

For the “Soul of Israel”: Zionism is Not Enough

By Rav Shaul Feldman

While serving as an IDF paratrooper 20 years ago, I was involved in a mission to uncover caches of hidden munitions that were being used to target Jews traveling to and from Gush Etzion. As the mission intensified, our battalion was stationed in the Arab village of “D’heisha” near Beit Lechem, conducting thorough house-to-house searches.

Over the course of our systematic raids, we encountered several elderly Arabs who claimed that they were unable to move. Following protocol, we forcibly removed them from their beds to ensure that it was not a ploy and that they were not hiding ammunition under their mattresses. Many times, this tactic proved essential, as we uncovered rather large stockpiles of weapons.

Make no mistake, it was an incredibly uncomfortable mission. We gained no pleasure in making a mess of people’s clean houses or forcing elderly people to stand. Yet, we understood the magnitude of our mission. We knew that we were acting on behalf of the State of Israel to protect its citizens, our fellow Jews.

At one point during the mission, we forcibly removed an elderly Arab from his bed but found nothing beneath his mattress. A soldier in my unit broke down on the spot, throwing his gun to the ground and ranting about the ethics of the activities in which we were engaged. He explained that he was not willing to serve in the army if he would be required to carry out this kind of mission.

This long-forgotten memory came to mind a couple of months ago when a group of soldiers from Unit 8200, one of the IDF’s most elite intelligence units, drafted a letter to their commanding officers stating their position on the Israeli Air Force missions over Gaza: they refused to be involved in the airstrikes because they believed that the tactic was immoral and unethical.

Both of these stories illustrate the dangers of promoting Zionism without Torah. Without Torah knowledge and a deep understanding of our culture, history and traditions, Zionist ideology is inherently flawed – it is a skeleton without a backbone. So, when soldiers who are raised on a Zionism devoid of Torah values face an ideological challenge, they are simply at a loss.

The bottom line is that Religion and Zionism are innately intertwined and cannot be separated. As such, it is essential that we educate our children and arm our military with a strong Jewish identity and deep connection to Torah values so that they will

never question the historical, cultural or national importance and significance of the Jewish State, nor our right to protect our people in our land.

Voting for the Religious Zionist Slate (www.VoteTorah.org) in the current World Zionist Congress elections presents us with a unique opportunity to safeguard Torah values and ensure that religious Zionist ideologies are put into practice in Israel and around the world.

It's really quite simple. Before we can concentrate on educating the world about the global importance of the State of Israel, we need to make sure that our own children connect with their birthright on a personal level and understand and believe in the necessity to keep our Homeland safe, secure and undivided.

We need to all "Vote Torah" and constantly keep Israel's Jewish soul in mind.

Rabbi Shaul Feldman is the Director of Bnei Akiva of the U.S. and Canada. Previously, he held teaching positions at Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, Yeshiva University and Torah Mi'Zion Kollel, and spent four years as a Bnei Akiva shaliach. Rabbi Feldman is also the Campaign Chair of the Religious Zionist Slate (www.VoteTorah.org), a party running in the World Zionist Congress elections.