

CHOVERET CHINUCH

Introduction

Hello dear Bogrim,

This Choveret is presented to you in courtesy of the FZY shlichim.

Dealing with the different issues within Israel, leading chanichim and programmes and being a good madrich in FZY requires a high level of understanding and engagement with different topics and perspectives, so that you can pass on knowledge and answer chanichim questions.

We feel that in order for you to pass on knowledge you need to have confidence in your understanding. The following articles are the gate and beginning to understanding the issues from point of view of Israelis, non-Jews and Jews in the same booklet.

This is just the basics, designed to intrigue you and create the platform from which you can grow.

So what do we have?

1. **Zionism** – definitions and stream
2. **Delegitimisation of Israel** – by Richard Goldstone and an article about Israel's right to exist.
3. **Service and Society** – compulsory army service and its effect on the Israeli society.
4. **Religion and State** – what role do religion and state play in Israel, and what is the status quo agreement

*Gili, Daniel and Dandi,
Neshikot xxx*

Bogrim Seminar – What is Zionism

Zionism is the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, which led to the founding of modern Israel in 1948.

Different streams of Zionism before the foundation of Israel:

❖ **Political Zionism: Herzl**

Stressed the importance of political action and deemed the attainment of political rights in Palestine a prerequisite for the fulfillment of the Zionist enterprise.

❖ **Practical Zionism: Hibat Zion**

Emphasized practical means of attaining Zionist goals, such as aliyah, rural settlement and educational institutions, despite inadequate political conditions.

❖ **Religious Zionism: Rav Kook**

Religious Zionism can be traced to the "augurers of Zion" (Mevasrei Zion, precursors of Hibbat Zion), including Rabbis Yehudah Alkalai, Zvi Kalischer, Shmuel Mohilever, and Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin. Based on a fusion of Jewish religion and nationhood, it aims to restore not only Jewish political freedom but also Jewish religion in the light of the Torah and its commandments. For Religious Zionism, Judaism based on the commandments is a sine qua non for Jewish national life in the homeland.

In 1902, in response to the decision of the Fifth Zionist Congress to consider cultural activity as part of the Zionist program, Rabbis Reines and Ze'ev Yavetz established the Mizrachi organization (mizrachi being the Hebrew abbreviation of merkaz ruhani-"spiritual center"). Mizrachi held its first world convention in 1904 and composed the movement's platform, which concerned itself principally with observance of the commandments and return to Zion. In Palestine, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacoen Kook gave Religious Zionism his personal and spiritual endorsement, regarding settlement in the Land of Israel as the beginning of Redemption.

Religious Zionism has pledged much of its efforts and resources to constructing a national-religious education system. Hapoel Hamizrahi branched away from the main movement (1922) to focus on Orthodox rural settlement in Palestine under the slogan "Torah va'Avodah" (Torah and Labor). In 1956, the two movements, Mizrachi and Hapoel Hamizrahi, united under the umbrella of the National Religious Party, active in Israeli politics today.

❖ **Cultural Zionism: Ahad Ha'am**

Values Jewish culture and history, including language and historical roots, rather than other Zionist ideas such as land and religion.

❖ **Socialist Zionism (Labor Zionism): Nachman Syrkin.**

Strived to achieve Jewish national and social redemption by fusing Zionism with Socialism; based on assumption that the problem of Diaspora Jewry would remain

unsolved even after the Socialist revolution, and that the solution was the emigration of Jews to, and their concentration in, a territorial base.

❖ **Synthetic Zionism: Chaim Weitzman.**

Merger of Political and Practical Zionism, "Synthetic Zionism" advocated concurrent action on both tracks: political activity with practical endeavours in Palestine.

❖ **Revisionist Zionism: Ze'ev Jabotinsky.**

Belief in settlement of Palestine and Jordan, and reclaiming of all of Biblical Israel; it is the founding ideology of the non-religious right in Israel.

