

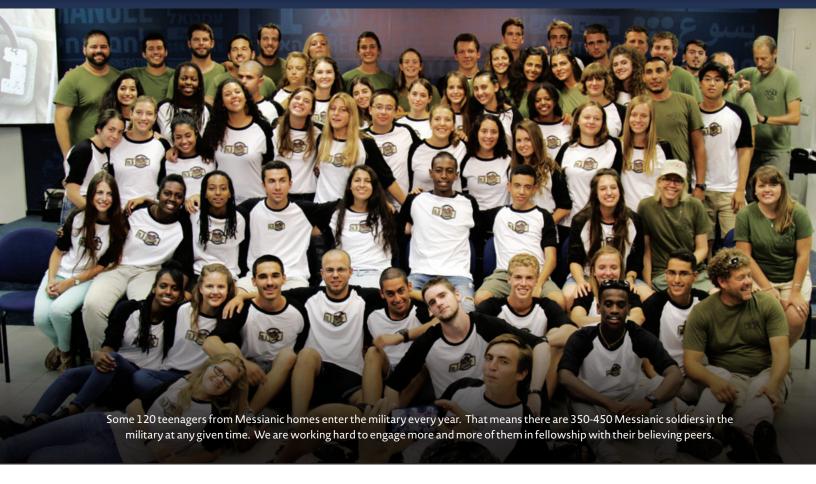


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Since 1976

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# PREPARING ISRAELI YOUTH FOR SPIRITUAL SURVIVAL IN THE ARMY

By Joel Goldberg

hen I entered the army in the late eighties, there were very few Messianic believers serving in the IDF. I was part of the Golani Infantry Brigade, another guy was in the paratroopers and another

in the Givati Infantry—we were scattered across the army.

In the next few years there were more and more Israeli believers serving in the IDF, and a few started gathering for Bible studies and fellowship. When I turned 20 while in the army, one thing troubled me deeply: most of the believing friends I grew up with did not continue to follow

the Lord. Over the years, a lot of Israeli youth raised in Messianic homes have walked away from the faith. A lot.

Some began to have romantic relationships with non-believers. Some simply didn't know how to defend their faith, or know what they really believed. So when they served in the military, they were completely disoriented.

In the army everything is challenged—morality, values, our Biblical understanding, ethical decisions, and, of course, our spiritual walk. Military service is one of the most difficult, challenging times for a believing teenager. It is a spiritual desert. Emotionally, it is one of the most pressured times in life. Sexually, it is a temptation. It is a struggle.

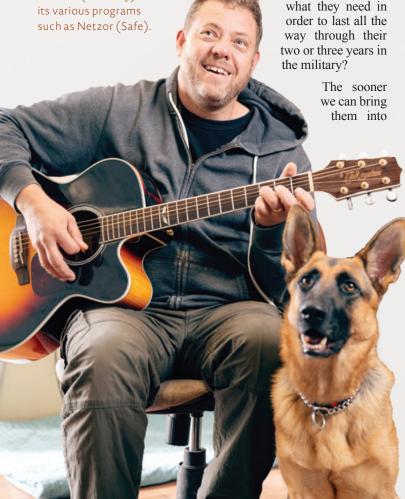
We're talking about the ages of 18, 19, 20, and 21. Men serve three years; women, two. It is a decisive stage of life when one is making critical decisions on who they are and what they believe. They are in the most precarious and challenging stage of their lives.

#### **HELP IS ON THE WAY**

Our organization, Netivah (translation: "Pathway"), serves these teenagers with a total of 22 conferences, camps and programs each year to prepare them spiritually for what's ahead! We provide spiritual "boot camps" from the seventh and eighth grades through the army years for

Messianic Jewish young

people. How do we encourage and challenge Joel Goldberg, founder them? How do we and trailblazer of provide them with Netivah (Pathway) and the military?



regular fellowship with a group of other believers, especially their own ages, the better the chance they will live for the Lord and their faith will not be shaken

About 10 years ago we began a program called Netzor for high school graduates just before they go into the army. Netzor is a 10-day course that challenges these teenagers to know what they stand for and to encourage them to make a decision now! There are kids who have been raised in the faith but have never made a wholehearted commitment to serve Yeshua, no matter what. These are the ones who lose their way in the army. This year we are expecting 60 to 70 to go through the Netzor training.

