

Ellie Schwarz

Mr. Greco

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Tzavah

For as long as I can recall, my father, Erez Schwarz, has had a robust appreciation for Israel. He has invariably taught me the value of knowing my origin, along with the sacrifices which have allowed for Jewish culture to persist. Erez served in the Israeli military, Tzavah, for a total of seven years. At age 18, in 1984, he decided to leave his abode in London, England, to make an “alliah,” a committed journey to Israel.

He says, “I left London as I was Israeli and I had the passionate belief that all Israelis need to serve in the army... I also wanted to challenge myself to see if I had the discipline, determination, and will power to get into special forces” (Schwarz). In Israel, he lived on a kibbutz, known as a communal settlement, with a designated family who cared for him when he was not at his base. Three months after registration and preparation, on February 12 of 1984, he officially began his service.

As he embarked upon his new lifestyle, he frequently encountered hardship. The unfamiliar language was troubling, training was extremely rigorous, the culture differed from London's politeness, he had little to no time to himself, and he suffered from extreme exhaustion. But like any new beginning, a routine developed. For the first 18 months, he was tested to become an official member of his desired unit, which was Sayeret (reconnaissance)

Golani. One with these aspirations is required to go through periodic testing until the last two phases of placement – these tests included navigations, hostage rescue, parachuting, and combat training, to name a few. After finally being accepted into his unit within Golani, Erez was relieved and proud; he instantly felt as if he was exactly where he needed to be.

Erez was a *chayal boded*, a lone soldier, and while his story was very unique at the time, there are now many people who come to Israel with similar intents and origins.

Retired Jewish veteran Joseph Lenoff shares his personal importance as a *chayal boded* during his time in the Israeli force, “Israel, a country of 8 million people, has a military with over 600,000 soldiers. Born out of the ashes of the Holocaust and the "Never Again" mentality that still pervades Israeli society, the military has a more prominent place in Israeli life than in other industrialized nations. Historically, this emphasis on military duty made sense: when the state of Israel was founded and the Israel Defense Forces established in 1948, the country was under constant existential threat from hostile neighbors. Beginning with the Israeli War of Independence, the very existence of the new state depended on the strength of its military (Lenoff). The eminent sense of nationalism the country's citizens obtain is evidently powerful, and has taught those who commence as *chayal boded* to carry the values they learn to their daily lives post-service.

Erez exemplifies the enduring value of Israeli military service. As a retired veteran he has learned that “The army has influenced every aspect of life for me from focus, commitment to a task for project, hard work, communication, initiative, responsibility, reliability, honesty, these are the principles that I learnt and these are the principles that guide

me through life” (Schwarz) He now specializes in advanced cyber security at a company called Aqua. His close companion which he commanded in advanced training, Guy Marom, also works in Information Technology. Marom was born and raised in Israel and currently works as a Vice President of a public high tech company, and also lives in the Bay Area. Marom describes how his time in the military differed from Erez’s: “We did a very similar service. The main difference is that I branched out to be an officer and commander in the ‘regular’ battalion of Golani (similar to the US Marines), and Erez stayed in our special forces unit as an officer” (Marom). While they did different things in their unit, they still both ended up in Silicon Valley working in high-tech. In the article, “In Israel, Some Tech Companies See Combat Experience as a Major Plus,” Maayan Manela interviews tech executives and discusses how they prefer to hire former warriors who gained unique tools from combative military within the demanding nature of a career in tech. Manela explains, “It is common knowledge that intelligence unit veterans have an advantage in the Israeli cybersecurity industry, but former warriors have unique qualities that are also crucial to the sector, according to Yifat Bar-Eli, the general manager of Israel for Tel Aviv-based cybersecurity startup CyberHat Ltd. About 40% of the company’s local employees were military fighters, she said in an interview. ‘Warriors do not break down under pressure and can work under extremely stressful and complex circumstances,’ she added.” (Manela, Maayan. “In Israel, Some Tech Companies See Combat Experience as a Major Plus.” 9 Dec. 2019.)

My father's road to working in tech was very unusual with little to no sense of direction. After seven years of the army my father admits, "I was very thirsty to learn." (Schwarz, Erez. Personal Interview. 21 April 2020.) Throughout primary and secondary school in England, he had been a very mediocre student, barely passing classes. He attended prestigious Jewish day schools, but always set his sights elsewhere. Once he completed high school most of his friends instantly went to University. He had no doubt that his future would hold serving in Israel, but this was very frowned upon as it was extremely unusual. His mother and father tried to convince him to stay, and get an education at a local University, as they were against his hope of escaping and joining the combative military in Israel, "They thought I was in complete la la land! They kept telling me I don't understand the mentality of the Army, and that I would not survive," he confesses (Schwarz).

