

Capt. Ziv Shilon: A Portrait of Unselfishness

Years ago as a young believer, I remember hearing a pastor compare 'self-focus' to cancer. After all, he reasoned, cancer is the body turning in on itself; attacking its own cells.

Self-focus is much the same, looking only inwardly, consumed only with one's own needs, one's own wants, and thus breeding a life of *selfishness*.

Carrying the metaphor forward, if self-focus leads to death ... then serving others, one must conclude, leads to life. Yeshua said it best:

"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." (John 12:25) and *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."* (John 15:13)

Even 12-step programs use this as one of their keys to overcoming addictions; that is, to serve others struggling with the same addiction, by sharing all that you yourself have learned.

A Real Life Hero

There is a remarkable video I came across recently, put out by the Israeli Defense Forces.

It's a video of Capt. Ziv Shilon, an IDF platoon commander who was severely wounded while on routine patrol near the Israeli-Gaza border in October of 2012. Shilon survived the attack, but his hands were permanently mangled.

In his speech to fellow soldiers, delivered during a special ceremony, he says: *"You are required, as a handful of our best sons, to take a break from your lives and give of yourselves,*

all for one purpose: that the State of Israel, the Jewish State, will continue to exist, and things like the Holocaust and anti-Semitism will never happen again. 'He who neither slumbers nor sleeps will guard over Israel' (Psalm 121:4). My dear soldiers, rise up and succeed, congratulations and thank you for an incredible time."

His words left me in awe. This is the opposite of selfishness. This is *selflessness*. This is service and love in action.

Just the Opposite

On any day, Captain Shilon's story should reduce us to tears. But today, it struck me even more powerfully because of recent comments by some other Israelis in the news, lately. Namely, some in the ultra-orthodox community.

Most estimates put the number of ultra-orthodox at about 10 percent of Israel's population of around eight million. That would mean about 800,000 men, women and children who are a part of a community who believe that studying the Torah and other books such as the Talmud and Mishnah is more important than anything else in life. The words of their rabbis on how to live every moment of every day of their lives, takes precedence to anything and everything else.

That includes service to the nation of Israel.

Tens of thousands of those in the ultra-orthodox community do not take part in Israel's mandatory military service. That mandatory service is supposed to include three years of military service for men and two years for women. Unless some sort of medical condition prevents you from doing so, all Israeli citizens are required by law to carry out this service.

In 1949, a law was passed, allowing a few hundred rabbinical students to study, rather than serve. Since then, due to the

political clout of ultra-orthodox lawmakers, that number has ballooned to include nearly all able-bodied orthodox men.

Last year, Israel's Supreme Court finally struck down that law, but cowardly lawmakers have still yet to enforce the court's ruling.

Why Does This Matter?

Immediately after the Supreme Court's ruling, ultra-Orthodox leader Meir Porush, a former lawmaker, said drafting 'his people' would unleash a "civil war."

And the rhetoric doesn't stop there, as the *Jerusalem Post* reported only two weeks ago:

Shas chairman Eli Yishai, meanwhile, told Army Radio that he was adamant that his party would not compromise on its core values, which include allowing yeshiva students to continue their studies in lieu of IDF service. "We would never agree to the Plesner recommendations," Yishai said, referencing the Kadima party's unsuccessful 2012 attempt to resolve the issue of ultra-Orthodox enlistment. "It's not realistic to come and say we will draft everybody. The haredim will come as one and say 'we'll go to jail.'"

We'll got to jail, he says! We'll go to jail?!

These are the words of an Israeli political leader? A deputy Prime Minister in the last government?

I would argue that these are the words of a selfish man.

The end of Israel

Why should only ultra-orthodox students get to study, rather than serve in the military? Why didn't Capt. Shilon's parents get that option?

What would become of the nation of Israel, if all its citizens

had this attitude? If all demanded to get to study, while living on taxpayer welfare, rather than serving a few years in the IDF?

What would become of Israel? ... Capt. Shilon already told us:

"You are required, as a handful of our best sons, to take a break from your lives and give of yourselves, all for one purpose: that the State of Israel, the Jewish State, will continue to exist, and things like the Holocaust and anti-Semitism will never happen again."

Selfishness can be the downfall of one's own life. And selfishness can just as easily be the downfall of an entire nation.

Please join us in prayer that the selfish will not prevail in fragile Israel, that instead we'll be a nation of servants ... like Capt. Shilon.

"But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:43-45)

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