

SETTLER, SOLDIER, SHLIACH, SHLEIMUS HA'ARETZ ACTIVIST

BY ALIZA KARP

Born in Brooklyn, Raised in Yesha, Served in the IDF and Embarking on Shlichus, Danny Cohen and his wife Batsheva Represent a Generation Determined to Hasten the Geula.

Ten years ago, Tishrei 5751, Danny Cohen attended his first *farbrengen* at 770 with the Rebbe. "Everyone could tell I was a newcomer," he recalls. "It had its advantages... I was pushed straight to the front...and once you are that close to the Rebbe, there is no going back."

When Brooklyn-born Danny Cohen was six years old, his parents took him to settle in Eretz Yisroel. Devoted to Torah and dedicated to the point of *mesiras nefesh* for *Eretz HaKodesh*, the family settled in Psagot, a settlement neighboring the Arab-populated city of Ramallah.

"It was fascinating to grow up near the places that we were learning about in the Torah. It brought our learning to life," says Danny. "We could feel our connection to these places in our soul. It gave us the conviction to guard and protect what is ours."

But along with the educational benefits, the fragility of the political situation was always at hand. "All the Jews in Psagot traveled to school in Beit El. We had to drive through Ramallah, and it was a regular occurrence to be pelted with rocks and bottles. You could feel their hatred for us, physical hatred and psychological hatred. In those days the government was more supportive,

and if things got out of control... it was possible to put them back under control.

"Now things are different. The other night I called my house in Psagot and there was no answer. Later

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my family called to say that they were unable to get to the phone because the entire neighborhood had been instructed to lay on the floor to be sheltered from gunfire."

Before his own army service, Danny had close association with Jewish personalities, such as Shlomo Carlebach and Meir Kahane. He knew Boruch Goldstein personally. Danny respected Kahane for his persistence and consistency, and how he would open a *seifer* and learn if there was ever a spare moment. He knew Boruch Goldstein to be gentle and calm with never a word of *lashon*

ha'ra. From his solid foundation of a religious upbringing and beneficial contact with exceptional people, Danny eventually built on this foundation, perceiving and understanding the value of the *derech* of Chabad.

When Danny entered the military he wanted to do more than the minimum, he wanted his service to make a difference. Against regular army qualifications, he pushed his way into a combat unit, Givati, and eventually became sergeant for a Hesder unit. "One year on Shabbos Parshas Chayei Sara my unit was called to Chevron to protect the crowds of Jews that visit Me'aras HaMachpela. I was told to go home for Shabbos, because they knew that as well as protecting the Jews they would also be some haranguing the Jews. As it turned out, I went to Chevron for Shabbos and ended up being chased by the soldiers in my own company."

"Once I became closer to Chabad," Danny relates, "I realized the importance of doing *mivtzaim* with everyone. If only I had that realization when I was in the army. Many times I was with soldiers who were not religious. I knew to be a *mentch* and set a good example... but I did not realize that I should be putting *t'fillin* on them!"

Danny drew many lessons for life from his army experience. This past Shushan Purim he shared these lessons with the children of Tzivos Hashem in Brooklyn.

In 5741, the very first year that the Rebbe MH"M initiated Tzivos Hashem, he called for children's rallies to be held on Shushan Purim, which fell out, as it did this year, on Sunday. The Rebbe expressed his will to have children around the world celebrate this day in unison with the children of Yerushalayim. This year, Tzivos Hashem again heeded the Rebbe's call to strengthen worldwide connection to Yerushalayim by holding mass rallies for children on Shushan Purim.

At both the rally for girls and the rally for boys combined, more than one thousand children sat at the edge of their chairs, eyes filled with wonder, as they eagerly learned about army strategies from Israel Defense Force Sergeant Danny Cohen, as he recounted stories from his real-life army service and told them how they could take his experiences and apply them to their missions as soldiers in Tzivos Hashem.

PUNCTUALITY

Cohen told the children how he learned the important lesson of being on time. While in officer's training, all the soldiers set their watches to match that of the commanding officer, so that when the officer told them to be somewhere at a certain time, they would be there promptly, without a second to loose. One time, the officer called everyone to attention at a given time, and Cohen was just fifteen seconds late. The officer told him, "you owe me those fifteen seconds, Cohen."

That night, Cohen was woken up from his sleep and

A successful demonstration to save the Golan, organized by Danny Cohen together with *HaTamim* Yonatan Rubin, son of Chabad *shliach* in Yesha



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told to be outside in full gear in two minutes. He couldn't help but notice that he was the only one summoned, but had no time to wonder why. Outside he met the officer to whom he owed the fifteen seconds. He was told to run to a certain spot, in full gear, and be back in ninety seconds, if he was back a second or more earlier, that would be the amount of seconds he was repaying the officer. He had to repeat running back and forth until he had repaid all the fifteen seconds. He started to run.



