

# Ksharim



## Lesson 36

# Youth and coming of age in Israel

### 1. Outline

The New Jew

The school systems

Informal education: youth movements, volunteer service

The army

### 2. Introduction

Many of the “founding fathers (and mothers)” of modern Israel came to the country as twenty-somethings (or younger), in the Second Aliyah (1904-1914) and the Third Aliyah (1919-1923). While they were small in number, their cultural influence was far-reaching and long-lasting, and it is perhaps largely due to their experience that Israel’s self-image is that of a “young” society, a society whose youth are its heroes and its leaders. There is an ironic reversal here of the traditional respect accorded to age and wisdom. And needless to say, this self-image affects many aspects of cultural life, from child-rearing to education to politics – not always in constructive ways. Another factor contributing to this youth-centeredness is the central place of defense in the collective consciousness – the near-universal conscription of both genders means that the army is a major rite of passage and a huge cultural influence.

This unit will examine the perception of – and the experience of – youth in Israeli society in several important contexts. The materials and background are presented straightforwardly – not as a comparative examination with the North American Jewish experience; however, exploring the comparison is recommended as a useful and effective educational method for using this material.

### 3. Lesson goals

- a. Understanding the educational implications of Israeli society’s origins in a revolutionary movement
- b. Understanding the ambivalent attitude toward youth and Jewish identity in Israel
- c. Knowledge of some of the basic institutional frameworks affecting young people in Israel

### 4. Expanded outline

#### a. The New Jew

- i. From the beginnings of modern Zionism, the hope of a Jewish return to sovereignty in Zion was accompanied by a parallel vision of a revitalized

Jewish life based on the notion of a “New Jew.” One of the movement’s earliest leaders, Max Nordau, coined the phrase “muscular Judaism” that came to symbolize this concept of Zionism as an anthropological revolution – a revolution not only against the fact of the Exile, but against the “type” of the Exilic Jew (see:

<http://www.jafi.org.il/education/100/concepts/sport/2.html> ). In a sense, many Jews accepted the anti-Semitic characterization of the Jew as pale, weak, timid, and parasitic, and dreamed of a new “race” of Jews who would be just the opposite: tanned, strong, bold, and self-reliant. It is this image that morphed into the Sabra, as seen, for example, in Leon Uris’ Ari ben-Canaan (Paul Newman in *Exodus*). An examination of the rise (and fall) of the New Jew in Hebrew literature can be found in this lecture by Prof. Arnold Band:

<http://isanet.org/judaic/bilgray/band/Band2.htm>

And this obituary for author Moshe Shamir gives some insight into the values of the New Jew and how they can lead in different directions:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel/Story/0,2763,1292010,00.html>

And for something of the historical context – the aliyah of the *chalutzim* and their concept of renewal by settling the land, see:

<http://www.jewishagency.org/JewishAgency/English/Jewish+Education/Eye+on+Israel/hityashvut/The+socialist+pioneers.htm>

- ii. It is of interest to consider our own stereotypes of Israelis – and of Jews – and what their emotional impacts on us are. To what extent does the image of the New Jew fulfill fantasies for us? To what extent are we disappointed to discover that Israelis are in fact just like us?
- iii. Below (source 1) is a poll taken in 2002 that gives a sense of what Israeli young people are like today; it is interesting to see how it fits and doesn’t fit the New Jew stereotype.
- iv. By the way, it is interesting to note that the Sabra (prickly pear) cactus is not native to the Israel; its origin is Mexico. The Conquistadores noticed that the Indians used a bright red dye, which they made from insects that infested cacti. The Spaniards took cuttings of these home, and the plants spread all around the Mediterranean. In the middle east they were often used as a living fence. Today, in Israel, the tell-tale sign of an Arab village that was abandoned in 1948 is the luxuriant growth of Sabras.
- v. Despite (or perhaps partly because of) the centrality of young people to the Zionist revolution and the Zionist vision of a New Jew who will build the New Jewish State, Israel suffers from a full spectrum of the problems of children and youth: poverty, abuse, homelessness, drug abuse, crime,

etc. These occasionally cause public outcry, and are much sensationalized by the tabloids. And there are many serious and dedicated persons and institutions working to remedy these social ills. In any case, it is important to be aware of Israel's "normality" in this realm, for better or for worse. See, for example,

