rabbi Wade called him over and asked him, "What happened?" After all, West Point Military Academy is not exactly the place one would expect a straying Jew to find his roots!

In reply, the young cadet related the following: He had taken a required Military Strategies course, where they study almost every war that was ever fought and dissect it and learn all about it and try to analyze why the winner won and the loser lost. The young soldier noticed that although they studied and analyzed a wide range of conflicts and battles, in none of the lectures was there ever even a mention of Israel. The cadet raised his hand in class, and asked the teacher, a veteran, well-experienced general, why the wars fought in Israel were never mentioned. After all, they were some of the most astounding victories, especially in 1967. The general didn't answer the question and was very abrupt and he ordered the cadet to see him in his office after class.

When the cadet reported to the general's office, he asked the young fellow to repeat his question. "How come that we never seem to study the battles fought by Israel? Surely there must be important lessons and strategies that we can learn from these battles?"

The general answered: "Young man! The greatest military strategists in the world have examined, dissected and analyzed the wars that Israel has fought and won. No matter how you look at it, they should have lost every single time. It is perfectly clear that it was not their weapons or their strength or the strategies that they used that gave victory to Israel. The only reason that can honestly explain Israel's victories is that they are miracles — and at West Point Military Academy we do not teach miracles."

The young soldier was astounded that a battle-hardened general would admit such a thing. He realized that if high-ranking militarists can recognize the Hand of G-d in the affairs of the Jewish People, then he wanted to be a part of this People. He started to enquire about what it means to be a real Jew. He began learning about Judaism and he became an observant Jew — and he remains so today.

Contributed by Mr David Witt of Johannesburg, South Africa, to whom many thanks.