



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Natan Brownstein

Am Yisroel Chai

Often we get so caught up in boxes and sects of Judaism we forget the underlying theme that unites all of us. That we are all one people and one nation with one goal, even if it sometimes seems unclear along the way. In my mind a war brings people together, on the one hand it's sad that we need something to that level in order to realize our bond with each other; on the other hand, it shows the Jewish people are still strong.



Last night with Pesach, Drew, and Ilan I went to the Leviah (funeral) of Dvir Emanueloff, and of all the experiences I have had so far in Israel this has been the most powerful of them all. The funeral was being held in the middle of the night on Mt. Herzl, the Israeli military cemetery. Before I talk about the funeral one must understand what it is like to be on Mt. Herzl. To be buried on Mt. Herzl you have to have died in service for the State of Israel. Every single grave is the exact same, no matter how big the war was, or in how dramatic of a fashion you died. There are soldiers that have died while on guard duty or in terrorist attacks, in Israel or in a bordering country, defending or attacking, they all died for the same reason. So that people like me can sit here and learn in Yeshiva and feel safe while doing so. They died so that I can go to the *Kotel* every morning to *daven Shacharit*, and travel to the Golan for a day of hiking. The land is our land because of the people that died on Mt. Herzl. Being there in its own right is a powerful and humbling experience.

On the bus ride to the funeral, Ilan related to me how strange it was to think that exactly one week before he had been at a wedding in Jerusalem and experienced the feeling of Jewish Unity and the hope of new families and children in Jerusalem, in a Modern State of Israel. Sometimes, though, it is important to know that life is a cycle, and just as quickly as life begins, it can end. That while one day we are celebrating a birth, that same week we are together once again experiencing a death. The Jewish people continue to live on.

We arrived on the bus and it was like being outside Yankee Stadium on the night of a big game, but no one was cheering, and they were not convening for a happy event. The crowd was enormous, coming from many directions converging to an area in the cemetery where the funeral was to be held. I could not see the open grave but at a certain point we could not go any farther. Ahead of me was a sea of

kippot. Kippot that covered your entire head, some that were colorful, some that were black felt under black hats, and some that were small with designs resting square on the top of the head, and some with no *kippah* at all. There were women in long skirts and women in pants, men with shaved heads and long beards. There were olive green uniforms scattered throughout the crowd sometimes standing together and sometimes alone, paying their respects to their fellow soldier.

It was one thing for these people to all be here, from different backgrounds all here for the same reason but for all of these people to be breaking down in tears is another feeling all together. Religious women and secular Army generals all being emotionally affected by the same tragic event. People got up and spoke - each depicting a different aspect of the Dvir's life. His Rabbi spoke about the *Mishnayot* they were learning. When he passed away they were in the middle of one in the Tractate of *Kiddushin* about *Am Yisroel Chai*. One of his fellow soldiers got up and spoke about his dedication to his country and how he was a leader within the *plugah* (company). Then his sister got up and spoke. All who had dry eyes up until that point (including myself) burst into tears, because she herself did the same. This sister spoke of the last time she spoke with her brother on the phone. "He told me to say goodbye, and I would not do it". She continued "He always was there to give a listening ear and good advice whenever I needed it." We often forget in the news or do not realize that each of these soldiers that dies has siblings that look up to him, parents that love him, a future and friends. I for one can say that reading the news will now be a new experience because I will always think back to the hundreds of Jews from every background and sect saying *Kaddish* together under the moonlight of Har Herzl. Sometimes we get so caught up in the war, and who is right, and who is wrong we forget to take a step back, and realize that we are *Am Yisroel*, and we all are one people that are connected with something deeper than the way we see *halacha* or the type of *shul* we go to. *Am Yisroel Chai*.

Natan attended Cleveland High School in Portland, Oregon where he the Captain of the Varsity Swim Team. He was the Portland Regional Student Director of the Jewish Student Union and a member of the Northwest NCSY Regional Board. Natan also spearheaded efforts to get the Portland Public School Board to change exam dates so that they don't fall on Jewish Festivals.

Natan's favorite part of Orayta is: The Gemara Shiurim. And ending the day every day feeling like I have been challenged intellectually to my full capacity and becoming a better person.