

EDUCATION & CULTURE

POST-OCT. 7 EDUCATION

Med school — and survival

By LARRY HANKIN
IJN Associate Editor

For most young Israelis, the post-high school years go like this: two years of compulsory military service, followed by a gap year of traveling, then off to university, trade school or the workforce.

On Oct. 7, many university students found themselves back in the military as reservists were called into service as Israel went to war for its survival against Hamas.

Shaked Ben Shushan, 27, and Eliyahu Green, 28, are pulling double duty as both IDF reservists

‘I’m a paramedic and I have a mission to make sure everyone in my battalion comes back safe’

and medical students at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. They have been traveling around the world this summer telling audiences how they are trying to manage their stressful lives as both students and soldiers in a time of war.

They recently spoke in Denver, Vail and Aspen.

They were accompanied by Americans for Ben-Gurion University CEO Doug Seserman and BGU Vice President Jeff Kaye.

Shaked Ben Shushan, born and raised in the Western Galilee in Israel’s north, is a second-year med student and paramedic with Magen David Adom, Israel’s emergency medical response. She had just returned to Israel on Oct. 5, 2023, from a two-month trip to Vietnam and Thailand, in time to celebrate Simchat Torah with her family. On Oct. 7 in the morning, she was at synagogue.

On her way home, someone stopped Shaked and said, “You don’t know what’s going on. You must go home immediately.”

At home, she turned on her cell phone and saw a lot of messages from Soroka Hospital in Beersheba, which is associated with BGU.

She got a call from her boss at

Magen David Adom, telling her to report immediately for a 24-hour shift in the South near Gaza.

“Then I got a call that changed all that from my commander in the IDF to report immediately to the base to help in the mission to protect my country.

“In innocence, I packed only five pairs of socks because I thought to myself, ‘OK, only one weekend and it’ll all be over and I’ll resume my normal life.’ Unfortunately, there is still a war in Israel, now for nine months.”

Shaked ended up reporting as

an army medic and treating the wounded at Kibbutz Erez in the northern part of the Gaza envelope, attacked by Hamas terrorists Oct. 7.

“That was the first time that I really understood that I am participating in a war,” she said.

After two weeks, Shaked’s battalion was ordered to cross the border into Gaza.

“My mother didn’t like this idea at all. I needed to convince her that I’m not just a regular soldier; I’m a paramedic and I have a mission to make sure than everyone in my battalion comes back safe. I can’t leave them without a medical team.”

With her battalion, Shaked crossed the border on foot, walking five kilometers (3.1 miles) and carrying her medical equipment weighing 24 kilograms (53 pounds).

The first night in Gaza was most fearful. The camp was completely dark so as not to be seen by Hamas.

“Another issue was that I was the only woman in my battalion. I am on a team with 20 guys. I’m sharing everything. I’m eating with them, but I don’t take a shower with them.



DOUBLE DUTY
Eliyahu Green, I, and Shaked Ben Shushan are both Ben-Gurion University medical students and IDF reservists.

I only took a shower like once a month.”

Shaked will never forget a scenario that took place on a Friday night as she and her team members were gathering in a house for Shabbat prayers and dinner.

“The Hamas terrorists spotted us and sent a rocket accurately to our location. There was a big, loud explosion. Then silence.

“I didn’t know what was going on. I just touched myself to see if I was OK. I grabbed my things and went to where I heard the soldiers screaming. One of them was unconscious with shrapnel in his back and head. Another had a chest injury, and another a head injury.”

At that moment, Shaked realized how important her job was.

“I had been working for seven years as a paramedic with Magen David Adom, but I never treated people I knew. Now, the wounded soldiers were my second family, and they are wounded. I need to make the right decisions and I need to focus. There is no time for fear.

“I applied a tourniquet to stop the bleeding and gave medication. We rescued them by walking them to the border.”

At the border, a helicopter was waiting to transport the wounded to Soroka Hospital. They are fine now, Shaked said.

One soldier in Shaked’s battalion did die, and Shaked knows quite a few other people who died in the war. An added layer of worry: her boyfriend is also serving — in Beit Hanoun in the northern edge of Gaza.

“We actually talked just once a week for one minute over a ‘kosher’ phone that doesn’t have GPS.”

Shaked was back at BGU, trying to find a balance between her two worlds — the war and studying to be a doctor because she’s back in Gaza for one month during August.

“I hope that it’s going to be over soon, and I don’t need to go back. But if I do, I will do it because I really understand that we don’t have another country; we don’t have another chance. This is our time to

protect our country.”

Shaked’s BGU classmate Eliyahu Green was born to North American parents who made *aliyah* before they met each other in Israel. He was born near Jerusalem and grew up in Raanana. He was a first lieutenant in the Duvdevan counter-terrorist unit of the IDF.

After his mandatory service, Eliyahu spent two years in his father’s native Canada and worked as a bodyguard before enrolling in BGU. After a first “great” year at BGU, Eliyahu went to Sri Lanka for a month between semesters.

