

Eli – Where Leaders are Made



Combining religion and military studies in Bnei David - a Military Yeshiva Academy in Eli, a town in Samaria.

by Ari Bussel

In last week's issue I focused on some of the issues defining a religious and a secular Israeli and the inner struggle within the Israeli society trying to grapple with different approaches to life together. We continue this week by examining a unique approach for serving in the Israel Defense Forces ("IDF") based on Bnei David, a Military Yeshiva Academy in Eli, a town in Samaria.

The IDF, the "armed forces of the People," was always a melting pot, where people of different ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds entered as equal and

Bnei David- Eli - I.D

Description: The military Yeshiva Academy of Israel

Slogan: Service & Spirit, Building Young Leadership"

Key Phrase: Inspiring young Jewish Leadership for the future of Israel

KEY POINTS:

1. The first Yeshiva Academy combining Torah studies and full-length army service (as opposed to the 50% army service component of Hesder programs)
2. A spiritual torah agenda with a unique emphasis on Jewish thought, ethics and social responsibility.
3. 90% of Bnei David graduates serve in combat units of which over 50% become officers and volunteer for additional service of at least one year.
4. Three training programs including a pre-army yeshiva academy and civil leadership programs for outstanding rabbinic and university students.

underwent the same service. When a young man or young woman in Israel graduate from high school they are expected to serve in the IDF. Men usually serve three years (four if they finish the Officers' Training School) and women two years (three for officers). Service is mandatory, and for decades after the creation of the State, lack of service for any reason resulted in the person becoming an outcast, unable to get a job or to advance in society. This is no longer the case.

Long before graduation, a senior in High School in the States has applied to several universities and expects to receive acceptance letters from one or more of his top choices. Similarly in the religious sector in Israel, high school students strive to be accepted to the top Yeshivas in the country. Most of them will not serve in the IDF. Some will combine Yeshiva learning with military service, going for a year and a half to a Yeshiva, serve for a year and a half, and then return to the Yeshiva for another year and a half.

This combined service would be in units composed solely of religious soldiers. This commonality makes the service more manageable (for instance getting Minyan for prayers) and helps the soldiers support each other.

Recently, the IDF has been struggling with the idea of separate units for religious Jews and considering dismantling them in favor of regular, fully integrated service. The armed forces all observe the religion (strictly Kosher kitchens, synagogues, Shabbat restrictions, etc.), and some claim that there should not be special units for religious Jews. Moreover, in elite combat units, a shorter service (14 to 18 months as compared with 30 to 36 months) is frowned upon by the commanders – the soldier is gone months after he has attained a sufficient level of training and proficiency.

The religious sector in Israel which believes in the importance of serving the country, has typically objected to regular, non-separated, service of its youth. This was due to the fact that a very high percentage of those serving would "remove the Kippa" (become secular) at the end of the service. This documented trend was even more pronounced among



Major Benjamin Hilman, a graduate who died in the 2nd Lebanon War.



Rabbi Eli Sadan, Founder and Dean of Bnei David, a Military Yeshiva Academy in Eli, Israel (top left).

photos: Ilana Kadosh

those who continued to the Officers' Training School and continued in combat / elite unit. There are those who strongly believe in the importance of serving the country, one's debt to society, and they believe that service combined with Emuna (faith) is a fulfillment of a young person's obligation and expect the person to serve a full length service. To combat the worrisome statistics of religious

youth abandoning their religion as a result of "mixed service," Rabbi Eli Sadan founded twenty years ago the pre-military Yeshiva Academy in Eli.

Overlooking the remains of Shiloh, where the Tabernacle stood for 369 years and where the Israelites people came to worship three times a year, Eli is a unique place.

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Lauder elected president of WJC

By Amiram Barkat

Ronald Lauder was elected interim president of the World Jewish Congress.

The organization's executive committee voted 11-4, by open ballot, to recommend Lauder, the president of the Jewish National Fund, to the WJC board of governors, moving him one step closer to the office. The board then confirmed Lauder as the successor to Edgar Bronfman, who is retiring after 30 years as president.

Lauder defeated Mendel Kaplan, the South African steel magnate who is chairman of the WJC executive and former chairman of the Jewish Agency's Board of Trustees. Others in the race were Einat Wilf, an Israeli activist and writer, and Vladimir Herzberg, a Russian-Israeli nuclear physicist. Only Herzberg was not in attendance at the New York vote.

