

Filling their Bellies, Warming their Souls

How a few individuals are supporting our Israeli soldiers and showing them that we care

By Baila Rosenbaum



Yossie Goldberger was driving near his home in Jerusalem and had to pull over. It wasn't the traffic, the buses or the congestion that got his attention. It was the compelling voice of Elad Amedi, speaking on the radio. Amedi, popular host of a daily radio show, is known for straight talk, boldly sharing his thoughts and beliefs across the airwaves. The topic of the day was one close to every Israeli's heart – *chayalei ha'tzaava* – our young Israeli soldiers. Amedi's message was one that easily resonated. *Chayalim* deserve our respect and gratitude – and that gratitude needs to be expressed. Offering a *chayal* a drink, a snack or a friendly greeting is the least one can do for the soldiers who put their lives on the line for *Am Yisrael* every day. Amedi enthused about his experiences

joining Amit Amar, a former soldier, who had put together a team of volunteers to do just that.

Amar and crew, who call themselves Tvaat Paamon, go out every night and visit *chayalim* at checkpoints, guard towers and outposts. They connect, encourage, and ply them with hot drinks and snacks. The soldiers' response to the love and caring of fellow Jews is so warm and overwhelming that Amedi was galvanized to call for an impromptu get-together. He announced a location and time and invited all *chayalim* to enjoy an event in their honor.

Back in traffic Yossie Goldberger, who does not always listen to Amedi's secular radio show, absorbed Amedi's message and knew that he had to be a part of it. Goldberger is an experienced "*ish chessed*" and

didn't wait to act. He called the radio program from his car, reached Elad Amedi, and made an imposing offer, "How can I help? I want to do something big!" Amedi connected him with Amit Amar and the two men, powered by a sincere desire to show their appreciation, brainstormed to find just the right way to show how much they cared.

Yossie Goldberger wasn't joking when he offered something "big." In fact, he was experienced in "big." He contacted one of his many partners in *chesed*, Rabbi Pesach Lerner, Executive President Emeritus of the National Counsel of Young Israel and resident of Far Rockaway, NY.

"Yossie and I go back a long way," Rabbi Lerner explains. "About eleven years ago we started working together on behalf of the families of Gush Katif. We col-

lected money for Shabbat and *yom tov* expenses and basic food items." The sight of empty refrigerators and unhappy children tore at both their hearts, spurring them into action. They arranged for the distribution of food packages, raised money for stipends, and along the way, learned a valuable lesson in giving. "Once we distributed food for Pesach. After everything was given out a man came over and, almost tearfully, thanked us for the grape juice. Now, the grape juice was by far the least impressive item in the box. But, as the man explained, the grape juice would mean a lot to his children.

"Little things that we wouldn't normally think about can make a very big impact on someone's life."

Lesson learned. The next time they arranged for a food distribution they made

sure to include a bottle of Coke in each box. Everyone needs staples, but the soda was a gift – a little luxury. On a subsequent Purim they raised money to buy five thousand Purim costumes for families from Gush Katif. The costumes brought enormous joy to the children; and their families felt the support and caring that the gifts represented.

With Rabbi Lerner on board raising funds, Goldberg and Amar got to work. "We wanted to do something special – something beyond drinks and a snack," Goldberger said. "We decided to make a barbecue and to do it right – with all the trimmings. I went out and bought hamburgers, hot dogs, buns – the works. Amit went on a buying spree too. We didn't know how many *chayalim* would show up, and we were

determined that no one would leave without something hot and satisfying. We wanted each of them to know how we felt about them; how we valued them."

At the appointed hour, Amit Amar and a group of volunteers came to start setting up. Other radio listeners appeared to volunteer and the grills were fired up and food unpacked. The *chayalim* started coming in small groups until there was an overflow crowd. "It took time to cook everything up but there was no rushing or impatience." Goldberg describes, "The atmosphere was warm and full of camaraderie. Everyone was enjoying themselves – there was singing and smiles. The volunteers came from everywhere, *chilonim* and *charedim*. There was a feeling of brotherhood and unity. It was beautiful."

