

## 'LOSING THE NORTH'

## Concern over Zionist leadership's tilt to the left

TED  
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A HIGH-RANKING IDF officer appears at an official Yom Hashoah function and declares that the spirit of Nazism is alive and well within Israel. "Nauseating processes that occurred in Europe 70, 80 and 90 years ago are here in our midst," so he proclaims.

No, this isn't a scene from an anti-Zionist screenplay by Ken Loach or Harold Pinter. It's a factual event that transpired in May 2016 at the Massuah Institute for Holocaust Studies.

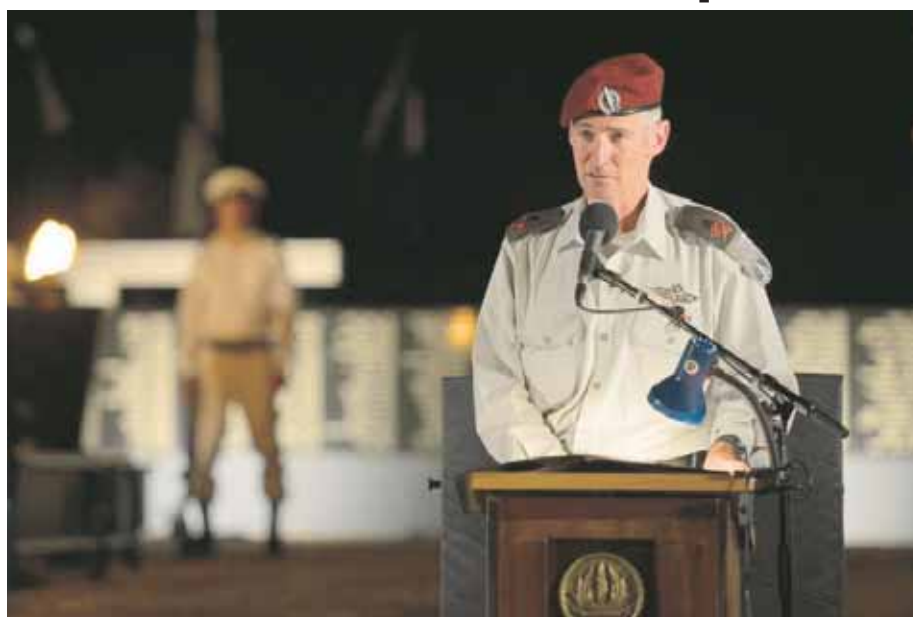
The officer in question was Major General Yair Golan, at the time the IDF's deputy chief of staff. And while speaking those incendiary words, the maroon beret of an Israeli paratrooper was perched atop his head and silver jump wings glistened on his chest.

The historical illiteracy that pervades these comments renders them all the more morally grotesque. In one fell swoop, Yair Golan managed to trivialise the Shoah and malign the nation whose uniform he wore.

The Yair Golan episode is simply one of several examples that illustrate the leftward bent adopted by the ZFA in recent years.

The gold standard on what qualifies as Jew-hatred comes from the working definition of antisemitism promulgated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). And the IHRA includes "comparisons between contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis" in its definition of antisemitism.

Thus, the most charitable observation one can make is that Yair Golan exercised extremely poor judgement at that Yom



Yair Golan addressing the Yom Hashoah ceremony in May 2016.

Photo: Gefen Reznik/IDF Spokesperson

Hashoah event. This self-inflicted act of folly generated serious questions in the eyes of the Israeli people about the quality of his character.

As the utterly predictable inferno of public outrage erupted over his comments, Golan went into damage-control mode. But his statements of 'clarification' were too little and too late to salvage his tarnished military career and blighted credibility.

All of which makes me wonder why the Zionist Federation of Australia (ZFA), deemed Yair Golan a fit and proper person to deliver one of its online Lockdown Learning lecture sessions. To those who cite Golan's record of military service in his defence, I say this: now he is just another parliamentarian who operates within the political arena. The senior rank he once held confers no immunity against criticism.

The ZFA's choice of Golan as a speaker is all the more curious in view of the fringe status of the only political party that would have him. Meretz is the farthest left one can go on the Israeli political spectrum while still claiming to be Zionist.

Meretz reached its political apotheosis during the salad days of the Oslo Accords before the voting Israeli public was mugged by the bloody reality of the Second Intifada.

As it became obvious that most Palestinians reject Jewish national self-determination in any form, support for Israel's 'Peace Camp' haemorrhaged. With a mere three seats in the current Knesset, Meretz has atrophied into a rump leftist party of perpetual opposition.

But while its political power waned, the totalitarian instincts of Meretz activists waxed. Case in point, the party's attitude towards Yoav Eliasi, a Tel Aviv-based rapper who performs under the stage name "The Shadow".

In addition to his musical endeavours, Eliasi is a conservative political firebrand known for provocative social media posts that lambaste the Israeli left. Needless to say, the apparatchiks of Meretz despise him.

So in 2015, an official Meretz car adorned with the party logo parked a portable toilet outside the entrance to the house where Eliasi lives with his elderly

parents. The rapper's 70-something-year-old mother was terrified by this blatant act of thuggish agitprop.