Lauder was running on a ticket with Bronfman's son, Matthew, the chairman of the WJC's finance committee. Matthew Bronfman was elected chairman of the group's governing board, in a vote also held this week.

Lauder, who first announced his interest in the job in an interview with Haaretz, said he would rehabilitate the organization, which has been in deep crisis following revelations of irregularities and corruption.

Lauder is a Republican who is identified with the Israeli right. He is the owner of the Estee Lauder cosmetics empire, founded by his mother, and his personal wealth is estimated at \$2.7 billion.

The interim president will serve until 2009, when the WJC holds its next plenary and selects a permanent president.

The WJC, founded in 1936 in Geneva, is an umbrella organization with representatives from Jewish communities in 80 countries, including Israel.

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The World Jewish Congress, founded in 1936 in Geneva, Switzerland, is an umbrella organization with representatives from hundreds of Jewish communities in at least 80 countries, including Israel.

Chronicle of a war foretold

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The law authorizes seven senior IDF officers – the chief of staff, his deputy, the head of the Operations Branch, the head of the Home Front Command and the three heads of the district Commands – to command the local civilians. The reality is confused and even foolish: Authorities are determined by cause and not by effect. If an explosion is heard in Netivot, and it turns out to be a terror attack, then the police are in charge; but if it was the sound of a rocket landing there, then it's the army that is responsible, and depending on the legal situation at the moment, that responsibility falls on either the Southern Command or the Home Front Command.

Drivers of ambulances and mobile ICU units, of which there are normally two but which now number a dozen, have been quasi-drafted, though they insisted upon and received military permission to continue wearing their Magen David Adom uniforms. A territory about seven kilometers wide, from the east of Gaza and a little north of it, now belongs to the IDF. Having lost the Gaza Strip, it may now console itself with the strip around Gaza, whose border is the "Yellow Line."

None of the government ministers bears comprehensive responsibility for the home front, which has been relentlessly bombed and shelled for almost seven years – though not always in the same place, except for Sderot. The term "Home Front Command" promises much, but is helpless to deliver on those promises. The GOC Home Front Command, Yitzhak (Jerry) Gershon, who would like to change the organization's name to the "National Guard," has been trying to improve the situation, so far without success. Gershon, whatever his motives may be, learned for himself what it means to win a battle and lose the war.

With the encouragement of the most senior officers, he was prodded to petition the High Court of Justice this past March against the state comptroller, over the issue of the release

of the comptroller's report on the home front. The petition was accepted, but Gershon was left in the position of an "untouchable," from whom it's best to keep one's distance. If, up to then, it was reasonably expected that Gershon would again follow in the footsteps of his predecessor, Yair Naveh, this time into the Central Command, Ashkenazi has since shied away from him and propelled ahead of him Gershon's successor in the Paratroop Brigade, Gadi Shamni.

Gershon was the commander of the Judea and Samaria Division in the IDF's last successful operation, Operation Defensive Shield, in 2002. His treatment paralleled that of the then-head of the Central Command, Yitzhak Eitan, his Intelligence Branch officer, Gal Hirsch, and Division Command Amos Ben-Avraham, all of whom were let go from the system, with the IDF choosing to ignore their experience and what they'd learned.

A logical personnel arrangement would have brought Gershon to the Central Command and Shamni, formerly the commander of the Gaza Division, to the Southern Command. But that's just the trouble: There's no connection between the army and logic.

The rabbi learns a lesson

In the General Staff over the past five years, from Ya'alon through Halutz to Ashkenazi, for the first time in the history of the IDF there has come to be a bloc of skullcap-wearers (four generals) equal in size to that of the blue caps of the air force, the red berets of the Paratroops, the brown berets of Golani and the black ones of the Armored Corps. This is a major change, when you compare the situation at the time of the Six-Day War, when the lone religious general in the IDF had only a political rank, given to him by David Ben-Gurion just before his retirement. This was the chief military rabbi, Shlomo Goren, and documents from the 1967 General Staff reveal how chief of staff Yitzhak Rabin related to him: There was no crack in the unity of the command staff, no division

of authority between military and religious sources.

In August, two months after the war, Rabin had to address two issues that arose in its wake. The first had to do with plundered vehicles. The second, the Temple Mount, focused on Rabbi Goren, but also, in retrospect, provided a glimpse of insight into another general, who, three decades later would go ascend to the Temple Mount and from there to power.