<http://www.iyfnet.org/section.cfm/76/90/102>

and

[http://www.ias.org.uk/publications/theglobe/02issue1/globe020\\_p14.html](http://www.ias.org.uk/publications/theglobe/02issue1/globe020_p14.html)

and some examples of attempts to respond...

<http://www.elem.org/about/about-elem.php>

and

[http://www.jdc.org/p\\_is\\_ps\\_youth\\_roie.html](http://www.jdc.org/p_is_ps_youth_roie.html)

There have been, over the years, hundreds of glib attempts to attribute the problems of Israeli youth to the various circumstances of life here; e.g., the threat of terror, the occupation, the expectation of military service, the climate, the experience of immigration, ethnic discrimination, permissiveness, provincialism, the loss of religious faith, etc. Any or all of these may contain some truth; on the whole however, it is not clear that young people in Israel are really significantly different from their peers in other developed countries, reflecting primarily the sufferings generic to adolescents in modern, modernizing, and post-modern societies.

## b. Schools

- i. The institutional setting most affected by the concept of the New Jew was the education system. The generation of the founders saw their task as to create the new "type" by means of education. From the beginning of the Zionist movement, education was a hot topic; indeed, the very creation of a religious Zionist movement (Mizrachi) as a subdivision within the Zionist movement came (in 1902) as a response to the decision of the Fifth Zionist Congress to make "cultural work" a part of the Zionist agenda – instead of limiting Zionism to the political work of securing a state, the movement decided to get involved in educating Jews to strengthen their national identity; this led to a split, as the Orthodox were not prepared to support educational programs that were secular-national. Ultimately, this led to the formation of two separate school systems in the Yishuv, in 1922, which were recognized by the state in 1948. Today there are three parallel government school systems: secular Jewish, religious Jewish, and Arab, and various "recognized" private or semi-private networks of schools, the largest of

which are the ultra-orthodox yeshivot and ulpanot (girls schools). For a compact summary of historical developments and a description of the system, see: <http://countrystudies.us/israel/59.htm> .

And/or:

[http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000\\_2009/2001/8/Education%20for%20Democracy%20at%20the%20Start%20of%20the%20Twenty](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2001/8/Education%20for%20Democracy%20at%20the%20Start%20of%20the%20Twenty)

Interestingly, there are many thousands of ultra-Orthodox children in private schools because of the religious milieu; a few thousand Arabs (mostly Moslem) attend private Christian schools because of the quality of the general education there. There are no private Moslem schools – all Israeli Arabs except for the minority attending private Christian schools study in schools operated in Arabic by the ministry of education.

- ii. Note that in only a very few cases do Jewish and Arab children attend school together; there are a total of about four integrated schools in Israel. See

<http://www.handinhand12.org/>

and

<http://nswas.org/rubrique22.html>

- iii. As in many modern societies, only, perhaps, more so, in Israel the schools – which began as “tools” of the Zionist revolution, and saw themselves as responsible for creating New Jews and hence, the New Jewish society and state – are seen as responsible for the perpetually dismal “state of our youth.” Lack of Jewish knowledge, unclear Jewish identity, lack of commitment to democracy, ignorance of math and science, violence, draft-dodging, drug usage, sexual permissiveness, street kids, social fragmentation, socio-economic gaps, ethnic tensions, etc. are all blamed by the popular culture on the failings of the schools; already in 1912 such complaints were voiced by Zionist leaders. Hence throughout the years there have been countless commissions of inquiry, new curricula, reforms, etc. - and, due to the proletarianization of the teachers, almost yearly (sometimes more often) strikes and a constant feeling that the education system lacks the resources to do its job properly. On top of this, due to the parliamentary system of government, every time the government changes or the coalition is renegotiated, the education minister changes; control of the schools is seen as an important political position, and the tone that is set for the system is influenced by the ideology of the minister’s party. All of this means that school teaching is not a high status or highly paid profession, is governed by a user-unfriendly bureaucracy, and is fraught with professional and personal frustrations.