Some times he gained a second or two, sometimes not, but in the middle of the night he paid back all fifteen seconds.

Cohen was never late again for the rest of his army duty. He learned an important lesson that he shared with the Tzivos Hashem that rallies on Shushan Purim. He learned that if it is so important to be on time for an officer of flesh and blood, how much more important is it to be on time for the Commander in Chief - Hashem. Every day Hashem waits for our prayers. We should not keep him waiting, not even fifteen seconds!

PERSEVERANCE AND EMUNA

Cohen learned another valuable lesson from the above episode. "It is amazing how capable we really are," he told the children. He never would have believed that in the middle of the night he could have run so fast for so long. But he trusted his commander and he just kept trying until he was able to do what he was told. It wasn't easy, Cohen assured his audience of that, but he did it!

A soldier in Tzivos Hashem has to know that Hashem does not give obstacles that cannot be overcome. With Hashem's help, every soldier can conquer the *yetzer ha'ra*, even when it seems like it is impossible.

VIGILANCE

In the army, the nighttime guards use equipment that allows them to see in the dark. In the daytime, obviously, these special glasses are not needed. At dawn, just as the sun is rising, it is not yet clear enough to see the enemy by daylight, but it is too light to use the night vision equipment. It is the perfect time for the enemy to attack - and they know it... and they will do it. So every morning at dawn, the soldiers get up and surround their base, just in case

of an attack. Soldiers work hard all day and are not given many hours to sleep. Interrupting just four hours sleep to stand guard for half an hour is a real challenge, but the soldiers do it!

As Sergeant Cohen told this story to his eager audience, he taught them that a soldier in Tzivos Hashem always has to be alert. The *yetzer ha'ra* can come at any time. He knows what is hard for you. Maybe you have trouble doing what is right when all your peers are doing otherwise, maybe you have a weakness for a

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being shot."*

particular prohibition or maybe you feel lazy or moody from time to time - that is when you have to be prepared and guard yourself. You have to know that these are your weak times and work hard to beat the *yetzer ha'ra* when he is most likely to attack.

One morning, Sergeant Cohen and his troops had just gone back to their bunks after sunrise, then the enemy attacked. The soldiers were really caught off guard, but they quickly re-grouped and successfully defended their camp.

OBEDIENCE

Part of Cohen's training was to memorize certain terrain. To know the valleys, the hills, the boulders, the bushes, the trails, everything about the areas so that he could find his way without a map, even in the dark. One time he had to travel through an area that he had studied very well and was sure that he knew perfectly. At one point he had to decide which way to turn. From his recollection he was sure he should turn left, but decided to check his compass anyway. According to the compass, he should turn right. He was confused, but then decided that the compass must be wrong and he turned left. As it turned out, he had to walk three extra hours to rectify his mistake.

Cohen's message to the children: Sometimes the *yetzer ha'ra* tells us that we know our own situation better than the Rebbe, but we have to remember that "the Rebbe MH"™ is our compass and the way the Rebbe shows us, is the only way to go!"

Many of the State of Israel's political leaders have met personally with the Rebbe and have received guidance on which way to turn. Yet even as the Rebbe's predictions of what would happen if they went the other way are proven to be true with each passing day, they continue to go in the wrong direction.

Following his army service, Danny married Batsheva Moses. Batsheva grew up in the town of Katzrin in the Golan. His parents moved there shortly before the Yom Kippur war, when Batsheva was a



Danny Cohen reading the Rebbe's letter after *davening* in Washington DC at a Golan demonstration together with Rabbi Yitzchok Springer

crowded into the home of Dovid and Miriam Schmukler on Montgomery Street to learn more about the current

situation in Chevron. Two videos were shown and a moving talk was given by Elisheva Federman.

One of the videos opened with the frightening sounds of gunfire, the nightly scenario that Chevron residents live with these days. Scenes were shown of Arabs throwing baseball size stones, and using slings for larger stones, as the soldiers stood by. But then there were scenes of soldiers *shlepping* Jewish girls away from their protest sights, despite the Israeli law that male soldiers and police officers are not allowed to touch women.

Before Federman spoke, tissues were distributed to the audience. Rightfully so, as there was not a dry eye in the room as she told the women about how she witnessed the murder of 10-month-old Shalhevet Pass, and stayed with the 19-year-old mother as the conclusive news of her baby's death was brought to her. "We heard the shots and saw the father fall to the ground," reported Federman, "so we thought that he was the only victim. We were happy to see that he was alive, but then the mother picked up her baby and started to scream. I stayed with the mother as others tended to the child. It was two hours later when the baby's grandmother herself came in to tell her daughter that Shalhevet's tasks in this world had been completed."