Questions to discuss:

- What does Zionism mean?
- What were the main goals of Zionism, and how did Zionists hope to achieve them?
- When the word "Zionism" is mentioned, what association, does it raise? What did it mean to previous generations, such as your parents' and grandparents'? Do you think it has meant different things to different generations?
- Theodore Herzl started modern Zionism because he saw that Jews were not fully accepted even in modern liberal democracies like France, because of the anti-Jewish pogroms in the Russian Empire and because this persecution had been a central characteristic of Jewish history since the Roman conquest. In light of that, how relevant Zionism as Herzl defined it to our days?
- Now that Jews have a state, what is the role of Zionism?
- What streams of Zionism can you identify in today's Israeli politics?
- What streams of Zionism can you identify in your own surroundings?

Can Israel Survive Post Zionism?

by Meyrav Wurmser (MEMRI), Middle East Quarterly, March 1999, pp. 3-13

- ❖ Editor's Note: MEMRI is a right-leaning Washington DC-based think-tank

In early December 1998, Israeli television again and again played the video clip of an Israeli soldier surrounded and beaten by a Palestinian mob without his making any attempt to defend himself, followed by his fleeing without his gun. The episode prompted a heated national debate over the soldier's performance. One school of thought found his actions shameful; another celebrated them as the fulfillment of a new spirit in Israel. Typical of the latter viewpoint, Gideon Levy wrote gleefully in Israel's leading newspaper, Ha'aretz, of the soldier's "heroic surrender":

"The myth of Israeli courage shatters before our eyes, a public outcry is sounded, and hardly anybody asks whether perhaps the myth itself is unnecessary, anachronistic or even harmful [T]his, of course, is not the first picture we have seen of a beaten Israeli soldier. Since the

heroic surrender—yes, heroic—of the Mezah outpost during the 1973 Yom Kippur War ... the Israeli ethos has not looked kindly upon those who escape with their lives...”

The recurring question pertains, therefore, to the basic values of Israeli society: Do we really want brave soldiers who risk their lives, merely to satisfy the lust for national honor and maintain the myth of courage? ... In 50-year-old Israeli society, the macho man of the past must no longer be a hero ... We are better off being a "wimpy" state, whose soldiers survive and do not kill for nothing, than a strong state whose source of power is in soldiers who sometimes shoot indiscriminately.

Of course, the question was whether the soldier had the right to shoot in self-defense, not whether he should be "shooting indiscriminately." But this is how many Israelis now view their national security—not as an act of self-defense, but as a "macho" myth, indifferent to the value of life and inclined toward indiscriminate aggression.

By itself, this incident could be dismissed as an aberration. But it is one of very many examples; indeed, it is part of a crisis of identity currently plaguing Israel. It is this crisis, its origins, and its likely implications, that we shall look at here.

THE POST-ZIONIST IDEOLOGY

Israel is today in the midst of a cultural civil war in which one side would like to see their country continue to exist as a Jewish state and the other believes that Zionism, the founding idea of the state, has reached its end. For the latter group, the time has come for Israel to enter its post-Zionist stage; for this reason, it describes itself as "post-Zionist." By their own definition, post-Zionists are anti-Zionist, meaning they believe that the Zionist enterprise has lacked moral validity since its conception and, therefore, must be undermined. Further, post-Zionists also question the moral bases of their religion.

Post-Zionists seek to prove the lack of moral validity of the Zionist dream; they view the current situation in Israel as a phase in which Zionist truths about the moral purpose of Jewish nationalism have mostly collapsed without there being any sign of what will replace them. They claim to be post-modernist, meaning they subscribe to a philosophical school that views everything as relative, that seeks to deconstruct and "transcend" modern reality and values without offering any replacement. Their stated goal is the destruction of the Zionist idea on which the State of Israel is founded. Their intention is wholly negative; not to improve Zionism but to destroy it. Post-Zionist writers openly aspire not to create a new Israeli historiography free of all ideological biases, but rather seek to inject an anti-Israel bias into them. On occasion, they admit that their works are "guided by a post-Zionist ideology and perception." In other words, they are simply replacing one ideological bias—a positive one focused on construction—with another, negative one, focused on destruction.