- iv. In 1993, the Shenhar Commission examined the whole area of “Jewish education” and came to the conclusion that the secular school system was failing to foster Jewish cultural identity. In the years since, many programs have been created in response, and a whole network of secular schools with “increased Jewish studies” (the Tali schools) established (actually, the Tali network antedates the Shenhar Report, but its most significant expansion has been in the past decade). See, on this, for example:

<http://www.masorti.org/media/archive2004/01132004.html>

[http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaystory/story\\_id/4461/edition\\_id/81/format/html/displaystory.html](http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaystory/story_id/4461/edition_id/81/format/html/displaystory.html)

The discourse surrounding the Shenhar Report is part of the ongoing discussion, since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, on just what should be the “Jewish” content of Israeli education. What should be the place of, for example, rabbinic literature in the curriculum of a society that denies the relevance of halachah? The dominant philosophy of Jewish education, over the years, has been the approach of Achad Ha’am – that Jewish culture has a life of its own that can continue and flourish even without religious belief (Mordecai Kaplan was a disciple...); he believed that the building of an authentic, independent Jewish culture in Israel would rejuvenate Jewish culture world wide, rescuing it from the degeneration that had come to characterize Diaspora Orthodox Jewish life. See below, from one of his essays. This philosophy allowed the general culture of Israel, and the schools in particular, to develop a public Judaism that was independent of religion: from Purim carnivals to Chanukah pageants, from Tu Beshvat plantings to Shavuot first-fruits festivals. The result, in many cases, has been a reduction of the tradition to these public ceremonies, without any spiritual – or even ethical – components attached to it in the students’ consciousness.

- v. One of the most frequent criticisms of the school system, since before 1948, relates to the centrality of the *bagrut*, or matriculation, exams – nationally standardized achievement tests administered at the end of high school, serving as the basis of the college admissions system – and serving as a way of insuring nationally standardized curriculum. However, the result is often an intensity of “teaching for the test” that precludes any freedom, any enrichment, any efforts to deal with value questions, with building community in the school, after about 10<sup>th</sup> grade. In recent years there have been changes that have loosened the system somewhat, giving students and teachers more curricular choices; however, the general atmosphere in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade is one of “don’t distract us from our *bagrut* preparations; real life will have to wait.” Of course, most students then move directly from high school to

the army, without a serious opportunity to prepare for the serious personal and moral challenges that await them in this next phase.

vi. **Three Galilee Diary entries on education in Israel:**

[http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3579&pge\\_prg\\_id=15531&pge\\_id=1698](http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3579&pge_prg_id=15531&pge_id=1698)

[http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3578&pge\\_prg\\_id=15531&pge\\_id=1698](http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3578&pge_prg_id=15531&pge_id=1698)

[http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3577&pge\\_prg\\_id=15531&pge\\_id=1698](http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3577&pge_prg_id=15531&pge_id=1698)

### c. Informal education

- i. As over against the self-perception by the teachers, in the period of the Yishuv, as cultural revolutionaries, there has existed a distinct strand in Israeli culture that views schools as purveyors of knowledge and skills only – while value education is the province of the informal educational institutions, primarily the youth movement. Many olim, from the earliest days, were products of Zionist youth movements – secular socialist, revisionist, religious – and saw the movements as the seat of the true revolution. Unlike the model of NFTY and other American educational youth organizations, run by adults for children, the Zionist youth movements are based on an ethos of the self-reliance of youth. Adult supervision is rejected. Each age level serves as the leaders/teachers/coaches for the level beneath it. In the Yishuv period – and to a significant extent today – the movements were and are ideologically driven, and take their role as purveyors of ideology seriously. For a good historical survey, and a discussion of the decline of the youth movements in recent years, see:

