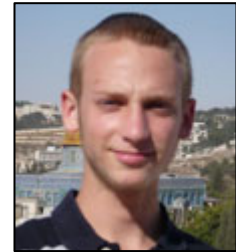


STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Josh Feigenbaum

Yom Ha`atzmaut has always been a very emotional and exciting day for me. Every year back in the states, I have celebrated either with my high school or at a community function. Occasionally there would be a carnival, and a bunch of kindergarten students would sing “*Am Yisroel Chai*” while the adults would stuff their faces with falafel covered in garlic mayo. The point is: it was a fun day where Jews would get together and have fun celebrating the existence of a Jewish homeland.



What I believe a lot of American Jews forget is the day before: *Yom Hazikaron*. Sometimes my high school would light a candle or have an hour ceremony, but never have I truly felt the pain and anguish of the day. My previous times spent in Israel during *Yom Hazikaron* have established a feeling of pride, although I still could not understand why Israelis found it tough to leave *Yom Hazikaron* and enter *Yom Ha`atzmaut* instantaneously. I always believed that *Yom Hazikaron* will help you fully understand *Yom Ha`atzmaut*. and then Israelis will go on celebrating like the day before didn't happen. Maybe that's how I felt, but a whole country strongly disagrees with me.

Recently I decided that I have the obligation to protect the Jewish people of the world and the state of Israel by joining the Israeli military. Next year I will be drafted into the army where I will serve 14 months of Israeli defense.

Yom Hazikaron never hit me as hard as it did this year. I have always heard the stories of war heroes who were just like me; but I never understood what it meant that they died for the Jewish homeland. *Masa* had an event on *Leil Yom Hazikaron* during which they related several stories of soldiers who fell. Some of them happened to be “*Chayalim Bodedim*”, or lone soldiers, meaning they were volunteering from another country. One story that really hit was the story of Alex Singer, a Jew from White Plains, New York. As the man on stage read Alex's story, tears were welling up in my eyes. I have never cried from a soldier's story before but now I couldn't stop it! The part that hit me the most was when the man read a letter Alex wrote to his mother. He tells her that he loves her and misses her, and that he is in the army for her. I then realized that I will be sending such a letter (or emails) to my mother in less than a year.

I never stopped to think that if God forbid something would happen to me, my family would feel the worst pain in their lives. I never stopped to realize how potentially selfish it would be for me to go through this experience, and put my family through so much pain and anxiety. This bothered me until they read what Alex's brother said at Alex's funeral. He said: "Your message to me is one word. 'Do.' Do as you believe and people will follow you. Do not just **know** what is right, **do** what is right. Only then will other people follow you. Only then will you have the power to affect the world." This brought immediate strength to me and my future endeavors. I recognize the pain and suffering of the Israeli people, but at the same time I recognize the tremendous power we have to affect the world. I realize that I want to be a part of something bigger, and that I am willing to be the sacrifice Israel must take to embrace peace.

This was reassured when Rav Noam read us a letter of a soldier who fell in battle in 2002. The soldier, Gadi Ezra, wrote his fiancée a letter "in case of emergency". The letter has become famous around Israel and is read every *Yom Hazikaron*. He writes:

Feb. 28, 2002

My Dear Galiti,

If this letter reaches you, it means that something has happened to me. This morning, we were informed that the mission planned yesterday, will with the Almighty's help, take place today.

I told you that the mission had been changed and was not to be carried out as planned - I didn't want to worry you, my dearest. It was very hard for me not to tell you the truth, but I preferred it this way than for you to be crazy with worry - "*meshanim mipney hashalom*".

My beloved, on one hand I feel that there is nothing more that I want in this world than to be with you - to love you and to establish a home and a family with you.

But on the other hand, there isn't anything that I want more than to be a part of this military operation and strike those terrorists a blow so strong, that they will never again even consider carrying out a terrorist attack.

In order to do this, there is a price that we must pay. I am willing to be that price.

Don't be angry with me, my love, but at moments like this, your feelings for "*Klal Yisrael*" (All Israel) is the feeling that is supposed to guide you right now - and you relate to this evil as if your private life does not exist.

"Soldiers of King David's army would free their wives from marriage before going into battle." (See "*L'emunat Itenu*", Part 4). My beautiful one, I love you so much and the only grief of mine is the fact that you will have sorrow and I will not be the one who will be privileged to make you happy.

You deserve all the happiness in the world. Therefore I ask, magnificent one, that you should be happy! That you should be happy, that you should love and blossom - because that is what you deserve. I will always watch over you from wherever I am and I will see to it that you will meet someone who will make you even happier than I could have made you.

My sweet one, don't forget - all that happens is for the best and if this is what the Almighty chose, then this is what has to be. What is left for us is to accept it with love.

I love you and will always love you and want you to know that the thoughts in my head are only for you in these moments and also I am sure, in the moment that will happen what has happened, you will be the last thing that I will think about, and I will leave this world with the knowledge that I was the most happy person that can be, and that is because of you.

Know that you made me the happiest of men and you brought me to achievements that all my life I only dreamt of reaching.

I love you my dearest and thank you for all the good and all the joy you brought me while we were together.

Really, it is not that we were together, but we are always together - before we came to this world and when we part from it, we are together.

Remember this, my dearest, because always, always we are together because the root of our souls is one.

"*Kol man de'avid rachamana latov avid*" - "Everything that G-d does is for the best" - this too. I promise you that where I am now is the most wonderful place that exists. I am not suffering and I have no regrets.

My only sorrow is for the grief of those left behind - you, my family and my friends. Spread the message, dearest one - "There's no despair - always be joyful."

This is what I ask of you, even if it is difficult.

I know that I can request this from you, because I know the natural happiness and joy that shines from within you always and that is what I fell in love with, and that is what drew me to you the very first time I saw you.

My dearest one, my beloved one, I love you and will always love you.

Only promise me that you will continue onward and will not allow Sodom to be the victor - you are the victor and that is how it should be and that is right to be.

I love you forever, for all eternity, and I am always with you.

Gadi

"In order to do this, there is a price that we must pay. I am willing to be that price." This is the feeling of every fighting soldier, and this is the feeling of everyone who risks everything to live in Israel and be a member of "*Klal Yisrael*". As a nation we come together for one day to collectively appreciate what we have given up to establish our state and our freedom.

Therefore, after spending time at *Har Herzl* and having emotional conversations with Michael Levin's (a *chayal boded* killed in Lebanon) parents, I could not enter *Yom Ha'atzmaut* with the right mindset of partying for Israel's freedom. When I expressed my emotions to an Israeli I met, he told me: "now you're thinking like a true Israeli". This hit me like a brick wall. It never occurred to me that through all the smiling, dancing, singing and excitement, lurks a cold, harsh feeling of what is lost in order for us to feel that way. I never recognized before that there is a pain behind the smile of each Israeli, until I felt and experienced it myself. These two days exploded a sense of pride and commitment within me that I will never lose for the rest of my life. I rise with the fallen and appreciate everything they have done for me. From

the older leaders of: Yoni Netanyahu, Zeev Jabotinsky, Menachem Begin, and Mordechai Anilewicz to the recent ones of: Gadi Ezra, Alex Singer, Michael Levin and much more. I can now enter my army service stronger than I was before, and fight alongside my personal heroes to bring the day of peace which is destined for the State of Israel.

Joshua Feigenbaum, from Hollywood, Florida, will be joining the IDF next year. In his spare time, he enjoys learning Jewish history and hanging out with the Orayta guys. He would like to acknowledge his personal hero, Michael Levin who has inspired him to join the army and who accompanies Josh spiritually every day.