Post-Zionists consist primarily of left-wing Israeli intellectuals. This way of thinking was first introduced into Israeli life through the works of Israeli academics, particularly historians and sociologists. "New historians" and "new sociologists," as these individuals described

themselves, challenged mainstream Zionist historiography as ideologically biased in employing research to prove the moral validity of the Zionist claims.

Theodor Herzl, Der Judenstaat (1896)

I consider the Jewish question neither a social nor a religious one, even though it sometimes takes these and other forms. It is a national question, and to solve it we must first of all establish it as an international political problem to be discussed and settled by the civilized nations of the world... We are a people – one people

- ❖ What is the Jewish question that Herzl is talking about?
- ❖ Can the Jewish question be divorced from religious or social considerations?
- ❖ What is the nature of Jewish peoplehood?

Max Nordau, Zionism: Its History and its Aims (1905)

Messianism and Zionism were actually identical concepts for almost 2000 years, and it would be difficult, without subtlety and sophistry, to separate the prayers in the Jewish liturgy for the appearance of the promised Messiah from those for the not less promised return to the historic home. These prayers were meant literally by all Jews until a few generations ago, just as they are meant to-day by plain believing Jews. Jews had no other thought but that they were a people which had lost its hereditary land as a punishment for its own sin, condemned to live as strangers in foreign countries, and whose grievous sufferings, will cease only when the Nation will again be gathered together on the sanctified soil of the Holy Land.

- ❖ Is Zionism a messianic movement?
- ❖ Is there a Zionist utopia (ideal world) or several and what might it look like?
- ❖ Should religion be confined to Zionist history?

Jerusalem Programme 2004, World Zionist Organisation

(The last programme in 1968 is underlined, and forms the current basis of FZY's ideology)

Zionism, the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, brought about the establishment of the State of Israel, and views a Jewish, Zionist, democratic and secure State of Israel to be the expression of the common responsibility of the Jewish people for its continuity and future.

The foundations of Zionism are:

1. The unity of the Jewish people, its bond to its historic homeland Eretz Yisrael, and the centrality of the State of Israel and Jerusalem, its capital, in the life of the nation.

2. Aliyah to Israel from all countries and the effective integration of all immigrants into Israeli Society.
3. Strengthening Israel as a Jewish, Zionist and democratic state and shaping it as an exemplary society with a unique moral and spiritual character, marked by mutual respect for the multi-faceted Jewish people, rooted in the vision of the prophets, striving for peace and contributing to the betterment of the world.
4. Ensuring the future and the distinctiveness of the Jewish people by furthering Jewish, Hebrew and Zionist education, fostering spiritual and cultural values and teaching Hebrew as the national language.
5. Nurturing mutual Jewish responsibility, defending the rights of Jews as individuals and as a nation, representing the national Zionist interests of the Jewish people, and struggling against all manifestations of anti-Semitism;
6. Settling the country as an expression of practical Zionism.

Note: FZY's ideology is based on the Jerusalem Programme of 1968, not 2004.

- ❖ FZY's ideology is paraphrased as the Four Aims; are all four present in this updated description of Zionism?
- ❖ What additional aims could be taken from this definition of Zionism?
- ❖ Do you agree with all of the 2004 aims of Zionism?
- ❖ Should FZY update its aims in line with the new aims of Zionism?

I am a Zionist – Yair Lapid

- ❖ Editor's Note: Yair Lapid writes for Yediot Acharanot, and hosts Channel 2 News on Friday night; he is regarded as centre-left and part of the Reform movement in Israel

I am a Zionist. I believe that the Jewish people established itself in the Land of Israel, albeit somewhat late. Had it listened to the alarm clock, there would have been no Holocaust, and my dead grandfather – the one I was named after – would have been able to dance a last waltz with grandma on the shores of the Yarkon River.

I am a Zionist. Hebrew is the language I use to thank the Creator, and also to swear on the road. The Bible does not only contain my history, but also my geography. King Saul went to look for mules on what is today Highway 443, Jonah the Prophet boarded his ship not too far from what is today a Jaffa restaurant, and the balcony where David peeped on Bathsheba must have been bought by some oligarch by now.