<http://www.wzo.org.il/en/resources/view.asp?id=1665>

For positive examples of how the movements continue to be a force for good in Israeli society, see:

<http://www.wzo.org.il/en/resources/view.asp?id=1611&subject=29>

Some movement websites:

<http://www.hamahanot-haolim.org.il/profile-e.asp>

<http://www.noal.co.il/eng.htm>

<http://www.bneiakiva.net/Index.asp?CategoryID=192>

<http://www.betar.org.il/english/index.htm>

[http://www.zofim.co.il/about\\_tnua\\_english.asp](http://www.zofim.co.il/about_tnua_english.asp)

- ii. Perhaps the most significant impact of the youth movements today is the phenomenon of young people postponing their draft date by a year and devoting a year to volunteer community service. This practice is very much a youth movement tradition, but there are opportunities for kids who did not grow up through the movements. In addition, there are many who enter pre-army work/study programs, also requiring a one-year draft postponement, and which feature intensive group living, pluralistic Jewish study, and community service. While the majority of kids don't choose these options, the minority (under 2%) who do volunteer represent an

impressive demonstration of idealism and leadership, in a generation often accused of being materialistic and apathetic.

See:

<http://www.carmelinstitute.org.il/YouthService/nysinisrael.htm>

and

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3238314,00.html>

#### d. The army

- i. Every 3 months, large signs are hung on public billboards – all youngsters born between the published dates are called to report to the induction centers for initial tests. Most kids also receive personal notices by mail. From this moment until army enlistment, they are officially termed "intended for security service," restricted from freely leaving the country – army property. In the year or two until enlistment, kids report to induction centers at least twice for a series of tests, and many are repeatedly invited for additional assessments in preparation for enlistment in various courses or units. For some background material see [http://www.jafi.org.il/education/juice/2000/israeli\\_society/is9.html](http://www.jafi.org.il/education/juice/2000/israeli_society/is9.html).

Draft day is a major rite of passage; typically, the whole family drives the inductee to the induction center in a nearby city early in the morning, where an auditorium full of similar families sits and waits for a female soldier serving in the induction center to mount the podium and begin to call off names, one bus-load at a time. As the names are called, the families accompany their draftees out to the parking lot and cry and laugh and call through the windows of the buses until they drive away. Generally, after a few days in an induction base getting processed, the new soldiers are sent home for Shabbat before beginning basic training.

Note that the Israeli army does not generally do laundry: soldiers are expected to have their families launder their uniforms when they are home for Shabbat leave.

- ii. The high school period in Israel is permeated with consciousness of the army period which typically follows, and high schools are officially required to actively encourage their students to enlist. A circular from the head of education ministry (1999) stresses: "The central goal which the IDF and the Ministry of Education share: Preparing all youth for [service in] the IDF, while strengthening their readiness and motivation for meaningful and contributive army service, every person according to his/her capabilities and preferences, and stressing the importance of service in combat units". We will examine some of the issues raised by ubiquitous army service in

Israel by reading an excerpt from the circular (see source 3 below), which lists the goals of the army preparation program.

- (Goals 1-2, 7-8) – the fact that a stated goal of the Israeli education system is to encourage army service and improve kids' readiness for it causes uneasiness in some circles, which argue that this causes a surfeit of militarism in Israeli society. See the following for information about New Profile, an organization calling for the "Civil-ization of Israeli society".  
<http://www.newprofile.org/showdata.asp?pid=740&language=en>  
 Feminists argue that the militarization of Israeli society has far-reaching consequences for the status of women in Israeli society. See the following for an interesting analysis:  
<http://www.euowrc.org/13.institutions/3.coe/en-violence-coe/11.en-coe-oct99.htm>
- (Goal 3) – the IDF is viewed as a "people's army" – one of the important institutions of Israeli society. Signs that the high participation level is beginning to erode are unwelcome. The level of motivation to serve in the army is followed anxiously, and statistics about enlistment rates, in-service dropout rates and percentages of those preferring combat units are often published in the media, followed by soul-searching and committees tasked with improving the rates. Some current statistics (from a paper presented for discussion in the Knesset education committee, 2001 - <http://www.knesset.gov.il/MMM/data/docs/m00132.doc> (in Hebrew)):

