

Tefilla Notebook

8 Adar I • Terumah

February 16-17, 2024

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Dearest Members & Friends,

Last month, amidst all the to-ing and fro-ing across Israel, our solidarity mission from Los Angeles spent a couple of hours at an important event on Rechov Uruguay, a quiet leafy street in the Kiryat HaYovel neighborhood of Jerusalem. Rechov Uruguay is just one of the many streets in Kiryat HaYovel named for countries that voted at the U.N. in November 1947 in favor of partitioning Palestine – a landmark vote that

paved the way for the creation of Israel six months later. But we were not on Rechov Uruguay to commemorate an event from history. Rather, we were there to celebrate the formal opening of an apartment for soldiers of the Netzach Yehuda division of the IDF, better known as Nahal Haredi.

This past Yom Kippur, just a couple of weeks before the tragic events of October 7th, our synagogue in Beverly Hills held an appeal to raise money to pay for this apartment, and now we were there to dedicate it. The event was attended by a range of dignitaries, but truthfully, they were eclipsed by another aspect of the ceremony that took center stage.

On the morning of October 7th, Haredi soldier Sergeant Binyamin Lev heard about the Hamas terrorist incursion into Southern Israel, and immediately rushed to the town of Sderot, together with his colleagues, to eliminate the threat against Israelis. Hours later he was dead, felled by terrorist bullets. Sergeant Lev was 23 years old. The apartment on Rechov Uruguay was being dedicated in his memory, with the participation of his commanding officers and his family. It was an event that will remain with me for as long as I live.

Sergeant Lev's story is incredibly inspiring. He was born into a Chabad family in Paris, one of 8 children. A couple of years ago, out of the blue, he decided to move to Israel and join the Israeli army as a lone soldier, much like our own son Meir, who did the same a year earlier. Meir told us that he helped Binyamin join the same unit he was in – Haredim Tzanchanim, or "Chetz", a unique paratrooper unit entirely made up of boys from Haredi families.

Binyamin excelled in his military tasks, but he also clung tenaciously to strict Jewish observance, totally devoted to his traditions and family customs. At the dedication event, Binyamin's grandfather, a gentle-looking, white-bearded Chabad hasid, took out a guitar and sang Binyamin's favorite song. The words of the song were a verse from scripture. We all wept as we sang along with him and clapped our hands to the beat. Meir was particularly moved; he attended Binyamin's funeral in October, and now he was at this dedication event. It brought it home for him, and for us – the real price our people paid on October 7th was on vivid display, personalized and stark.

But truthfully, neither Binyamin nor Meir are typical of the Nahal Haredi recruits. Most Haredim who join the strictly Orthodox units of the IDF come from families that shun them for the choice they've made, or at best tolerate them while making clear that active military duty is not okay. Some families tell their soldier sons never to appear in their Haredi

neighborhoods in uniform, in case this triggers hostility and causes the family problems. Incredibly, there are even Haredi families with sons in the army who have been forced out of their communities for having broken ranks with their Haredi compatriots. This is why Nahal Haredi needs these apartments, so that their soldiers have got somewhere to live when they are off duty.

This negative attitude by Haredim all stems from a pivotal decision in 1948 by Israel's first prime minister, David Ben Gurion, to exempt yeshiva students from conscription. This policy, known as the 'Torato Umanuto' ("His Torah is His Profession") exemption, was initially intended to apply to a small number of students to allow for the continuation of Jewish religious scholarship that was devastated by the Holocaust. At the time, the exemption was relevant to an estimated 400 students, but the numbers have grown significantly. In recent years, reports indicate that the number of exemptions granted annually to yeshiva students has reached into many tens of thousands – the result of an exponential growth of the Haredi sector in Israel.

In 1963, Ben Gurion expressed regret for the blanket exemption in a letter to Levi Eshkol, but he was no longer in power and the exemption numbers continued to grow, long after post-Holocaust concerns had been mitigated by the incredible growth in quantity and quality of yeshiva scholarship. As a result, the 'Torato Umanuto' exemption has become a source of endless contention and discord in Israeli society.

Until October 7th, societal norms were such that tensions between Haredim and the rest of Israel regarding the broad refusal by Haredim to take part in defending Israel from military and terrorist threats by participating in national service had evolved into the familiar discourse of a special interest group refusing to consider any kind of alternative narrative. Nahal Haredi – formed in 1999 to accommodate the needs of Haredi soldiers not suited to yeshiva study – simply got caught in the crosshairs of this epic ideological battle. For all intents and purposes, the concept of Nahal Haredi died on the vine, as it lacked the kind of meaningful support from Haredi rabbinic and political leadership that would have ensured broad success. Those Haredi boys who did enlist – unless they came from abroad as lone soldiers – found themselves shunned and marginalized, as did their families.

But the shock of October 7th and the war that has been raging ever since has shifted the paradigm considerably. Last week, Israel's Interior Minister, Moshe Arbel of the Haredi Sephardic Shas party, reached out to Yossi Levy, CEO of Netzach Yehuda. In his letter, later published by Yediot Ahronot, Arbel encouraged the integration of Haredim into meaningful, long-term military service. He particularly expressed his pleasure at the significant increase in interest among Haredi youth to enlist for combat service in the upcoming draft.