Federman also told of the death of Rina Didovsky, her daughter's teacher for the past two years. "My daughter was understandably very upset. I told her that Hashem gives life and Hashem decides when our work here

newborn infant. Despite the hardships of warfare and uncertainty, her family stayed on and became leaders in the struggle to keep the Golan when others were talking of giving in, giving up, and giving it away.

Growing up in the Golan presented its own sacrifices, those associated with being in a small town far from major cities. "Once in a while there would be a terrorist, but it was not a common occurrence," she says. However, while she was engaged to Danny and was driving near Ramallah one time, her car became the target of a barrage of stones being thrown by a group of Arab students. "I became scared and disoriented. I started to cry. I began to drive in a zig zag. I do not know how I missed the cars around me. Somehow I was able to reach a nearby group of soldiers. It was devastating for me to see their nonchalant reaction. They simply did not care."

As newlyweds, Danny and Batsheva lived for two years in Kiryat Arba and began working with Baruch Marzel to promote and protect the Jewish community living in Chevron. Danny toured the country with Marzel, meeting with *roshei yeshivos*

and rebbes to encourage visits to Chevron. The constant flow of visitors to Chevron was a way to ensure that the roads would remain safe and that the importance of our holy cities be reinforced to Jews everywhere.

"I would like to give a *yasher ko'ach* to Rabbi Groner, the Rebbe's secretary" says Danny. "Every time he comes to Eretz Yisroel he stops in Chevron to *farbrenge*. Even if his trip is only for a few days, he always finds a few hours for Chevron. His visits give the people there lot of *chizuk*."

The Cohens have now moved to Crown Heights where Danny is learning in 770, and Batsheva runs the Hebrew program for the children in a school in Flatbush.

Even now living in Crown Heights and learning in 770, Danny is behind many major events connected with *shleimus ha'Aretz* and Chevron. Recently in Crown Heights, Danny and Batsheva organized a meeting so that women in Crown Heights could meet Elisheva Federman, mother of six youngsters who has lived in the house of Menucha Rochel in Chevron for many years.

On Sunday morning, Erev Rosh Chodesh Iyar, close to fifty women

is done. She understands that it can also happen to her, but she is not afraid. We all believe that the Avos are protecting us.”

Batsheva Cohen was pleased with the response to the meeting. “This gathering, together with other similar gatherings in different cities, has helped to raise the awareness of the Rebbe’s message of *shleimus ha’Aretz*. The Israeli government cannot abandon Chevron as long as people like the Federman’s are living there - building families, building schools, and welcoming visitors.

“Chevron seems to have a special connection to Jewish women,” Batsheva continues. “It was Mrs. Nachshon, Mrs. Levinger, and a handful of other brave women who settled in the abandoned Beit Hadassah building, with the Rebbe’s

encouragement, to establish a Jewish presence in Chevron. It was Menucha Rochel, daughter of the Mittlerer Rebbe whose legacy is still vibrant in Chevron.* Just as she would walk between the raindrops and not get wet, so may the residents of Chevron today, walk through the bullets without being shot.”

It took many years of exploration and experience, and now Danny and Batsheva have synthesized their dynamic life experiences and their close contact with many Jewish leaders to emerge as Chassidim, committed to the Rebbe’s teachings of *shlichus* and *shleimus ha’Aretz*. “I was always attracted to the element of *simcha* in Chabad. In high school I had a Chabad friend who would always go to *farbrengens*. There was always another Chassidic holiday and a reason to celebrate. He even

celebrated ‘flat tire day,’ which turned out to be the day that the Alter Rebbe stopped the carriage so that he would not travel on Shabbos... But even before that, when I was five years old my father brought me to *Hakafos Sheini* at Kfar Chabad. In the midst of the music, dancing, and excitement, I turned to my father and said, ‘When I grow up, I am going to be a Chassid.’

“I will always love the *simcha* in the Rebbe’s teachings, but I also appreciate the seriousness of our task. The Rebbe’s instructions are clear. We have to do all we can to bring Moshiach. We have to respond to the Rebbe’s instructions for *shleimus ha’Aretz* and for *chinuch* and for all the *mitzaim* and all the *horaos* - until we will greet the Rebbe face to face *b’simcha shleima*.”

*There is a well known story about the Mittlerer Rebbe’s daughter, Menucha Rochel. The Mittlerer Rebbe wanted her to settle in Chevron. When the day came for her to leave, the Tzemach Tzedek was Rebbe. He called her in and told her that

she should leave that very day. She wanted to wait until the rain stopped, but the Tzemach Tzedek assured her that she could begin her journey and that she would not get wet. From that day on, Menucha Rochel could go out in the rain

and not get wet.

Once in Chevron, Menucha Rochel was sought after for her *brachos*. Even great *rabbanim* would come to her before Yom Kippur to receive a blessing from her.

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