### Jewish men who received exemptions

Reason for exemption	1999	1996
Ultra-orthodox exemption	7.8%	6.7%
Medical exemption	5.2%	4.9%
Unfit	2.7%	2.7%
Abroad	3.8%	5.2%
Total	19.5%	19.5%

In 2000, 19% of soldiers who joined the army dropped out without completing their full term of service. See more data, on attitudes to service, in Source 4 below.

- (Goal 6) – army service, especially in the last decades which have been characterized by a low-grade war on terrorism, pose many ethical dilemmas to soldiers. Some argue that at their young age, the soldiers are not ready to face them. The situations which they find themselves in may come back to haunt them in later years. One explanation given for the "after-army trip" many Israelis undertake, backpacking in far-off countries for periods from a few months to a few years, is the need to escape these ghosts. Another fear that has been raised is that soldiers who spend their formative years in army service internalize violent standards of behavior, contributing to a violent atmosphere within Israeli society. For an interesting discussion of some of these issues, see the following articles:  
[http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/07/11/listening\\_post/main708205\\_page2.shtml](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/07/11/listening_post/main708205_page2.shtml)  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A54448-2003Nov17?language=printer>
- (Goal 12) – several sectors do not typically serve in the army – ultra-religious men, religious women, and Arabs. While many Israelis view members of these sectors with enmity, envying them the extra years which they do not contribute to serving the state, not to mention the reduced risk of death in combat, the flip side of the coin is often not considered. Army service does offer benefits to the individual – some bestowed by the government (such as housing benefits, preference in certain jobs, etc.) and some resulting from the characteristics of army service. Soldiers in the army often receive valuable professional training and experience; soldiers gain opportunities to fill jobs that often, in civilian life, require many more years of experience – operating sophisticated equipment, commanding units and bearing high levels of responsibility; the army is the main hothouse for Israel's "old boy network", invaluable in later life in countless ways. Members of sectors who don't serve, already marginalized from mainstream Israeli society, are doubly marginalized by these effects.
- (Goal 13) – the "*hesder*" program was developed especially for religious soldiers. It combines periods of army service with periods of yeshiva study, in units composed solely of religious soldiers who go through the program together. This makes it easier for religious soldiers to fulfill their army service duty while retaining their commitment to a religious way of life; on the other hand, it lessens their exposure to other sectors of society, and reduces the army's ability to act as Israel's great "mixer", which some see as an important role. Recently, the question of

*hesder* soldiers' possible "double loyalty" (split between their army commanders and their yeshiva rabbis) has been raised, especially in the context of the disengagement plan.

- (Goal 14) – most religious girls are exempted from army service, and most of those exempted undertake national service – for one or two years. Most religious Zionist rabbis recommend this option, feeling that it poses for the girls fewer challenges to their religious way of life. Once again, this impinges on the army's "mixing" role. It also raises the question of whether the time has not come for all youngsters to be able to choose between national service and army service, and not limit the option solely to religious girls. See research on national service at <http://www.carmelinstitute.org.il/YouthService/nysresearch.html>

- iii. A few Galilee Diary entries dealing with the role of the army in growing up in Israel:

[http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3622&pge\\_prg\\_id=16071&pge\\_id=1698](http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3622&pge_prg_id=16071&pge_id=1698)

[http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3602&pge\\_prg\\_id=15657&pge\\_id=1698](http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3602&pge_prg_id=15657&pge_id=1698)

[http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3596&pge\\_prg\\_id=15510&pge\\_id=1698](http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3596&pge_prg_id=15510&pge_id=1698)

And two more entries, no longer available on the URJ archive, are appended below.