I am a Zionist. The first time I saw my son wearing an IDF uniform I burst into tears, I haven't missed the Independence Day torch-lighting ceremony for 20 years now, and my television was made in Korea, but I taught it to cheer for our national soccer team.

I am a Zionist. I believe in our right for this land. The people who were persecuted for no reason throughout history have a right to a state of their own plus a free F-16 from the manufacturer. Every display of anti-Semitism from London to Mumbai hurts me, yet deep inside I'm thinking that Jews who choose to live abroad fail to understand something very basic about this world. The State of Israel was not established so that the anti-Semites will disappear, but rather, so we can tell them to get lost.

I am a Zionist. I was fired at in Lebanon, a Katyusha rockets missed me by a few feet in Kiryat Shmona, missiles landed near my home during the first Gulf War, I was in Sderot when the Color Red anti-rocket alert system was activated, terrorists blew themselves up not too far from my parents' house, and my children stayed in a bomb shelter before they even knew how to pronounce their own name, clinging to a grandmother who arrived here from Poland to escape death. Yet nonetheless, I always felt fortunate to be living here, and I don't really feel good anywhere else.

I am a Zionist. I think that anyone who lives here should serve in the army, pay taxes, vote in the elections, and be familiar with the lyrics of at least one Shalom Hanoach song. I think that the State of Israel is not only a place, it is also an idea, and I wholeheartedly believe in the three extra commandments engraved on the wall of the Holocaust museum in Washington: "Thou shalt not be a victim, thou shalt not be a perpetrator, but above all, thou shalt not be a bystander."

I am a Zionist. I already laid down on my back to admire the Sistine Chapel, I bought a postcard at the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, and I was deeply impressed by the emerald Buddha at the king's palace in Bangkok. Yet I still believe that Tel Aviv is more entertaining, the Red Sea is greener, and the Western Wall Tunnels provide for a much more powerful spiritual experience. It is true that I'm not objective, but I'm also not objective in respect to my wife and children.

I am a Zionist. I am a man of tomorrow but I also live my past. My dynasty includes Moses, Jesus, Maimonides, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Albert Einstein, Woody Allen, Bobby Fischer, Bob Dylan, Franz Kafka, Herzl, and Ben-Gurion. I am part of a tiny persecuted minority that influenced the world more than any other nation. While others invested their energies in war, we had the sense to invest in our minds.

I am a Zionist. I sometimes look around me and become filled with pride, because I live better than a billion Indians, 1.3 billion Chinese, the entire African continent, more than 250 million Indonesians, and also better than the Thais, the Filipinos, the Russians, the Ukrainians, and the entire Muslim world, with the exception of the Sultan of Brunei. I live in a country under siege that has no natural resources, yet nonetheless the traffic lights always work and we have high-speed connection to the Internet.

I am a Zionist. My Zionism is natural, just like it is natural for me to be a father, a husband, and a son. People who claim that they, and only they, represent the "real Zionism" are ridiculous in my view. My Zionism is not measured by the size of my kippa, by the neighborhood where I live, or by the party I will be voting for. It was born a long time before me, on a snowy street in the ghetto in Budapest where my father stood and attempted, in vain, to understand why the entire world is trying to kill him.

I am a Zionist. Every time an innocent victim dies, I bow my head because once upon a time I was an innocent victim. I have no desire or intention to adopt the moral standards of my enemies. I do not want to be like them. I do not live on my sword; I merely keep it under my pillow.

I am a Zionist. I do not only hold on to the rights of our forefathers, but also to the duty of the sons. The people who established this state lived and worked under much worse conditions than I have to face, yet nonetheless they did not make do with mere survival. They also attempted to establish a better, wiser, more humane, and more moral state here. They were willing to die for this cause, and I try to live for its sake.

ATTACKING APARTHEID – RICHARD J. GOLDSTONE, October 31, 2011

- ❖ Editor's Note: Richard Goldstone is a highly distinguished international judge, who was asked by the UN to author a report on Operation Cast Lead. After a highly critical initial report, Goldstone retracted certain elements of it in the previous year.