#### **CHOOSE THIS DAY**

I really believe it is our responsibility to show them there's a decision to make. It's like in Joshua 24, when Israel's leader said, "Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve." The children of Israel came back and said, "We'll serve God." But we also know that Joshua warned them that they could not serve God and other gods at the same time.

"Netzor" means "to be safe, to be guarded." Proverbs says, "Above all things guard your heart."

We help these young men and women guard their hearts and prepare them for the many challenges and distractions awaiting them during their military service. We talk to them about values; about Biblical mandates—what it means to be a servant. Our goal is not to make better soldiers, but to make better disciples for Yeshua who are serving in the military. We desire to make better messengers of the truth, and the hope that the Gospel promises to the young men and women they will be serving alongside.

#### **YOUR JOB: TO BE A LIGHT**

There is nothing we can do about going or not going to the army. This is our society; it's part of our culture, part of our ongoing struggle for our state to survive. And of course, we want to encourage them to do their best as unto Yeshua wherever they are.

> Our goal is not to make better soldiers, but to make better disciples for Yeshua from those who are serving in the military.





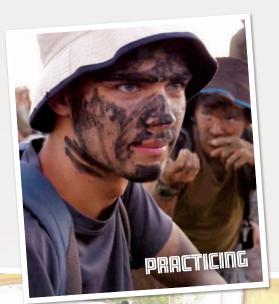
Messianic lewish Teenagers, days before entering the army, spend 10 days camping out, working out and preparing themselves spiritually with 60-70 peers. Every year the number of participants increases.

These believers know serving in a high place in the IDF is respected in our society, and we need to be really good soldiers. But we tell them, "It is not about how you will be the best soldiers or officers. It's about being a light wherever you are!"

One of the things we share is that sometimes God will put them in the worst place, in the most difficult place, with the most difficult people in the army, because there they can be an influence. There they can share the Gospel and the truth with the people around them.

It's not always popular to talk in this way, but I think when they finish this Netzor program, they go with the understanding of what it means to be a servant of Yeshua while serving in the military.





#### FIRST BIG CHALLENGE

There are three big challenges Messianic believers face in the military. First of all, our soldiers talk about the spiritual dryness during their military service. It's fully understood that the routine of one year, two years, three years, surrounded by non-believers, of being challenged day after day for their faith, is wearing; it is not easy for these young men and women to stand for their faith during this long period of time.

We see the military as a spiritual desert, and we want to provide them with water wells along the way, from one well to another well, from a water spring to another water spring. You've not heard heartfelt worship until you've heard 120 soldiers who have been spiritually dry all week come into a time of worship and prayer where we provide a spiritual oasis for their souls.

I'm a worship leader, and sometimes I'll stop playing and we will just sing, and you hear the voices of their hearts crying out to Yeshua. They know they are very much in a spiritual desert.



The second challenge is commitment to sexual purity. For guys, there is pornography and constant temptations. For girls, there is nothing more attractive for young non-believing soldiers than a sweet, pure, young lady that's been brought up in a Messianic home.

One of the things we have found is that our guys and our girls are just not prepared for this challenge. It is not just sexual. It starts with genuine friendships. For example, here's a sweet young girl who's grown up in a Messianic home; she is a true believer. And



Messianic soldiers on active duty witnessing to Messianic high school graduates preparing to enter the military.

the guys are hitting on her left and right. She is not used to that kind of attention because in Messianic circles, in our camps and conferences, guys are respectful. But non-believers are very direct and don't hold back!

Actually, our youth who have

grown up in Messianic homes are quite impressive. They are respectful. They are good soldiers. They do well. They have a high level of values, and we find even Orthodox girls falling for these Messianic boys! Why? Because they're good guys! The Messianic boys then look at these girls and say, "Wow, I've not seen girls like this in our Messianic community!" So there is temptation from every angle.