“I was having fun, and then the 7th of October hit.”

bad videos, and I heard that my staff sergeant from when I was in the army got killed at the Nova Festival. An ex-girlfriend of mine and another friend were also killed there.”

Eliyahu decided he needed to get back to Israel, and he got on an evacuation flight from Dubai to Israel on Oct. 9.

When his parents picked him up at the airport, they tried to convince him not to go back into the military, but he felt compelled to.

“Because I was between units at the end of my mandatory service, I didn’t get a specific position as an officer in the reserves, so I wanted to go back to my original team as a regular soldier and help wherever

er I could.

“They were very happy to see me, and I saw a lot of fear in their eyes, and a lot of anger, boosted by the death of our staff sergeant at the Nova Festival. They wanted to go fight in Gaza.”

However, the brigade commander in the unit didn’t know Eliyahu, and told him to go home. “I said, ‘No, these are my boys. We grew up together. We fought together. We know each other.’ He said no. I said yes. No, yes, no, yes.”

After two weeks of staying there, sleeping with my team, training with my team, he understood I was not going anywhere, so he finally drafted me.”

After a few weeks of training, Eliyahu and his unit were the first platoon to be sent into Gaza, where they started going from house to house, looking for terrorists. Ultimately, they were engulfed in a harrowing night of explosions and flying debris.

After a huge explosion, three of the men in Eliyahu’s unit, including his commanding officer, fell to the ground.

“I thought my ear blew off. We all dispersed. I pictured my life without an ear. Slowly, gradually, I put my hand to my ear, and thought, ‘OK, I have an ear,’ but it was bleeding. ‘I guess it’s just a scratch.’”

The commander officer had been shot in the back, and he put Eliyahu in charge.

“I was in charge of making sure everyone’s OK,” he recalled. “I made sure everyone has their buddies, made sure everyone had water, made sure the tanks fired in the right direction.”

In all, 13 soldiers were wounded, seven of whom were put on tanks to there border, where helicopters transported them to medical care.

Once the wounded were squared away, Eliyahu’s adrenaline subsided.

“I took a knee and I had a crazy headache inside my skull. My friend saw I wasn’t OK and he pushed me to see a doctor, who was also a commander. He’s an ENT doctor at Soroka.”

The doctor saw that Eliyahu had a piece of shrapnel that went through his ear and into his skull, and sent him via tank straight to the border, where a chopper took him to Ein Kerem Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem.

Eliyahu was released from the hospital about a week later after a couple of surgeries. He was worried about his friends in Gaza. He didn’t know their status, nor did they know his whereabouts. Once everyone got out, there was a big ceremony and Eliyahu received his captain rings, “which was very emotional for me.”

I thought my ear blew off’

I was having fun, and then the 7th of October hit’

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PRIMER • HOW-TO'S

Anti-Semitism-free campus

ADL, American Jewish Committee, the Conference of Presidents, Hillel International and JFNA announced a comprehensive set of recommendations aimed at combating anti-Semitism on campus in the upcoming school year.

Additional supporting organizations include Academic Engagement Network, Alpha Epsilon Phi, Alpha Epsilon Pi, Jewish Grad Organization, Jewish on Campus, NCJW, Olami, Rabbinical Assembly, Sigma Alpha Mu, Sigma Delta Tau, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and Zeta Beta Tau.

"Given the increased anti-Semitic incidents on college campuses since Oct. 7, higher learning institutions must prioritize Jewish student and staff safety," says ADL Mountain States Regional Director Scott Levin.

"As we approach a new academic year, college leaders should review these commonsense steps and commit to creating safer, more inclusive learning environments for the Jewish community on their campuses."

This unprecedented time for institutions of higher education across the US demands a unified response to ensure the safety and full inclusion of Jewish students — as well as all students, faculty, and staff.

These guidelines provide college and university administrators with proactive ways to support a safer campus environment for Jewish students and for the entire campus.

Recommendations include:

• **Clearly communicate campus rules, standards and policies.**

Make clear to students what it means to be a member of the campus community, and ensure that students, faculty, and staff are aware of school policies on protests and demonstrations.

• **Support Jewish students.**

Prevent discrimination, unequivocally denounce anti-Semitism, ensure inclusivity and provide anti-Semitism education and training.

• **Ensure campus safety.**

Enforce university codes of conduct, maintain clear reporting avenues for antisemitic incidents, ensure campus staff are trained to address violations of campus rules and reaffirm rejection of BDS and

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Prepare
for
Oct. 7,
2024
•
Enforce
campus rules

academic boycotts of Israel.

• **Reaffirm faculty responsibilities.**

Ensure students' academic freedom and a non-discriminatory learning environment in the classroom. Communicate and enforce policies regarding faculty who threaten to withhold students' grades if faculty demands are not met, or who cancel mandatory classes.