Source 1:

Poll of Israeli teenagers, 2002, by Dr. Mina Tzemach

Question: What is the most important thing for you to do in life?

To raise a family	33%
To find love	24%
To help others	21%
To serve the country	16%
To make money	5%

Question: In the framework of military service, which kind of unit would you like to serve in?

Combat unit	55%
Administrative unit	15%
Professional unit	29%
Undecided	1%

Question: In the framework of military service, do you prefer to serve in a unit close to home or far from home?

Close to home	72%
Far from home	21%
Doesn't matter	6%
Undecided	1%

The pollsters' comment in comparing the above two results was: "Even though most Israeli high school students are prepared to serve in a combat unit, even so they don't want to be far from their mothers."

Question: What profession do you want to practice in the future?

Doctor	12%
Hi-tech	10%
Teacher	7%
Security services	6%
Actor, singer, or D.J.	5%
Business	5%
Lawyer	4%
Rabbi	3%
Clerk	3%
Media	3%
Technician or electrician	2%
Housewife	0%

Question: In your opinion, should marijuana be legalized?

Yes	15%
No	84%
Undecided	1%

Question: Have you ever had sexual relations?

Yes	33%
No	62%
Didn't answer	5%

Question: If you had the choice, would you prefer to continue to live in Israel, or would you prefer to move to a different country?

Continue to live in Israel	84%
Move to a different country	16%

### Source 2:

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#### Ahad Ha'am: Jewish State and Jewish Problem, 1897

And now Judaism finds that it can no longer tolerate the Diaspora form which it had to take on, in obedience to its will-to-live, when it was exiled from its own country, and that if it loses that form its life is in danger. So it seeks to return to its historic centre, in order to live there a life of natural development, to bring its powers into play in every department of human culture, to develop and perfect those national possessions which it has acquired up to now, and thus to contribute to the common stock of humanity, in the future as in the past, a great national culture, the fruit of the unhampered activity of a people living according to its own spirit. For this purpose Judaism needs at present but little. It needs not an independent State, but only the creation in its native land of conditions favorable to its development: a good-sized settlement of Jews working *without hindrance* in every branch of culture, from agriculture and handicrafts to science and literature. This Jewish settlement, which will be a gradual growth, will become in course of time the centre of the nation, wherein its spirit will find pure expression and develop in all its aspects up to the highest degree of perfection of which it is capable. Then from this centre the spirit of Judaism will go forth to the great circumference, to all the communities of the Diaspora, and will breathe new life into them and preserve their unity; and when our national culture in Palestine has attained that level, we may be confident that it will produce men in the country who will be able, on a favorable opportunity, to establish a State which will be a Jewish State, and not merely a State of Jews.

