

Graduation Ceremony Takes on Sentimental Meaning

Having lived in Israel for a while now, I am no longer a stranger to army ceremonies. Bringing picnics, taking pictures, and crying your eyes out with pride for whomever it is you've gone to see. But recently I experienced something new.

The ceremony meant more to me. As I watched my little sister standing in formation, running up to her officer and swearing her allegiance to the Israel Defense Force with her gun placed over her Torah in symbology of her willingness to use her weapon to protect her religion, I knew this was a sight I wouldn't be forgetting anytime soon.

This was a family legacy coming to life. This was, for the Goldberg clan, a dream come true. Finally, a daughter is serving her country.

By the time I got to Israel, I was too old to serve and they didn't draft me. But my sister is different. She holds in her heart the desire to fight for her homeland, something instilled in both of us as children, and she was lucky to come to Israel at 18—the normal drafting age for all Israelis.

"I swear, affirm and promise upon my word of honor to be faithful to the State of Israel, to her laws, and to her authorized institutions; To unconditionally take upon myself the yoke of Israel Defense Force discipline; To obey all orders and commands given by authorized officers; To dedicate all of my strength even unto sacrificing my life for the defense of the

Homeland and the freedom of Israel."

There was an energy there that I had never felt before at any ceremony. While usually the place is packed with Israeli families who had been to millions of these ceremonies before, this one was smaller, with a most eclectic variety of people coming together. Aside from the personal significance of this ceremony, all the soldiers being sworn in were new immigrants, **Lone Soldiers** from around the world.

These girls had chosen to pick up their lives and not only move to a strange land, but to fight for that country's freedom and security. All around me, instead of hearing Hebrew, I heard English, Russian, French, and Spanish in the friends and families who had come to support their lone soldiers.

In fact, the only Hebrew I did hear was from the adoptive families who had taken these lone soldiers into their homes as one of their own. What fascinates me is how these young women arrived at their decision to join the Israel Defense Forces.

What inspired them to give up so much? How did their interest and passion grow into such a definitive commitment to the Jewish people? Could it be that they were all raised in Zionist families like my sister? Or were they turning to Israel for a better life?

While these questions definitely do not have easy answers, more and more people are coming to Israel to enlist every year. These brave young men and women should be praised for making the conscious choice to put their identity as Jews and their commitment to the future of the Jewish state as a priority above all else.

Because we have no other place in the world like Israel, and she must be strong and defended, Israelis grow up knowing that army service is a part of their destiny. Serving together, lone soldiers join the ranks to make up the only Jewish army

in the world for the sake of all the Jewish people everywhere.

I remember well how hard it can be to foster a connection to Israel from outside, from any of the four corners of the earth that make up the Jewish Diaspora. Can it help to know that others just like you are picking up, leaving their families, and coming to Israel to be Jewish soldiers in the Jewish state?

Maybe, just maybe, it will inspire some little girl to know that there is a place where she will always be welcomed and honored.

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