"I ask that once IDF generals receive a [Plymouth] Valiant car," said Rabin, "that they not travel in, or have in their possession, a rekhev bizah" – using the Hebrew term for "plundered vehicle." Rabin continued: "Right now five generals, including GOCs, are in possession of a plundered vehicle."

Major General David (Dado) Elazar was offended. "Pardon me," he replied. "The head of the Northern Command did not travel in a rekhev shalal [a vehicle that is military booty] at any time since the start of this war."

Rabin didn't fall for the trap. "A rekhev shalal is from a military enemy," he clarified. "Bizah are just civilian taxis." As for the Temple Mount, Rabin said: "I wanted to explain the whole thing with Rabbi Goren. In the context of the admiration that is growing, and rightly so, and with the sentiments that are connected to the West Bank, each one has his own motivation for having the sentiments that he does. There are those for whom it is historic ... and there are those whose sentiments are religious. Rabbi Goren has a theory that the Western Wall is not the holiest place. Its holiness derives from its being the outer wall of the Temple Mount, and there is no place more sacred to the Jews than the Temple Mount. He says, 'I don't know why Jews in the State of Israel, because Jerusalem today is the State of Israel, are forbidden from praying on the Temple Mount. I understand that one needn't pray in the mosque or on Friday when it would disturb the Muslim ritual, but why should we sanctify a custom that prohibits a Jew from praying in the holiest place for a Jew?'"

Major General Elad Peled: "A Jew is for-

bidden to enter there at all, according to the halakha (Jewish law)."

Rabin: "Don't argue matters of halakha with Rabbi Goren."

Major General Uzi Narkiss: "The Chief Rabbinate argues with him and says that it's the arbiter."

Major General Yisrael Tal: "I'd argue with him on another halakha. If he's an officer in the army, his halakha is army orders. He's working on behalf of the General Staff before he's a rabbi."

Rabin: "I understand the excitement. Which is why he was summoned to see me and this is exactly what was said to him. He was told one general thing and one specific thing: 'Rabbi Goren, you may be right and you may be wrong, I don't make halakhic rulings on such matters. You want to keep on waging your battle? As long as you're in uniform, I forbid you from performing any act, even prayer. Second, I personally forbid you from praying on the Temple Mount.' He received this order in writing as well. 'And third, issue an order that cancels the call for prayer on the Temple Mount.' He carried out all of it. Until the next chapter. By the way, he denied that his prayer on the Temple Mount was deliberate. He said, 'I was tired, it was crowded next to the Western Wall.' Someone gave him an office. On the way to the office, which is almost the Temple Mount, he prayed."

Major General Ariel Sharon: "Every Jew can pray on the Temple Mount."

Rabin: "The first roll call on the Temple Mount was done not by the rabbis, but by Brigade 35, and they were there with approval."

Sharon: "Are Jews, not the chief rabbi, now forbidden from praying on the Temple Mount?"

Rabin: "Rabbi Goren is personally prohibited. We're not dealing with other Jews. The General Staff does not run the prayers on the Temple Mount. It could – or not – prohibit all army personnel, especially the high-ranking ones."

Don't worry, we're just National Socialists

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All of these are legitimate opinions in a certain sense (insofar as it is possible to believe that these things are being said seriously and not as mere posturing), and the obvious practical conclusion is to take out a foreign passport. But what does all this have to do with the wrathful Jerusalem professor who called for relinquishing the occupation

not because it would bring peace – he did not believe in that at all – but to save the Jewish national state?

There is one thing that Burg has indeed taken from Leibowitz: the comparison between Israel and Nazi Germany. But don't worry, "There is a difference between saying 'Nazi' and saying 'National Socialist.'" What a stroke of luck! Now all of Burg's readers around the world will understand that Israel

is just National Socialist, and not Nazi.

As for the danger of a "fascist debacle in Israel," in Burg's opinion, "it is already here." There has already been fascism. And what is the conclusion from this? That it is necessary to leave the country? To go underground?

Not exactly. The conclusion is that it is necessary to support Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in his intention to remain in office and to vote for Ehud Barak in the Labor Party

primary. After all, as everyone knows, this has been the way for anti-fascists to support those fascist (or perhaps National Socialist) leaders for whom one has "great fondness," as Burg does for Olmert, whom he professes to like very much. Is it possible to take seriously a single word that comes out of this person's mouth?