About 1,400 *chayalim* showed up for the barbeque and none left without a meal and a virtual hug. Members of ZAKA and Hatzalah came

wellbeing and appreciate the sacrifices they're making for their country.

"At about 2:30 in the morning we were cleaning up. There was no food left at all. Suddenly, three jeeps pulled up with about thirty *chayalim*. I was determined not to let them leave empty-handed." After some quick thinking and a phone call or two, Amit and Yossie found an all-night schwarma shop in nearby Maale Adumim and the *chayalim* were dispatched to pick up their late meal.

Throughout the evening Goldberg was in contact with Rabbi Lerner, facetiming. "What's the meaning of a hamburger?" Rabbi Lerner comments. "It's more than the meal. It was an expression of friendship and solidarity. More importantly, there was a mix of *charedim* participating and it meant a lot to the soldiers. Contrary to any negative impressions, the crowd may have had, here was an image of *charedim* as givers. It was a

the soldiers, who were mainly secular, that their *charedi* brothers care for them and love them.

It only took a day or two and the next barbeque was in the works. Funded by the Westmount Shul in Toronto, it took place in Jerusalem and had the same success.

"Everyone should want to be involved," Yossie Goldberg states passionately. "There are no words to describe what a *zechut* it is. Unfortunately, there is a natural anti-*charedi* feeling in the army. When these *chayalim* heard how *charedim* from America care about them, they were surprised, respectful and pleased. Many of the soldiers were not *daati*, yet sitting around the grill, what did they do? They sang 'Ani Maamin' and 'Hosheanu.' Where was this coming from? Those feelings come from the love exchanged between one Jew and another."

"I'm not a big *lamdan*," Goldberg continued. "But doing *chesed* for the *chay-*



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to help serve and to deliver food to units that could not come in person. When asked about who was sponsoring the event, the soldiers were told, "*Charedim m'chutza l'aretz she'echpat la'hem* [Religious Jews from countries outside of Israel who care for you] were sponsoring the event." They were amazed that *charedim* – who aren't even living in Israel – are concerned about their

big *kiddush Hashem*."

Rabbi Lerner spent the next couple of days canvassing to raise money and awareness, determined to send the word around. The goal was a weekly barbeque at sites around the country for soldier who were risking their lives for *Am Yisrael* every day. "Tell them it's coming from the Orthodox Jews in America who care!" he declared. He wanted to show

alim is a *zechut* I won't pass up. The next time I have a *yartzzeit* I myself will try to sponsor a barbeque and I urge others to do so as well. What bigger *nachas* can you give *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* than to take care of his children, to thank them for their sacrifice."

Rabbi Lerner sums it up. "We can have discussions in the boardrooms, in the Beit Medrash, and at the ta-

ble of *poskim* as to whether *charedim* should serve in the army. There's a time and place for that. But what's important is to realize is that if a young man or woman serves in the Tzahal, he has accepted upon himself to put his life on the line for other Jews. It is incumbent upon us to respond. They are protecting us. That we are able to go to Israel, travel freely and visit the holy sites is because they have put themselves on the line for our safety. If we can support them in any way, we should."

This initiative, born in a few impassioned moments and brought to fruition in only a few days, is reaching and changing Jews all over Israel. The cost of feeding 800-900 *chayalim*, with around 2,000 hamburgers, buns and the "works," is \$2,000 to \$2,500 but the results are priceless. Shuls and individuals have been step-

ping up to join in the cause.

"When there's a war, American Jews gather and pray. We give out names of individual soldiers and daven for their safety. Why not now? We have to support them even when we are not at war," Rabbi Lerner affirms. "The fact that this initiative is produced by the hard work of both secular and *charedi* Jews is even more of a reason to participate – it's good for the soldiers and it's good for *Am Yisrael*. The bottom line is that everyone's got to do something." ▲

For those looking to join in this initiative, contact Rabbi Lerner at info@idfbbq.org. Donations can be sent directly to Rabbi Lerner at THE CCJH, 567 Cedarhill Road, Far Rockaway, NY 11691. Or go to HELPKATIF.ORG and indicate the IDF BBQ when donating.