The Palestinian Authority's request for full United Nations membership has put hope for any two-state solution under increasing pressure. The need for reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians has never been greater. So it is important to separate legitimate criticism of Israel from assaults that aim to isolate, demonize and delegitimize it.

One particularly pernicious and enduring canard that is surfacing again is that Israel pursues "apartheid" policies. In Cape Town starting on Saturday, a London-based nongovernmental organization called the Russell Tribunal on Palestine will hold a "hearing" on whether Israel is guilty of the crime of apartheid. It is not a "tribunal." The "evidence" is going to be one-sided and the members of the "jury" are critics whose harsh views of Israel are well known.

While "apartheid" can have broader meaning, its use is meant to evoke the situation in pre-1994 South Africa. It is an unfair and inaccurate slander against Israel, calculated to retard rather than advance peace negotiations.

I know all too well the cruelty of South Africa's abhorrent apartheid system, under which human beings characterized as black had no rights to vote, hold political office, use "white" toilets or beaches, marry whites, live in whites-only areas or even be there without a "pass." Blacks critically injured in car accidents were left to bleed to death if there was no "black" ambulance to rush them to a "black" hospital. "White" hospitals were prohibited from saving their lives.

In assessing the accusation that Israel pursues apartheid policies, which are by definition primarily about race or ethnicity, it is important first to distinguish between the situations in Israel, where Arabs are citizens, and in West Bank areas that remain under Israeli control in the absence of a peace agreement.

In Israel, there is no apartheid. Nothing there comes close to the definition of apartheid under the 1998 Rome Statute: "Inhumane acts ... committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime." Israeli Arabs — 20 percent of Israel's population — vote, have political parties and representatives in the Knesset and occupy positions of acclaim, including on its Supreme Court. Arab patients lie alongside Jewish patients in Israeli hospitals, receiving identical treatment.

To be sure, there is more de facto separation between Jewish and Arab populations than Israelis should accept. Much of it is chosen by the communities themselves. Some results from discrimination. But it is not apartheid, which consciously enshrines separation as an

ideal. In Israel, equal rights are the law, the aspiration and the ideal; inequities are often successfully challenged in court.

The situation in the West Bank is more complex. But here too there is no intent to maintain “an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group.” This is a critical distinction, even if Israel acts oppressively toward Palestinians there. South Africa’s enforced racial separation was intended to permanently benefit the white minority, to the detriment of other races. By contrast, Israel has agreed in concept to the existence of a Palestinian state in Gaza and almost all of the West Bank, and is calling for the Palestinians to negotiate the parameters.

But until there is a two-state peace, or at least as long as Israel’s citizens remain under threat of attacks from the West Bank and Gaza, Israel will see roadblocks and similar measures as necessary for self-defense, even as Palestinians feel oppressed. As things stand, attacks from one side are met by counterattacks from the other. And the deep disputes, claims and counterclaims are only hardened when the offensive analogy of “apartheid” is invoked.

Those seeking to promote the myth of Israeli apartheid often point to clashes between heavily armed Israeli soldiers and stone-throwing Palestinians in the West Bank, or the building of what they call an “apartheid wall” and disparate treatment on West Bank roads. While such images may appear to invite a superficial comparison, it is disingenuous to use them to distort the reality. The security barrier was built to stop unrelenting terrorist attacks; while it has inflicted great hardship in places, the Israeli Supreme Court has ordered the state in many cases to reroute it to minimize unreasonable hardship. Road restrictions get more intrusive after violent attacks and are ameliorated when the threat is reduced.

Of course, the Palestinian people have national aspirations and human rights that all must respect. But those who conflate the situations in Israel and the West Bank and liken both to the old South Africa do a disservice to all who hope for justice and peace.

Jewish-Arab relations in Israel and the West Bank cannot be simplified to a narrative of Jewish discrimination. There is hostility and suspicion on both sides. Israel, unique among democracies, has been in a state of war with many of its neighbors who refuse to accept its existence. Even some Israeli Arabs, because they are citizens of Israel, have at times come under suspicion from other Arabs as a result of that longstanding enmity.