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Rabbi Sadan's Military Yeshiva Academy advocates full length service for its graduates. 90% serve in combat units and over 50% serve beyond the regular length of service as officers. Despite some criticism and objections by fellow Rabbis and heads of Yeshivas two decades ago, Rabbi Sadan set out to create a training program that will ensure that his graduates do not drop out of the religious framework as a result of the service. He proved this can be done and today there are about a dozen pre-military Yeshiva academies throughout Israel following Rabbi Sadan's footsteps. Moreover, the Yeshivas sending their students for a shorter service also learned from Rabbi Sadan's work and now incorporate general studies (Jewish thought and philosophy, history, faith, etc.) with Torah studies.

19 graduating classes, over 2,000 graduates. The Military Yeshiva Academy in Eli "Bnei David" now offers post-service programs that combine Yeshiva studies with academic studies toward a degree. What is so unique in "Bnei David" in Eli?

During the summer, almost a year ago, Israel went to war after Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev were abducted by Hizbollah from within sovereign Israeli territory. This followed the abduction in the south by

Hamas of Gilad Shalit. None of these abductions should have come as a surprise, since Hizbollah and Hamas both advocated this as a proven method to deal with Israel. [Hamas just recently unabashedly called for "Gilad Every Year." Apparently the process works!] The three soldiers are still in the hands of our enemies, and we pray for their safety, health and speedy return. This was the first war Israel has lost, a clear sign of weakness as seen by the Islamists. Nasrallah, the leader of Hizbollah, allows himself to laugh at the leadership of the State of Israel.

It is a very sad state of affairs, for Israel cannot afford to be conceived to be weak (and definitely cannot allow itself to actually lose its strength), for its continued survival as the Jewish Homeland is on the line. The war proved what Israel has known for sometime now—the envelope is rotten and corrupt, its leadership absent. The war also proved that the core was essentially healthy and that the future of Israel is safe with its people. Very dark times may be looming over the horizon, but Israel will prevail with the strength from within, from its people.

Three of the most heroic stories of the Second Lebanon War are those of Major Roe Klein who threw himself at an exploding hand grenade while shouting "SHMA ISRAEL, ADONAI ELOHENU ADONAI EHAD,"

saving his people, Lt. Colonel Emanuel Moreinu and Major Benji Hilman, Hashem Yinkom Damam. There is hardly a person today in Israel who does not know the story of Major Klein.

All three are graduates of Bnei David Military Yeshiva Academy in Eli. During the visit to Eli, Rabbi Sadan took us to a memorial room. There are 18 framed pictures of fallen graduates, three of whom gave their lives during the recent war. One picture, that of Lt. Colonel Emanuel Moreinu, is noticeably absent, only the frame is there. For the security of the State of Israel, the picture cannot be displayed.

"If saving a life is equal to saving the world, as Benji, Roe and Emanuel learned in Yeshiva, each saved the world many times over" (from Bnei David's A Tale of Three Heroes). Bnei David suffered heavy losses during the war since "more than a quarter of all officers on the front lines of the battle were graduates of Bnei David. Because of their high involvement in the fighting, the Yeshiva also suffered unduly high casualties."

Each year some 200 students are accepted for their thirteenth and fourteenth year of study, following which they will complete full length service. The program combines an equal share of Torah (Gmara, Mishna, ...) study and what Rabbi Sadan loosely terms "inoculation

studies" or exposure to the outside world. This involves Jewish Philosophy and history, faith and values, other schools of thought such as the Israel Left, the Christian religion, science and technology, etc. By exposing the students to as wide a range of views as possible, while still in a very protective environment of the Yeshiva, Rabbi Sadan achieves the equivalent of inoculation, resulting in less than 2% dropout (from religion) rate.

Following a fully integrated service, many remain as career officers. Others committed to public service continue in an academic / advanced Judaic studies track. Still others continue in various capacities throughout Israeli society, always leading by example.

Rav Sadan and his people definitely do something unique in Eli, where values and tradition mix into a coherent mixture, who results we see in those who serve, raise families and continue living according to the Torah as productive and contributing Israelis. As simple as it sounds, it seems to me that much of Israel's continued existence depends on our realization of returning to the roots. It is that existence which Rabbi Sadan's graduates and we hold in our hands, a future we must take with great reverence and learn to work together, as a team.