Arbel also told Levy how happy he is about the more than 800 new Haredi soldiers who have joined the IDF since October 7th. And in an interview, Arbel argued that it is totally indefensible for Haredim to claim exemption from military service simply because they are Haredim. Like all other Israeli citizens, they should serve, he told the interviewer, except for those who are genuinely engaged in full-time Torah study.

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FRIDAY, FEB 16th

5:20 PM CANDLELIGHTING
5:25 PM KABBALAT SHABBAT

SATURDAY, FEB 17th

8:30 AM GEMARA SHIUR
9:15 AM SHACHARIT
5:25 PM MINCHA
6:15 PM MAARIV
6:17 PM SHABBAT ENDS

WEEKDAY DAVENING

Sun	8:00am	5:25pm
Mon (Presidents Day)	8:00am	5:25pm
Tue-Thur	7:00am	5:25pm
Fri	7:00am	5:30pm

BRING THEM HOME NOW

THANK YOU

This week's kiddush is sponsored by
Shawney and Richard Fine
in honor of Shawney's sister's birthday
and her visit from Israel.

Cont'd from page 1

This shift is without question a welcome change, but it has yet to translate into full-throated support for Nahal Haredi by the recognized rabbinic hierarchy within the Haredi world. That support must come, as Israel and the Jewish people face the most challenging threats to their existence in recent history, and the IDF is poised to play a key role, in which the Haredi community have a stake that is no less significant than every other element of Israel's Jewish population. We are all in this together, and no element of the Jewish world can afford to opt out of the task that lies ahead.

Currently, the Jewish world is reading the biblical portions that deal with the construction of the Tabernacle in the Sinai wilderness. Every Jew was expected to support the construction of this holy sanctuary. The Midrash informs us that the princes of each tribe decided to wait until the end of the campaign to make their contribution, so that they could then fill in the gaps. But as it turned out, they messed up – the people were so enthused by the idea of supporting the project, that when it came to the turn of the princes, there was nothing left for them to give, an omission that forever remained a blot on their record.

Members of the Haredi community – of which I consider myself a product and proud member – have long considered themselves the princes of Jewish life. Sadly, this has meant that they have not been willing to contribute to the national effort to defend Israel, instead expecting everyone else to play their part while they remained on the sidelines. That is not the right approach. Just like the tribes of Reuven and Gad, and half of Menashe, Haredim – who by their way of life represent the importance of preserving Jewish identity and tradition – should be first in line to defend Israel and the Jewish people on the battlefield.

The Torah instructs us (Lev. 19:16): אל תעמוד על דם רעך – “do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.” This law demands of every Jew that if someone is in danger, to save them and do anything to ensure their survival. The Jewish nation is in physical and existential danger, from terrorists who are out to murder and destroy us. We need the Haredi soldiers now more than ever, to lead the charge against those who mean to kill and destroy us, and to uproot us from the land of our heritage and destiny. And if the Haredi community comes on board and commits itself to defending our holy homeland, I have no doubt it will be the inspiration that will inevitably lead to the coming of the Messiah and the rebuilding of our Beit Hamikdash.

Wishing you a Shabbat Shalom and a great week ahead,

Rabbi Pini Dunner

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Jennifer Smith

Larry Garshofsky

Samuel Hodara

Hart Cohen

Lielle Louie

Donald Beier

Dana Feldberg

Abraham Czucker

Yarden Casden

Samantha Cohen

Ladan Homayoon Sefat



Welcome Eli Beer

who will speak following mussaf.

Artscroll recently released a book about Eli and how he built United Hatzalah titled "90 Seconds: The Epic Story of Eli Beer and United Hatzalah". A new set of stories of the Heroism on October 7th, was also just released titled "Angels in Orange: Uplifting Stories of Courage, Faith and Miracles from the United Hatzalah Heroes of October 7th."

Eli Beer is the father of five children, a social entrepreneur and president and founder of United Hatzalah of Israel, an independent, non-profit, fully volunteer EMS organization that provides fast and free emergency first response services throughout Israel.

United Hatzalah's model of using community-based lifesavers has been implemented in 21 countries and has resulted in hundreds of thousands of lives being saved.



Happy Anniversary
Shervin & Yasmine Louie
Joe & Galina Samuel

Mazal Tov to **Helen & Moshe Sassover** on the birth of a new Grandson. Mazel Tov to parents **Jonathan & Debbie Sassover** and Mazel Tov to Grandparents **Julio & Judy Snitkovsky**.

YINBH

BEVERLY HILLS SYNAGOGUE



SOLIDARITY TRIP TO ISRAEL

FRIDAY MAY 10 - WEDNESDAY MAY 15



Following the success and profound impact of our January YINBH Israel Mission, we are delighted to unveil our forthcoming trip, centering on commemorating **Yom Hazikaron** and celebrating **Yom Haatzmaut** in Israel. This extraordinary opportunity will feature esteemed speakers, meetings, insightful visits and memorable experiences.

Trip **includes** accommodations at the **Inbal Hotel**, airport transfers, transportation within Israel, security, site visits, support staff & all meals.

PARTICIPANTS WILL ARRANGE THEIR OWN TRAVEL TO ISRAEL, & TRAVEL INSURANCE.

COST: \$3100 PER PERSON WITH DOUBLE OCCUPANCY
SINGLE SUPPLEMENT \$500

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