Following his army release, Erez realized he could not study in Israel because he did not have a required standardized test which was required of all who hoped to study in the country, and his hebrew was simply not strong enough. To him, returning to London was not an option, so the idea of studying in the United States intrigued him. Soon, he found himself at Montgomery Community College in Maryland. Prior to studying at MCC, he had never been to the US and did not know anyone in the country, but with education as a direct goal, he decided to take a leap of faith and create another new beginning in his life. Beginning by taking basic level classes, he did not give up on his goal of studying computer science. Two years later, he transferred to University of Maryland to graduate with a 3.9 GPA and a major in computer science.

Under an entry titled, “US Universities seek Israeli students,” author David Shamah researches EducationUSA, a US sponsored department which has centers worldwide seeking to recruit new students for American Universities. Shamah interviews Arona Maskil, the director of the Tel Aviv branch of EducationUSA. To find students, the organization holds information fairs where officials from schools in the US present their MBA programs (Master of Business Administration) to prospective students. Some schools which attend the fairs include, Columbia University, Brandeis University, and Booth Business School of the University of Chicago. Askil states, ““More and more leading US universities recognize the potential of Israeli students and scholarships are added each year to encourage Israelis to apply to MBA programs,” said Maskil. “Israeli students are seen as more mature and serious, since most of them are older and have completed their IDF service.” One of the reasons American schools are interested in recruiting foreign students, she added, is to diversify their student body, and having Israeli students on campus fits that bill very well.” (Shamah)

Immediately after graduating University Erez told himself he could not see a future where he worked in a computer science field, which led to yet another fresh start in Sierra Leone, West Africa. The year was 1996, and there was a civil war occurring in Sierra Leone, but this did not stop him from his new journey. The new company he created was responsible for transporting the diamonds to a bourse, or diamond exchange center, in Brussels, Belgium. About a year later in 1997, he came to realize his life was in great danger despite the war, so he promptly left and decided to make a comeback to Israel with no plan. With luck, Ex Spy Chiefs who had their own private security company knew that Erez had an American Degree

in computer science. The Chiefs needed his knowledge and aid with cyber security, so he accepted the offer and began working there. Shortly after beginning his new job in Tel Aviv, Israel he met my mother, and by 2000 they had my brother, Yali. Continuing work in Israel and working on cyber security projects led him to being offered a position as CTO, Chief Technical Officer, at an Israeli Japanese joint venture called Sorun- Comsec in Japan. He accepted the offer and moved my family to Japan in 2003, and later that year I was born. The company soon became a total failure, but this led him to meeting one of the most famous and influential tech moguls in cybersecurity, Shlomo Krammer. Israeli-born and raised, Shlomo founded high-tech companies such as Checkpoint, Imperva, and Cato, to name a few. He offered my father a job in 2005 at the small Israeli start up Imperva, which relocated Erez from Japan to Mountain View California in 2007, where we have lived ever since. Imperva was soon to become a multi billion dollar public company.

Aqua, where Erez currently works, is another Shlomo Krammer company. This company is another Israeli startup - he tells me he will not work for a non Israeli company. Connecting the Israeli world and the United States, Silicon valley especially, is very difficult as Israelis are profound at taking initiative, but are not specialized in long-term planning. This meaning, Israeli company starters have a hard time following through and taking their business to the next level by taking their idea and creating a consistent and reliable product which sells. Because of this, a representative in the US who speaks fluent English but also fluent Hebrew and understands Israeli culture, is exceptionally critical. Thus, Erez is a perfect candidate. He admits, "I am a Zionist, seeing Israel flourish and knowing that I am a

part of the growth is exceptionally rewarding” (Schwarz). In other words, he is a person who believes in the development of Israel and wouldn't give up on this ideology, therefore he would not work in a non Israeli company. Because of his service, he wouldn't simply drop his values and forget about his time dedicated to Israel, he wants and believes he must continue that diligence.

Erez believes that without his army experience, none of his dreams would have panned out successfully. He needed to have lived through seven years of unpredictable experiences to continue life free of fear, and to learn how to overcome strenuous defeat. His military experience pivoted him to new technologies where he had to absorb all of his army training and use it in his occupation, “head down, commitment, and perseverance,” is what he claims as the consistent values. The IT business has progressed to new technologies and continues to evolve and one's work ethic can never slack through this process. In the future, he plans to continue working at Aqua until he eventually makes a return to Israel once he has retired.

Not only has my father's story given me a lifetime's worth of wild stories, crucial values, and the confidence to seize all opportunities, but it has also strengthened our bond. My father has been a role model to me my entire life and his legend will live on for years beyond.. Tzavah brings people together, and forms a person. My father concludes, “In the end, life can be broken down to a few basic principles. The first being hardships and how to overcome these and turn them into opportunity with an indomitable spirit which allows one to overcome these hardships to face seemingly impossible situations, Next a deep

understanding of loyalty and how this component ties to the appreciation and gratitude one holds for their dearest factors of life. Most importantly it's bringing all those elements together to one force and creating success" (Schwarz).