### Source 3:

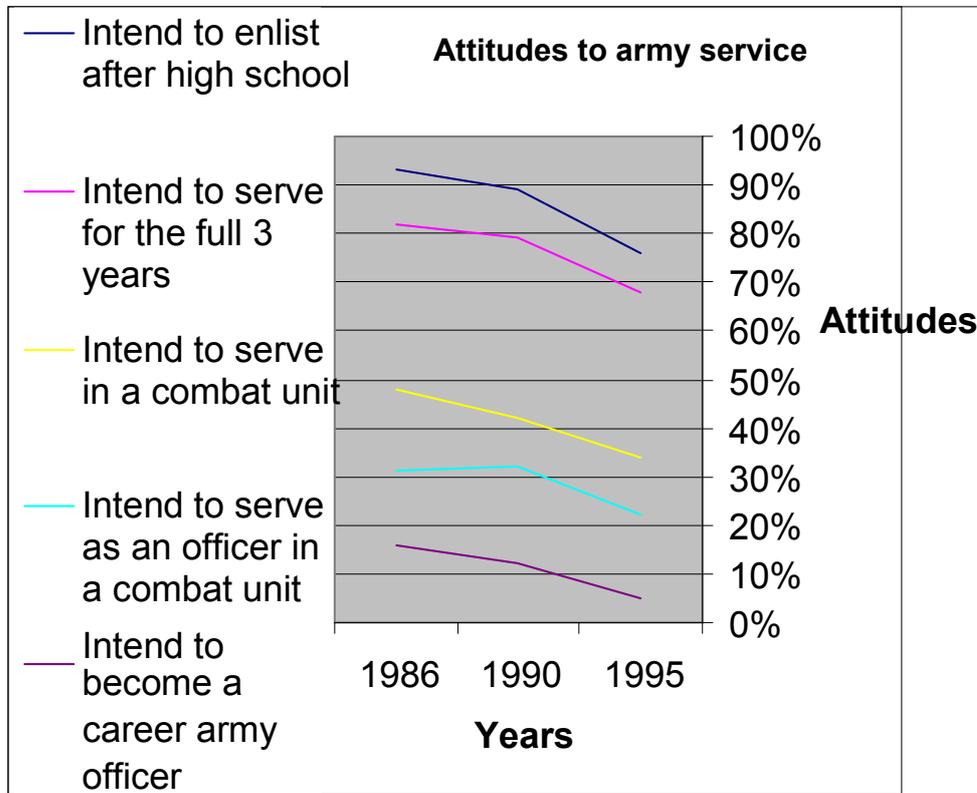
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Excerpt from a circular from the head of the Ministry of Education, 1999 (<http://www.education.gov.il/mark01/h0004825.htm#TQL>). Goals of the army preparation program in Israeli high schools:

1. Encouraging the students' feeling of connectedness to the State of Israel and the people of Israel and their identification with them, and bringing to their consciousness their duty and right, as citizens, to guard the security of the state and nation
2. Making the students conscious of the importance of the IDF's central role in securing the existence of the state of Israel and the peace process

3. Encouraging the students' willingness to serve in the army
4. Raising students' consciousness to the moral and ethical questions and the responsibility of each individual in his/her decisions in questions pertaining to his/her military service
5. Supplying students with information about the enlistment process and possible options of army service
6. Developing students' moral and ethical judgment while discerning between legal and patently illegal orders
7. Fostering a high standard of physical fitness and awareness in preparation for the stresses expected during service
8. Developing students' basic knowledge of physical training theory, so they can prepare themselves for meaningful army service
9. Fostering a feeling of readiness and personal capability to handle the process of transition from parents home and school to army service
10. Allaying fears of the unknown which enlistment often raise
11. Encouraging positive parental participation in their children's preparation and enlistment process
12. Clarifying the opportunities that meaningful army service can offer the individual
13. Fostering in religious boys the readiness for meaningful and contributory service in the "hesder" units, and informing them of the contribution of pre-army programs
14. Fostering in religious girls the readiness for meaningful and contributory service in the National Service organizations
15. Preparing religious students for their encounter with different sectors, while retaining their commitment to a religious way of life while serving the State of Israel in the army or National Service
16. Individually preparing religious girls who wish to serve in the army

**Source 4:**



## Galilee Diary #11; February, 2001

Marc Rosenstein

### Present Arms

Just returned from Lev's "beret ceremony" for paratroopers: graduation from basic training. This, it turns out, is a major rite of passage for Israeli males (except, of course, for ultra-orthodox and most Arabs). No matter what you have scheduled for that day, if you tell people you have your son's beret ceremony, you are expected to cancel your plans and go. And so we packed up snacks and umbrellas and picnic blankets and set off for the three hour drive to Jerusalem, on a cold, showery day. Having done extensive research among veteran parents about the appropriate fare for the post-ceremony picnic, we stopped at one of the hole-in-the-wall "steakiot" in the Machaneh Yehuda market on the way into town. The proprietors, upon learning our destination, treated us as honored guests, filling styrofoam containers with salads and sauces and soggy french fries to go with the grilled steaks.