The ZFA, of course, is free to do what it likes. But to my mind, Yair Golan's track record of political intemperance, combined with the marginality of the party he represents, make him a dubious choice to teach anyone anything of any value.

Yet the Yair Golan episode is simply one of several examples that illustrate the leftward bent adopted by the ZFA over recent years.

When the Morrison government declared Australian recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the ZFA seemed relieved that "this announcement in no way prejudices the prospect of Australia recognising a Palestinian state".

The decision to include a declaration of support for Palestinian statehood in a press release celebrating the long-overdue acceptance of Jerusalem as Israel's capital is bizarre, to say the least. Unless, of course, your worldview is that of a left-wing partisan.

Then there's the ZFA's first-time endorsement of the 25th annual Pride March in St Kilda this past February. This exhibition of progressive virtue-signalling has zero relevance to the federation's self-declared mission of "supporting a meaningful relationship between the Australian Jewish community and the State of Israel".

Even worse, the ZFA's participation in the 2020 Pride March constituted a calculated insult to those Orthodox elements of our community that espouse a Tanach-oriented view of sexuality and family. The "roof body" of Australian Zionism is leaking political correctness.

The IDF slang term for going astray during a land navigation exercise is "losing the north". And, under its current leadership, the ZFA has lost the north completely.

Ted Lapkin is the executive director of the Australian Jewish Association.

## IMPACT OF COVID-19

## Missing my weekly trip to synagogue ... any synagogue

SOCIAL isolation has been and continues to be difficult for everyone. But we all persist because we know that it is an attempt to save lives or at least to slow the spread of disease and virus transfer. And what could be more important or even more Jewish than that?

Yet, there have been some unintended consequences. Among the closures, as we all know, have been synagogues and other religious institutions. And while this has been the right decision, for me it has been difficult to live with.

I am certainly not the most religious person. In many ways, I don't even like to define myself in such terms. There are, however, two distinct Jewish things that I do in a regular week. One is that I am particular about what I eat from a kashrut perspective, and the other is that I go to shule every Shabbat morning.

Sometimes those are the only Jewish things I do all week. But both of them give me solace, routine and comfort.

Shule-going in particular has become so important and ubiquitous that despite the fact that I have travelled to nearly 40 countries, I have only missed shule on a Shabbat morning on four occasions in 27 years, and in locations that had no shules. Most times I have re-routed travel plans to



ensure that I was in a place that had a shule or a minyan at least, so that I could go on Shabbat morning. And by shule, I mean any Jewish institution.

I have been to a wide variety of shules, including some where God is barely mentioned, and others that might hardly qualify as shules in the traditional sense, particularly newfangled congregations in New York or elsewhere. But all of them fulfil a Jewish need or desire for a particular community, and have been interesting to observe.

As a result, I think I have been to every shule of every persuasion in Melbourne. But I also don't have a regular shule. I subscribe to nearly two dozen synagogue e-newsletters, and often decide on Shabbat morning where I will go based on interesting speakers, a good kiddush, or simply on a whim. So not being able to go to shule for the last few weeks, particularly over Pesach, when I usually go to multiple shules, has been very dislocating, isolating, confronting and bizarre. This was the first

time in 27 years when I have been in a city with a shule and didn't go on a Shabbat morning.

For me, shule is more than just a Jewish institution. It is an opportunity to be part of a community and a tradition that I love, and a chance to meet and mingle with a variety of people, and hear interesting and sometimes confronting stories. That is why I am not bound to a particular shule or even to a particular strand of Jewish expression. Prayer is only one element. Hearing the (hopefully) melodious voice of the chazan, the various Torah readers, and the words of the rabbi or sermon-giver or the kiddush-speaker, are what make shule the experience what it is. Shule also provides the opportunity for community gathering and communal prayers. Each week, there are prayers for healing, for peace, for prosperity, for political stability at home and in Israel, and each week there are mourners who can't chant their praiseworthy hymn without at least the presence of a minyan.

None of these elements have been possible with shules being closed. I have missed the opportunity to say Kaddish on the anniversary of the passing of my late mother, but more than that, I have missed the communities of the various shules.

On Shabbat morning and on Pesach, I mouthed the words of the prayers at home, but it wasn't the same and didn't feel right. The one positive, I guess, is that I had time at home to practise my Hebrew and read more of the translations and commentaries than I normally would have. But that is hardly a consolation.

For some, staying at home might be relatively easy. For me though, the whole experience has been challenging. On a regular week, there is barely a night when I'm home, because I love going out to events all over the community and I wouldn't have it any other way. Plus, each Shabbat morning I go to shule. Now I have none of those experiences, and in my own way, it is a struggle. But I know that it is a struggle that we will overcome together.

Shules in communities across the globe in many ways are the crucibles of a vibrant and intoxicating tradition that many Jews are greatly attracted to. The popularity of current online services is one proof of that. I look forward to when they can share those offerings with us once again in person, and I look forward to the day when I can once again choose which shule I go to.

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