An upbeat and believing younger generation

written by David M. Weinberg | 20.01.2024

Earlier this week paratroopers in the 55th Brigade wrote a letter to their commander declaring their willingness to carry the fight forward against Hamas "until victory," even if that means serving in the army reserves for many more months.

The letter, which is circulating widely, decries the decision of the IDF general staff to begin withdrawing from significant parts of Gaza before the mission to destroy all Hamas attack capabilities is completed. "How can we go home to our families before we create the conditions whereby Israeli residents of the Gaza Envelope towns can go home to their towns and families?" They ask for the "honor" of continuing the battle.

Without commenting here on the wisdom of IDF redeployments, the thing to note about the paratrooper letter is the gutsy patriotism and positivity that oozes from every paragraph.

The young Israeli men who signed the letter with their full names and military identification numbers are faithful members of their nation, devoted to Israel's future, and confident in Israel's ability to overcome all adversity.

Their buoyant and brave sentiments are of a piece with the resilience demonstrated by broad segments of the Israeli public, from muscular mothers holding down the home front to the hundreds of thousands of Israelis (and Diaspora Jews) who are volunteering in myriad ways to make up labor shortfalls in fields, factories, and hospitals.

A new public opinion poll and market survey of Israel's younger generation released this week (and unveiled here in English for the first time) makes it crystal clear that Israel is blessed the most believing youth; a generation of future leaders who are upbeat and keen enough to drive Israel towards every success despite all the demanding challenges ahead.

Results of the in-depth report from Glikman, Shamir, Samsanov (The Publicis

Group) demolish any aspersions against younger Israelis as being shallow, disconnected from values, or insipid universalists.

Paradoxically, their connection to Tik Tok and Instagram that had linked them to the broader world now has rooted them more than ever in Israeli and Jewish identity; a harsh backlash against the horrors of October 7 and its global antisemitic aftermath.

Most poignantly, the survey contrasts the views of young Israelis (16-25 years old – teens, soldiers, and students) with those of their parents and grandparents. And the contrast is stark.

Turns out that today's youth are more like their grandparents' generation (those who fought for independence in 1948) than their parents' generation. Like their grandparents, they are rough and tough, realistic, and filled with warrior spirit; whereas their parents are earnest about "normalcy" and "the good life."

The youth are this country's strongest patriots and optimists. 59% believe that Israel is strong and will win all current wars and has a great future. 49% say they are mobilized to the military or are volunteering in civilian frameworks and are "devoted" to the State of Israel. 42% say that Jews have no other place in the world. (35% are more worried about Israel's future; and 20% say that are disillusioned and don't see their future in Israel.)

At the same time, today's Israeli youth are not wearing rose-colored glasses. 57% recognize that tough times are head and Israel's path to renewed strength and growth will be a long haul. (29% see a swift recovery from the current crisis and believe that mass Aliyah can be expected soon; while on the other hand, 14% fear that Israel faces insurmountable difficulties.)

There is no escapism in view of the current situation. 82% of Israel youth are prepared (to some or to a great extent) to pause the "good life" in terms of personal plans for work, study, and vacation, and are prepared to forgo travel abroad all-together. 61% very much understand and 25% partially agree that now is the time to restrict their purchases and save for the future.

And when making necessary purchases, 77% categorically prefer to buy "Blue & White" (Israeli-made products), and 84% prefer to buy from Israeli or international companies that contribute to the war/national effort.

Unlike youth around the world at the relevant young ages, Israeli youth clearly understand that they need to focus not on parties and pleasure, but on work and study (54%), family (51%), friends (34%), and volunteering (21%).

IT IS IMPORTANT to contrast the eager and feisty, and at the same time pragmatic and levelheaded, thinking of Israeli youth with the dark and depressive sentiments expressed by a certain swath of Israeli elites. Alas, gloom governs the Israeli airwaves where a privileged class of older journalists and veteran "experts" dominate.

This "old guard" is telling us non-stop that Israel is losing the war with Hamas, cannot win against Hamas or Hezbollah, does not have the societal strength to survive long wars, and does not have a future without hewing to the stale paradigms of October 6.

This means acceptance of all Hamas demands for hostage release including an immediate end to military operations in Gaza; far-reaching diplomatic concessions to the Palestinians (despite their corruption, investment in terrorism and antisemitic education, and absolute intransigence); and of course, the political defeat of Prime Minister Netanyahu and his "messianist-radical" coalition government.

All their pessimistic talk handicaps this nation as it fights for its life. Two of my colleagues at the Misgav Institute, professors Gabi Siboni and Kobi Michael, have given the nay-sayers a name. They are the "Dichonistim" movement, the "Depressive" lobby. This is a name meant to rhyme and contrast with "Bithonistim," staunch believers in the success of bold Israeli security posture and stirring Israeli national identity.

What can be said for certain is that there is a wide and deep gap between the pessimist and depressive discourse dispensed by the "old guard" and the optimism and resilience expressed by Israel's younger generation and much of Israeli society.

I hope and assume that the negative and self-doubting ruminations of the "Depressive Lobby" will be overcome by the positive thinking and assured posture of Israeli youth and many/most Israelis. Israel cannot afford anything less robust and authentic.

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