#### THIRD BIG CHALLENGE

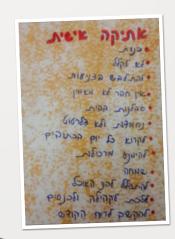
The third challenge is how to share their faith and be a light. Messianic soldiers must be equipped, because for the first time in their life they're being asked real, honest, elemental questions about their faith. Until now they've been able to just speak to whomever they feel most comfortable with. In high school you choose your friends; you choose who you are going to tell you're a believer, and you're honest and open with those whom you choose. Not so in the military. There you are—24/7—with a group of people who can see everything about you.

You are not being examined just on your outward behavior, but they are examining everything—every word you say, every attitude you have. They are measuring your behavior against what you say you believe. So there is no hiding who you really are in the military; it will come out. It will come out in the type of soldier that you are.

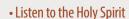
Volunteer guides and leaders for Netzor



# PERSONAL COMMITMENTS FOR BEHAVIOR IN THE ARMY



- Honesty
- Not cursing
- Dress modestly
- No unbelieving boyfriends
- Patience at home
- Being nice but not flirting
- Read the Scriptures every day
- Avoid gossip
- Joy
- Pray before meals
- Go to congregation and conferences





It will come out in your behavior, with the words you speak, the values you hold. Some young believers don't want to be under that kind of scrutiny so they might not tell anyone about their faith.

But many Messianic soldiers really want to be a testimony—want to be a light. For them, one of the big challenges to sharing the Gospel is that there are Orthodox guys and girls who do know the Bible. They know the Scriptures from a rabbinical perspective. Their challenges are deeper. They respond with, "Show me from the Scriptures. Prove to me that you know what you believe in." So that's one of our challenges in Netzor. You must know what you believe, why you believe it, and how to defend it.

#### **COMING FROM ALL OVER ISRAEL**

In our Netzor pre-military program, we gather boys and girls from all over the country, from all the congregations in Israel. We typically host 60–70 teenagers who have just graduated from high school who are about to begin their military service. It is a 10-day intensive program where we sleep outside on the Golan Heights. We hike with them and create bonding and relational activities. We bring in soldiers on active duty who share what it's like to be a believer in the military.

All of our 22 or more annual meetings, camps and programs keep us pushing forward constantly. For example, we feel we must have four to six meetings per year for our soldiers. Most of our conferences are over a Friday-Saturday when the soldiers are on leave. And here is our telltale statistic. Around 90% of the men and women who serve in the army and attend the soldiers conferences have grown up also attending the youth conferences! We have to start early! And we have to continue our relationship throughout their teens and their military service. We have seen that our outreach to believing soldiers is critical to their victorious walk with the Lord.

We study the Bible with a strong emphasis on God's instructions concerning our lifestyle. In a long four-hour session, we discuss ethical dilemmas and values. We then give them cards on which to write down their ethics, values and commitment to Yeshua.

#### **MAKING WRITTEN COMMITMENTS**

We challenge them to write several aspects of their own personal commitments on each of these values: honesty, purity, relationships with others, respect, family relationships, growing spiritually, and continued relationship with their congregation. They know they are making commitments before the Lord. We then laminate this card for them to put in their Bible.

It is a wonderful tool to help these teens keep themselves accountable. We know because of the testimonies coming from these young people after they have been in the army. Their personal, written commitment was, and still is, of great help to keep them strong in their faith.

Then there are others who, though they grew up in Messianic homes and have known the truth, have never surrendered to the Lordship of Yeshua. At Netivah, they have that opportunity.

At graduation, we invite elders and leaders of their congregations, parents and youth leaders, and we challenge them to keep these young men and women in prayer and in close relationship. The Netivah pre-military program has become a safety net—an instrument of God to keep young soldiers strong in their faith.







elieve it or not, Eliezer Ben Yehuda had very little success with spreading the Hebrew language during his first 20 years in Jerusalem. True, he had started an important weekly Hebrew newspaper (eight pages) coming out of Jerusalem. He had taught Hebrew as a spoken language to school children for the first time in almost 2,000 years. And he had begun work on a Hebrew dictionary.

He had even written articles urging the Jews to create a nation state in Israel 19 years before anyone had heard of Theodore Herzl.