Arriving at Ammunition Hill, the memorial park where the paratroopers heroically overcame the well-fortified Jordanians in 1967, we found the kid waiting for us in dress uniform, hobbling around painfully like all his colleagues, having marched 50 miles overnight from the coast to Jerusalem - the institution of the "beret march." After half an hour of hearing stories from the march, and being introduced to the buddies and officers we had heard about for the past six months, the parents were directed to seats in an amphitheater while the army organized the kids into loosely lined-up companies in the center. The pot-bellied master sergeant called us to order, goose-stepped to the microphone, and emceed the ceremony - flag raising, recognition of outstanding trainees, trite but appropriate inspirational speech by the base commander, lots of "company, attention" and "company, at ease," and then "company commanders, present berets!"

And then, with Israeli easy-listening songs playing on the loudspeaker, songs that conjured up images of good old days of heroism and simplicity, each commander - himself just a year older than his charges - presented each new paratrooper with the trademark maroon beret and gave him a slap or a hug of affection. At one point, when the slaps and hugs were taking too long, the master sergeant barked, "company commanders, hurry up!" Then, Hatikvah was sung along with the taped choir, and with a whoop, all the berets were tossed in the air, and the smiling troops hobbled off to dine with their families on luke-warm steaks on the wet grass.

Looking over the crowd, I was reminded again what a great leveler the army is here. The families represented every ethnic and socio-economic grouping, from professors to executives to laborers, religious and non, city and kibbutz, left and right. We were jockeying for camera angles, annoyed in a good natured way by each others' umbrellas. Our kids were learning to depend on each other and support each other, to take on responsibility for each other and for all of us in ways that seem unimaginable to me.

As a rite of passage and a leveler, the army with its silly ceremonies can make one feel proud. You find yourself quelling to the taped military march music, and eagerly photographing your kid with his beret and rifle. And you know “we have no choice.” You know we have a right to exist. You know history. You know we live in a violent world. And yet you wonder what you are doing, and if it has to be this way. You wonder how our democracy might be if it weren’t led by generals. You wonder about the effect of learning how to kill as a rite of passage, as the one thing that unites us. And you wonder how it is that you decided to move to a place where your child is learning hand-to-hand combat while his classmates from elementary school in Philadelphia are learning liberal arts.

And then the kid tells you with great enthusiasm that next week they move on to paratroop training - i.e., jumping out of airplanes. And you understand that armies are for kids. And you wonder if it has to be this way.

#### Galilee Diary #45; October, 2001

Marc Rosenstein

##### College Days

Our daughter is starting college this year, and the other day we drove her and a vanload of miscellaneous used furniture and housewares to her new apartment in Beersheba. Having lived through the American college “process” myself, and then experienced it as a high school principal for middle class Jewish kids, it is hard for me to get used to the experience here, which is so different.

1. No essay, no interview, no alumni representatives, no need to accumulate an impressive list of extracurricular activities and honors. You simply enter your final 12th grade average, your average score on the matriculation (end-of-high-school achievement) exams, and your score on the “psychotechnical” exam (an aptitude test) into a formula, and compare the resulting number to the chart published by each department in each university, showing the admission cutoff score. Thus, you can figure out whether you will be accepted without waiting for an envelope to arrive on April 15.
2. Forget liberal arts. You must be accepted by the department in which you plan to major. There are minimal distribution requirements outside your major. A BA takes three years.
3. Perhaps the main difference: university study is not the immediate continuation of high school. It is not the student’s first experience living away from home. The university does not see itself *in loco parentis*. Boys arrive after at least three years in the army - and often an additional year or more traveling and/or working; our daughter, who is fairly typical, comes to the college experience four years after graduating high