

Alas, no haredi draft

written by David M. Weinberg | 28.11.2025

There is no satisfactory solution to the haredi draft issue. Ultra-Orthodox young men cannot be forced into IDF service. And the phony draft law presented by the new chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs & Defense Committee, Boaz Bismuth, certainly won't do the job. It is a draft evasion law, not a pathway to realistic shouldering of the national security burden by the haredi community.

Haredi leaders are not budging. Despite October 7, despite the near-existential threat situation Israel finds itself in across seven fronts, despite the attendant acute military manpower crisis, despite the enormous sacrifices in dead, wounded, and displaced, and despite financial deprivation, household disruption, and emotional trauma experienced by so many Israeli families religious and secular alike – haredi leaders remain adamant that “yeshiva boys” cannot be drafted in any minimal way (whether they are really learning Torah full time or not).

These leaders are overwhelmingly cut-off from the war reality that “mainstream” Israel is living, purposefully and devastatingly so. Alas, they are disconnected, even unfeeling towards the broader public – as several condescending critical statements and recent interviews of the highest-ranking rabbis and their spokesmen have sadly made clear.

(For a particularly revealing and infuriating example, see the interview given three weeks ago by Yisrael Friedman, editor of the main haredi newspaper *Yated Neeman*, to the Religious Zionist newspaper *Makor Rishon*.)

I no longer believe that this can be changed even if the most drastic punitive measures were applied (and they won't be) – like a complete cut-off of government funding for everything haredi from schools that don't teach basic secular subjects to the massive subsidies that non-serving Kollel families enjoy in municipal taxes, health insurance, school tuition, daycare, and more.

I just don't see solutions on the horizon for the constitutional, political, and social crisis over haredi draft exemption (even though I believe that there are pathways to a better place in the very long term along the lines of haredi “hesder” yeshivas, which are growing very slowly).

There are certainly no solutions that will adequately address the IDF's immediate needs, which is about 10,000 new soldiers a year, including at least 6,000 full-time combat soldiers in the 18-24 age cohort. No "change government" headed by the current opposition leaders is going to be able to fix this, even if such an alternative government were to be voted into office next year. That's the miserable reality.

WHAT REMAINS is adoption of a moral stance as a matter of principle; the proclamation from every platform of the sociological and ideological suffering of serving Israelis – the echoing of their scream.

And within the religious world, it is extraordinarily necessary to defiantly distinguish distorted haredi interpretations of religious ideology regarding military service from authentic Torah ideology in this regard. This is an obligation for the sake of the "honor of Torah" as well as it being an emotional and social imperative.

In these pages in June 2024, I debunked at length four pseudo-foundational concepts that haredi ideologues cite in defense of their refusal to participate in "carrying the burden" of military service. Today, we'll let the voices of Religious Zionist heroes and heroines sound the siren.

Listen to Noa Mevorach of the Religious Zionist "Shutafot LaSheirut" movement (Partners in Service), speaking earlier this year to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. She held up her husband's conscription notice for reserve duty – his fifth tour of IDF reserve service since the Simchat Torah (October 7, 2023) invasion of Israel and the massacres led by Hamas.

"The blood of great Torah scholars from my community who went to battle for Israel over the past year, the husbands of my friends who were killed in battle and whose kids are orphans – cries out from the ground," exclaimed Mrs. Mevorach.

"I hear the discussion here in this committee where it is repeatedly said that haredi men cannot be drafted except by consensus, that they cannot be drafted against their will, that force won't work. And that the great goal of the proposed new draft legislation is to softly and slowly reach a 50% draft of haredi men over the next ten years."

"Behold my husband's fifth draft notice! I ask every member of Knesset to

consider this: Why am I not eligible for a 50% discount too, for a 50% reduction in the army burden placed on my husband and on the shoulders of my family? Give me a 50% reduction! “

“I’ll take either the holidays of Tishrei (Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Succot) or the holidays of Nissan (Pesach) in this cutback, so that my husband can be home for 50% of the holidays and we won’t have to sit at the holiday table alone or go to my parents.”

“Why am I not eligible for 50% savings? Who decided and with what authority was it decided that one particular population in the State of Israel, the haredi public, is entitled to a 50% discount? I also want the option to choose such a bargain!” concluded the valiant Noa Mevorach.

This week, a large group of (mostly religious) bereaved families published a petition aimed at members of Knesset from Religious Zionist and traditional backgrounds, in opposition to the Bismuth draft evasion proposals.

Among the signatories are Rabbanit Avivit Granot (mother of Amitai z”l), Rabbi Benny Kalmanson (father of Elhanan z”l), Hagai Lober (father of Elisha z”l), Rabbi Yonatan Slitoki (father of Yishai z”l and Noam z”l), Rabbanit Rachel Goldberg (widow of Rabbi Avi Goldberg z”l), Yair, Sarah, and Shira Schwartz (the family of David z”l), Haya Hexter (mother of Yakir z”l), Tovah and Ariel Shinkolevsky (parents of Yakir z”l), Miriam and Aharon Haber (parents of Zecharia z”l), Zvika Greenglick (father of Shauli z”l), Haim and Leli Deri (parents of Saadia z”l), Tzofia Dickstein (mother of Ivri z”l), and twenty other families.

“We call upon MKs from religious and traditional backgrounds to reject the current draft (evasion) proposals on ideological grounds. This is not the way of Torah! ‘Every person must participate in a *milchemet mitzva*, a war of commandment and merit’ – so teaches our tradition, and so we taught our sons; Torah teaching that unites the People of Israel and does not divide the nation.”

“On October 7 and in the two years since, our sons, brothers, and husbands sallied forth to defend the nation, in the name of Torah, out of mutual responsibility for all Israelis, out of responsibility for the fate of the Nation of Israel. They left home and did not return. The pain that we feel is endless, and this requires us to speak out.”

“We do not seek to end Torah study. On the contrary, we know that Torah is the lifeblood of our people. But the Torah of Israel does not allow one to exempt himself from the burdens of the public; it obligates everybody to collective responsibility. This is the Biblical commandment ‘Do not stand idly by when the blood of your neighbor is at stake.’ All the much more so when your neighbor is fighting to save you!”

“Specifically out of respect for Torah and those who study it, it is difficult for us to hear people using Torah to justify exemption from military service along with exemptions from basic social and economic obligations. A nation cannot survive if a third of its citizens enjoy all benefits of society without shouldering its obligations. Not today, and not in the future.”

“Therefore, the basic minimal requirements for new draft legislation involve true participation of the haredi public in national service with strict enforcement, and the denial of government budgets to the haredi public until this happens. Do not vote for the current legislation, which allows for continued draft dodging, involves more feeding at the trough, does concrete damage to Israel’s national security, and insults the Torah tradition by which our loved ones lived and died.”

“At this historic moment we say to our representatives in Knesset: Stiffen your spine and speak proudly in the name of Torah in the Land of Israel. Do not assault our common values, do not degrade our tradition, do not disappoint all those who have paid the highest price for defense of Israel and for the resilience of our people.”

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