D’var Torah – “When You Go Out to War?”
Parashat Ki Teitzei, 5785
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Temple Sholom - Vancouver BC Canada
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This week’s Torah portion begins with three words that feel painfully relevant:
כִּי־תֵצֵא לַמִּלְחָמָה — “When you go out to war.”

But a Haredi newspaper in Israel, Yated Ne’eman, recently reframed that verse with a single twist—
They turned it into a question:
“When you go out to war?”

The cover, shared by my teacher and friend of 35 years, Rabbi Danny Gordis, was striking.
It was not a declaration of fact, but a challenge.
Will you go? When should you go? And what happens to us when we do?

The timing of that headline was not accidental.

It came as Israeli forces prepared once again for battle—while others, including much of the Haredi world, watched from a distance.
There is a larger conversation to be had about shared responsibility in Jewish life—but that's not the focus I want to stay with this morning.

Because the real power of the question is not political. It's moral.
"When you go out to war?"

Not if, but when—because war, and I think Torah is being both specific and general here. War on the battlefield with armies and weapons and war in terms of any kind of conflict between human beings.

Struggle and moral testing in any form are part of our human story.
And Torah is not silent in those moments.
In fact, it is most insistent then.

What follows this verse is not a battle plan—it's a moral blueprint:
How to treat captives with dignity.
How to return what's lost.
How to pay your workers fairly.
How to protect the vulnerable.
How to build safety into your homes—and your society.

The Torah doesn't glorify war.
It disciplines it.
It asks: Who will you become when power is in your hands?

Because in Torah, war is not a break from ethics—it is a test of them.

And that's why this portion feels so vital now.

Because our people are still at war.
On the battlefield in Israel.
In the arenas of media and diplomacy.

In the streets, on our campuses, here and across Canada and too often even in our homes.

And yet, even now, particularly now in this season of T'shuva, this season of return the Torah calls us back to who we are.
It says: Remember. You are still a Jew.
Even in fear.
Even in grief.
Even in war.

You are still bound to a higher ethic, a deeper justice, a sacred restraint.

That is not just a spiritual aspiration—it is the work of policy, of community, of conscience.

And few people embody that work more than **Nico Slobinsky**, who has gone out to war—not with weapons, but with integrity, clarity, and commitment.

Through his leadership at CIJA, and in partnership with elected officials and civil society, Nico is helping ensure that the values of Ki Teitzei—of responsibility, of dignity, of conscience—are upheld not just in Israel, but here, in the public square of Canadian democracy.

We are honoured today by the presence of many of Nico's friends, colleagues, and allies—leaders who have joined us here at Temple Sholom, not just to celebrate this simcha, but to stand with our community in affirming these values.
Thank you for your presence, your partnership, and your unwavering support.

So yes, "When you go out to war?" is the right question.
But here is the one that follows:
What kind of person will you be when you do?
What kind of Jew? What kind of citizen? What kind of moral actor?

This morning, we celebrate **Tal and Levi** as they step into Jewish adulthood.
They are not soldiers, and I pray for a world when young boys and girls never have to grow up to become them. Tal and Levi are people of curiosity, compassion, intellect, and care.
Their mitzvah project, grounded in climate awareness and species protection, is its own act of moral courage.

Because to “go out” doesn’t always mean to fight.
Sometimes it means to show up.
To speak up.
To live your values out loud.

May we all go out into the world—whatever our battlefield—with that kind of Torah in our hands, and that kind of integrity in our hearts.