



ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית  
World Zionist Organization

המחלקה לפעילות בתפוצות  
Department for Diaspora Activities

# Beit Ha'am

Z-Talks

**בית העם**

שיג ושיח ציוני

**IDF – The People's Army**  
Supplemental Booklet:  
Operation Protective Edge



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Operation Protective Edge was launched in order to protect the citizens of the State of Israel, whose lives have been disrupted due to the rocket fire from the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip. The rockets are being targeted at innocent civilians, and most areas in the country are exposed to these incessant attacks.

This supplement seeks to raise issues for discussion that stem from the continued reality faced by Israeli cities and towns which have become a frontline, compelling the State of Israel, time and time again, to take steps to protect its citizens. And like any war, including those that are just, it poses moral questions of justice, transparency and democracy – difficult dilemmas and pain arising from the Zionist vision and our presence in this land.

The heavy price that Israeli society pays in these wars is shared by “lone soldiers” who come to Israel from abroad, volunteer to serve in the IDF, and connect, in the most tangible fashion possible, Diaspora Jewry to Israel. These soldiers fine-tune our mutual responsibility and common destiny, issues that in times of peace also need to be addressed.

We chose to highlight some of the key themes that arise in times of war and bring them to the attention of each and every one of you, regardless of your previous knowledge. We invite you, as in other Beit Ha'am modules, to discuss these issues, reflect on them, and challenge basic premises connected to the significance of political independence and the right of the Jewish people to this piece of Promised Land, as envisioned by Herzl, and to the relationships that exist between Israel and Diaspora Jewry.

**Gusti Yehoshua Braverman**

# When the Cannons are Heard, the Muses are Silent. Really? Transparency and Democracy

In the midst of Operation Protective Edge, the columnist, Gideon Levy, published an article in the Haaretz daily newspaper, entitled: “Lowest Deeds from Loftiest Heights.” The article sparked an important and critical public discourse dealing with the morality of the Israeli Air Force strikes in populated areas in the Gaza Strip. Combat pilots were interviewed on TV, articles were written that either condemned or praised Levy’s premise and, as could be expected, the social media found themselves in a state of turmoil.



## “Lowest Deeds from Loftiest Heights” – excerpts from the article written by Gideon Levy, a senior columnist with Haaretz – July 14, 2014

*“They are the most articulate, polished, brilliant and educated of soldiers. They study at the best universities during the course of their military service, and come from the best homes and the most highly regarded high schools. For years they are trained for their job, in electronics and avionics, strategy and tactics, and of course, flying. They are the very finest of Israeli youth, destined for greatness. They really are the very best, ‘bro’ – the best among us become pilots, the best pilots, and they are now perpetrating the worst, the cruelest, and the most despicable deeds...they sit in the cockpit and press buttons and joysticks. A war game. They decide life and death; from their lofty place in the sky they only see black dots scurrying around in panic, running for their lives, but also those who are waving their hands in terrible fear from the rooftops. The black arrow closes in on the target, and straight away a mushroom of black smoke rises – poof, a slight tremor in the wing, a “good” hit, and they’re off for the next sortie.”*





A video clip of a radio conversation between Israeli Air Force pilots, deciding to abort an airstrike in Gaza after spotting innocent people near the target



<http://youtu.be/PuL-OA84p54?list=PLObnKQho8o8PNUxfldeGNOsDFdazchJH8>



In an article published in the politics supplement of *Yedioth Ahronoth* Newspaper on July 18th, 2014 – Lieutenant Colonel (Res.) Tal Keinan responded to what Gideon Levy wrote

*"It's an insult. We live in a democratic country and I'm in favor of everyone expressing his opinion. But reporting for reserve duty means leaving our place of work, and logging the effect of these bombings on our souls for a lifetime, and all this so Gideon Levy, or someone else, can write whatever he feels like and offend us and the citizens of the country in time of war. Not to mention that what he writes is inaccurate. I out and out reject everything he says."*

And Tami Arad (wife of the captured air force navigator Ron Arad, who has been missing in action since 1988), adds the following in her own column:

*"Someone has to do the dirty work so that "knights of the keyboard" can enjoy freedom of speech..."*



- Relying on the above excerpts, what can we learn about the discourse currently taking place in Israel? Based on what you know, is it different than the public discourse in other democratic countries? If it is, in what way?
- Is there room for such a discourse during a war?
- And in your community?
- When addressing the Israelites before conquering the Land of Israel, Moses says: “Is there any man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him return to his home lest he make the heart of his comrades melt like his own.” (Deuteronomy 20:8)

According to one interpretation, it's a crime to dishearten soldiers during a war; and according to another, it's better that a fearful person not be on the battlefield so he won't compromise the morale of his fellow soldiers.