The mutual recognition and protection of the human dignity of all people is indispensable to bringing an end to hatred and anger. The charge that Israel is an apartheid state is a false and malicious one that precludes, rather than promotes, peace and harmony.

Richard J. Goldstone, a former justice of the South African Constitutional Court, led the United Nations fact-finding mission on the Gaza conflict of 2008-9.

Israel's Right to Exist

Adapted from: "Occupation and Settlement: The Myth and the Reality," by David Meir-Levi (June 5, 2005), and "Why Israel Is the Victim and the Arabs Are the Indefensible Aggressors in the Middle East," by David Horowitz (January 9, 2002). – Both are centre-right commentators

The State of Israel was created in a peaceful and legal process by the United Nations.

It was not created out of Palestinian lands, but rather out of the Ottoman Empire, which had been ruled for 400 years by the Turks who lost it when they, fighting alongside Germany, were defeated in World War I. There were no "Palestinian" lands at the time because there were no people claiming to be Palestinians, but rather simply Arabs who lived in the region of Palestine.

It was only after World War I that the present states of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq were also created – also out of the Turkish Empire by the British and French victors. Jordan was created on about 80 percent of the Palestine Mandate, which was originally designated by the League of Nations as part of the Jewish homeland. Since then, Jews have been prohibited from owning property there.

In 1947, a UN partition plan mandated the creation of two states on the remaining 20 percent of the Palestine Mandate: the State of Israel for the Jews, and another state for the stateless Arabs. But the rulers of eight Arab states did not want a non-Arab state anywhere in the Middle East. Thus they rejected the UN arrangement and simultaneously launched a three-front war of annihilation against the newly created state of Israel – on the very day of its creation in 1948. Israel begged for peace and offered friendship and cooperation to its neighbors. The Arab dictators rejected this offer and answered it with a war, which they ultimately lost.

A state of war in the Middle East has continued uninterrupted ever since, because most of the Arab states have refused to sign a peace treaty with Israel, and have refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Jewish state. To this day, the Arab states and the Palestinians refer to the failure of their effort to destroy Israel as *Al-Nakba* -- The Catastrophe. What for one people was a joyous founding, was seen by the other as a disaster.

Had there been no invasion of Israel by Arab armies whose intent was overtly genocidal, there would have been a state of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza since 1948.

From 1949 to 1956, Egypt waged war against Israel, launching more than 9,000 attacks from terrorist cells set up in the refugee camps of the Gaza Strip. The 1956 "Sinai campaign" ended Egypt's terror war, even though U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower forced Israeli Prime Minister Ben Gurion to return the Sinai to Egypt without a peace treaty.

But the Arab war continued on other fronts. In 1964, Yasser Arafat began a campaign of

terror whose avowed goal was the destruction of Israel and the genocide of its Jews. Sponsored first by Kuwait, and later by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran, Arafat declared unending war against Israel until all of "Palestine" would be liberated, redeemed in "fire and blood."

In 1967, Egypt, Syria and Jordan attacked Israel for a second time and were again defeated. It was in repelling these aggressors that Israel came to control the West Bank and the Gaza strip, as well as the oil-rich Sinai desert. Israel elected not to annex these territories it had captured from the aggressors, but neither did it withdraw its armies or relinquish its control over the region because the Arabs once again refused to make peace.

In 1973 the Arab armies again attacked Israel. This invasion was led by Syria and Egypt, abetted by Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and five other countries that gave military support to the aggressors. Israel again defeated the Arab forces. Afterwards, Egypt -- and Egypt alone -- agreed to make a formal peace.

In 1987 the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) initiated a violent, six-year Intifada (uprising) directed against Israeli soldiers and civilians alike, after false rumors of Israeli atrocities had circulated through Palestinian territories. During the first four years of the uprising, Palestinians carried out more than 3,600 Molotov cocktail attacks, 100 hand grenade attacks, and 600 assaults with guns or explosives. These actions resulted in the deaths of 16 Israeli civilians and 11 Israeli soldiers, in addition to the wounding of more than 1,400 Israeli civilians and 1,700 Israeli soldiers.