• **Prepare for Oct. 7, 2024.**

Anticipate and mitigate disruptions on the one-year mark of the Hamas attack on Israel, ensuring any protest activities do not interfere with campus operations or Jewish students' rights.

"The unprecedented surge in anti-Semitism on college campuses last year was utterly unacceptable, and yet far too many administrations failed to respond effectively," said



AURARIA ENCAMPMENT • MAY 2, 2024

Jonathan Greenblatt, ADL CEO and national director.

"We insist that all college and university leaders take significant steps to make Jewish students safer."

"During the last academic year, countless Jewish students experienced harassment, intimidation, discrimination and even assaults on campus," said Adam Lehman, Hillel International President and CEO.

"Alongside our efforts to build vibrant Jewish communities on campus, we are providing college and university leaders with clear guidance and practical solutions for the steps they need to take to ensure a safer and more welcoming environment for Jewish students."

"Jewish students and all students deserve a better campus and learning environment this fall."

During the 2023-2024 academic year, schools saw more than 1,400 anti-Semitic incidents on college campuses — by far

the highest number of anti-Semitic incidents on campus in a single school year on record.

Following the Oct. 7 attack, a survey by Hillel and ADL found that 73% of Jewish college students and 44% of non-Jewish students experienced or witnessed anti-Semitism on their campuses last fall.

A fall, 2023 survey by AJC found that one in four Jewish college students felt unsafe at a campus event because they were Jewish.

"What Jewish students faced on campus last year cannot be allowed to continue into the new academic year," said AJC CEO Ted Deutch, a former congressman.

"All students on campus have the right to attend class, learn and grow without intimidation, harassment and even violence at the hands of fellow students and outside agitators."

"Colleges and universities must do the work to ensure a university culture of pluralism, fact-based inquiry and dialogue across difference."

"They must ensure a campus

and societal culture where there is zero tolerance for anti-Semitism."

"Our campuses should be bastions of diversity and the open exchange of ideas rather than be pervaded by fear, intimidation, and discrimination," said Eric Fingerhut, President and CEO of JFNA, also a former congressman.

"With this agenda, we are working to ensure that every community's institutions of higher learning will take action to protect the civil rights of their Jewish students."

"Over the past school year, America saw numerous incidents of harassment against Jewish students, violent protests and flagrant violations of conduct codes. University officials are neglecting their duty to ensure a safe learning environment for all students," said William Daroff, CEO of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

"We urge them to adopt these recommendations and collaborate with Jewish organizations to protect the safety of Jewish students."

BGU med school to Gaza

MED STUDENTS

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While Eliyahu was in the hospital in Jerusalem, he was approached by a foundation for wounded soldiers, offering help. "They helped me a lot," he said.

Eliyahu learned that this foundation had no representatives at Soroka Hospital in Beersheba, where Eliyahu would be returning for his study at BGU, so he offered to reach out to wounded soldiers at Soroka and help them and their families, and he's been doing so on a volunteer basis ever since.

"Since I've returned from Gaza," said Shaked, "I can only focus for about 50 minutes. After that mind starts to blow. It's tough to find a balance. BGU has been really understanding with the situation. They called my mother while I was in Gaza to offer support, and when I came back, they gave me recommendations for my course of study, and allowed extra time for exams and even second chances at exams."

Eliyahu received his head injury

three weeks before school started again.

"The first week I got back to school, I was just staring half the time. I wasn't ready to go back to school, but it was good for me to get back to the structure."

Upon his return to school, Eliyahu received a call from a BGU social worker asking what he needs. "She gave me more time on tests because I knew something was off. She helped me with psychological treatments."

In turn, Eliyahu helped the social worker find other students with invisible injuries from the war or from Oct. 7 itself.

Eliyahu is open about his psychological struggles. "I've been seeing a psychologist for the past couple of months. I was struggling. I'm not scared to say I was showing signs of PTSD, reliving those scenarios on a daily basis, but seeing the psychologist is helping."

Shaked says she doesn't know if she's experiencing PTSD, but she does think about the Gaza experience at night, sleeping only about three hours a night. She says her structured schedule at the university helps her "balance between

the fighting and study."

She adds, "I think everyone is Israel is experiencing some PTSD, not just the ones who have been in Gaza."

Asked if they manage to have some fun amidst everything, Eliyahu says, "I'm good at having fun, but it's hard to be happy and post stuff on social media when there are still hostages in Gaza."

Neither Eliyahu nor Shaked have decided on a medical specialty, but their experiences since Oct. 7 may inform their future paths.

For Eliyahu, his foray into volunteer work with the wounded soldiers has been "the best scholarship you could get." Because many of the wounded soldiers he works with have orthopedic injuries, it has got him pondering a career in orthopedics.

While Shaked is a paramedic and has gained valuable experience in emergency medicine, she is now thinking she'd like to do something "happy," like delivering babies.

"I do think that experience taught me to be a lot more sensitive and to trust myself, and actually helped me to be a good doctor in the future." ■



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