- In your view, by writing the article, has Gideon Levy violated the dictate that appears in the Book of Deuteronomy?
- Transparency and democracy – is it right to impose restrictions on the freedom of information and freedom of speech in wartime?
- What did the American army do in Iraq / Afghanistan? And Putin in Chechnya? What price does the State of Israel pay for conducting itself transparently and democratically?
- At a demonstration organized by Israeli Arabs against Operation Protective Edge, attended by MK Hanin Zoabi, the demonstrators yelled out: “Hey Qassam, hey beloved, attack Tel Aviv.” In your opinion, should a member of parliament be expected to declare loyalty to the country he or she serves? Can you provide us with an example you're familiar with, where an official public figure, in your view, overstepped the legitimate boundaries of the discourse?



## Diaspora Jewry's Commitment to the State of Israel

13 Golani soldiers were killed on the first days of the Operation Protective Edge ground incursion in Gaza. Among them were two 'lone soldiers' - **Sean Carmeli z"l** from Texas (aged 21 at the time of death, he was killed in an incident involving an armored personnel carrier; Sean is survived by his parents and two sisters) and **Max Steinberg z"l** from Los Angeles (aged 24 at the time of his death, Max was also killed in the same armored personnel carrier incident in Suja'iyya; he is survived by his parents, two brothers and two sisters.)

Two days later, staff sergeant **Jordan Bensemhoun z"l**, a lone soldier from France, was killed in battle as well (aged 22 at the time of his death, Jordan was killed in a clash with terrorists; he is survived by his parents and two sisters). All three of them volunteered to serve in the IDF.

Many lone soldiers are volunteers who come to Israel from abroad to serve in the army, and whose parents remain overseas.

**Tens of thousands of Israelis attended the funerals of the three soldiers, in what was a powerful and moving expression of the Jewish people's solidarity!**

- Are you acquainted with any young people your age who moved to Israel and volunteered to serve in the IDF? What do you think about their decision? Are there other ways that young Jews in the Diaspora can express their support for the State of Israel in times like these?
- In your view, are Jews in the Diaspora committed to the State of Israel during a war? In general?
- Does the State of Israel's expectation that you visibly stand at its side in wartime, and in normal times, pose a dilemma from your perspective?
- Do you believe you will pay a price for doing that? What does it say about your loyalty to your own country and to the State of Israel?
- Do you feel that differences exist between the opinions held by your generation regarding the above issues and those of your parents and grandparents?





Sean's friends, themselves lone soldiers, recount: "It's not easy to come on your own to a foreign country, but we did it so we could join the army. Sean was the most "b'rabak" - with the most morale. He only talked about Golani, and that's where he wanted to be. He always said that he would go into Gaza in order to protect us. A friend who spoke to Sean asked him whether he was scared to go into Gaza. His response to her was 'No way!' A Golani soldier isn't afraid."



Sean Carmeli z"l



Max Steinberg z"l



Jordan Bensemhour z"l



# Peace, Justice and Everything in Between

**Medabrim Al Shalom –  
Talking About Peace**  
Lyrics: MUKI



To listen to the song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMtYkdEZ-r0>

Everyone talks about peace  
No one talks about justice  
What is one man's heaven, is another man's hell  
How many fingers are on the trigger? (x2)

How long will the storm rage?  
How long can a person live like a dog?  
The face slides on the razor's edge, fingers caress the sword  
Sometimes life brings me to my knees  
No one's guarding the gates, there are no signs from above  
I see people living out dreams and hopes  
I see people living out nothing but tricks and schemes  
Some people ask questions that have no answers  
Others are just full of nothing but complaints and demands,  
but...

Everyone talks about peace...

So we remain alone, talking to the wall,  
there's no one to talk to  
If we'd realize that we're all one,  
we'd see how it's all connected  
When your property burns, your soul will burn  
If you don't rush to save yourself  
We murdered the land and murdered the soul  
There's almost no air left for us to breathe  
And the world is in constant motion  
It spins and goes back to the same spot  
What goes up, must come down  
How can we take things in moderation?

Everyone talks about peace...

And there are people that take ownership over God  
And there are those who struggle, kick and scratch  
How many of us are really listening?  
Everyone talks about peace

Everyone talks about peace...

Everyone has the same dream,  
On a mountain, in a valley  
We keep on talking, talking about peace –  
But peace isn't possible without justice

- Have you ever experienced a situation where you had to choose between peace and justice? Please share your experience with us.
- Which line and/or image in the song can you relate to? Why? How does it have a connection to your life/surroundings/in general?
- The song Talking About Peace was released in 2001. In your opinion, is it still relevant? How? In what way?
- Do you think that the song will continue to be relevant in another 10-20 years?
- Is the song particularly Israeli, or can it refer to other places in the world as well?
- Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has repeatedly said: "There is no war more just than this one!" Is there such a thing as a just war? What makes it just?







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