In 1993 the Oslo peace process was initiated, based on the pledge that both parties would renounce violence as a means of settling their disputes. But the Palestinians never followed through on this pledge. During the so-called "peace process" -- between 1993 and 1999 -- they perpetrated more than 4,000 terrorist attacks that resulted in the deaths of more than 1,000 Israelis. During this same period, Israel gave the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza a self-governing authority, a 40,000-man armed "police force," and 95 percent of the territory their negotiators demanded. But Israel's efforts to achieve peace were in vain. In 2000, the Palestinians officially launched a new, second Intifada against Israel, effectively terminating the peace process.

Society & Service - from Charedi to secular and the IDF service.

Service in the Israel Defense Forces is a measure of involvement in the country's life. Most men and single women are inducted into the IDF at age 18, women for two years and men for three, followed by service in the reserves, men up to age 51 and single women until they have their first child

Out of respect for their community's religious commitments, Orthodox women may be exempted, although many choose to perform 12 month's national service in the civilian sector. Most ultra-Orthodox men are granted deferments while pursuing Torah studies, and those who serve in the IDF mainly fulfil religious functions.

In March 2007, a report issued by a ministerial committee on military service found that 43 percent of female draft candidates receive exemptions. Of these, 76 percent opt out of service for religious reasons, 7 percent are overseas, 8 percent have criminal records and 2 percent are married. Only 24 percent of men who are eligible are not drafted.

In essence, the society and army are one, as a broad spectrum of the population serves periodically over many years, with those in and out of uniform virtually interchangeable. Since soldiers often hold ranks not necessarily corresponding with their status in civilian life, the IDF has become a highly effective equalizer in the society and contributes greatly to integrating individuals from all walks of life. The IDF also helps new immigrants during their period of military service to acclimate to Israeli life in a framework wherein each person is undergoing the same process.

Over the years, the IDF has assumed a variety of national-social functions for the society at large; providing special services for new immigrants; upgrading educational levels of adults who were denied basic education in their countries of origin; supplying teachers to development towns; assisting in disadvantaged areas and responding to emergency situations in the civilian sector.

Religion and State

The predominance of halakah and religious courts in adjudicating matters of personal status--and for that matter, the privileged position of the Orthodox minority in Israeli society--date back to arrangements worked out between the Orthodox and Labor Zionists on the eve of statehood. In June 1947, the executive committee of Agudat Israel received a letter from Ben-Gurion, then chairman of the executive committee of the Jewish Agency, who was the predominant political leader of the Yishuv. Ben-Gurion, wishing to have the support of all sectors of the Yishuv in the dire struggle he knew was soon to come, asked Agudat Israel to join the coalition that would constitute the first government of the State of Israel. In return for Agudat Israel's support, Ben-Gurion offered a set of guarantees relating to traditional Judaism's place in the new society. These guarantees formalized the customary arrangements that had developed in Ottoman times and continued through the British Mandate; hence they came to be known as agreements for the "preservation of the status quo."

The core of the status quo agreements focused on the following areas: the Jewish Shabbat, Saturday, would be the official day of rest for all Jews; public transportation would not operate nationwide on Shabbat and religious holidays, although localities would remain free to run local transportation systems; *kashrut* would be maintained in all public institutions; the existing religious school system would remain separate from the secular one but would receive funding from the state; and rabbinical courts applying halakah would decide matters of personal status. Both Agudat Israel and the Zionist Orthodox party, Mizrahi (later the National Religious Party), accepted the agreements and joined the first elected government of Israel in 1949.

Ben-Gurion's concern that a more-or-less united Israel confront its enemies was answered by the status quo arrangement. But this arrangement--particularly the educational and judicial aspects--also set the stage for conflict between Orthodox and secular Jewish Israelis. This conflict became quickly apparent in the wake of the first flood of Jewish immigration to the new state and as a direct result of one of the first laws passed by the new Knesset, the Law of Return.