But when he arrived in Jerusalem, there were only about 25,000 Jews, mostly Orthodox, who themselves were fierce enemies of Ben Yehuda's vision to make Hebrew a modern spoken language of the Jewish people. He and his wife had almost no friends, let alone allies.

But something was stirring. Amazingly, during that same year Ben Yehuda came to Israel, 1881, the first wave of Jews (called The First Aliyah) started "coming home." Over the next 20 years 35,000 Jews immigrated—mostly young, bright, intelligent and idealistic—to farm. Yet few knew anything about agriculture and before long, half had returned to Eastern Europe.

Due to the primitive and filthy conditions of Jerusalem where the Ben Yehuda's lived, his first wife Devora, and three of his five children, died in the first ten years. Days before she died, Devora wrote a letter to her sister Paula Yonas, living in Moscow, begging Paula to take her place and marry Eliezer to help him accomplish his life's mission to resurrect the Hebrew language.

It is not clear whether Paula or Eliezer corresponded first, but soon rumors were spreading in Jerusalem that the widower's shoulders were less stooped, his eyes were again sparkling and his walk brisker. Letters crisscrossed the Mediterranean between Hemda (Paula's new Hebrew name), and Eliezer.

Eliezer's best friend Nissim Behar

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had a long talk with him. "Eliezer, how can you think of marrying this young girl of 19 after her sister died from contracting tuberculosis from you? I'm telling you this because your own doctor begged me to talk to you. You know yourself that you could die at any time. You must cancel this wedding."

And so Ben Yehuda did what he felt he must. He wrote Hemda, telling her what the doctor had said. The wedding was off. He gave the letter to the doctor to mail, fearful he might fail to mail it.

#### **HEMDA DECIDES**

His two remaining children were puzzled. Their father was no longer excited and would not answer when the children asked about their new mother's arrival. For two weeks, silence. Then one day a cable came. BE CALM. LETTER FOLLOWS, HEMDA.

Hemda had announced to her mother and father that she was determined to marry Eliezer and move to Jerusalem to be a mother to the two children. Her parents were shocked beyond words. Was she going to be another martyr to tuberculosis? But when they saw her unrelenting resolve, Solomon and Rivka Yonas decided to make aliyah together with Hemda and their two younger children! This was a unique family—willing to travel to "the ends of the earth" so their second daughter could marry a genius, but nevertheless, a very sick man.

You may be able to guess what Eliezer's first serious conversation was with Hemda. He told her she would not be allowed to speak to his children until she learned Hebrew!

#### **MOVING IN**

So there they were in Eliezer's small house: Hemda's parents and siblings and Eliezer's mother all now living together—and none of them could speak Hebrew except Solomon, and his Hebrew was elementary.

Eliezer solved the problem. He moved the printing press for his newspaper into their home and five pressmen came to work every day with instructions that they could never speak a word of any language other than Hebrew. And he told his Syrian servant who ran errands for him that he must be with his children from the time they arrived home from school until they went to bed.

#### **STUDYING HEBREW**

Hemda quickly realized it was up to her to decide whether the Ben Yehuda home would remain a Hebrew household or not. So she spent almost all of her time studying Hebrew. Often she cried in frustration that she wouldn't be able to learn the language and complained to Eliezer that Hebrew grammar was next to impossible.

But day after day he gave her lessons. He taught her first to read the entire book of Genesis, and each day gave her a sprinkling of purely household words to learn

After three months, she made an announcement to Eliezer—she was ready now to speak only Hebrew to him. And if he spoke slowly, she felt she could understand.

After six months, she made another announcement. She would from that day forward speak only Hebrew, not just with her husband, but everyone else she met. And so he took her to visit Jaffa and the new Jewish settlements near the coast to show off his bride's Hebrew!

Some people didn't believe she had studied Hebrew for only six months, and even accused Eliezer of playing a joke on them. Nevertheless, the impression she made on people was enormous. Here was proof that Hebrew is a language that even adults could learn and speak. If she could do it, others could, too.

#### THE DICTIONARY

Hemda began to grasp the monumental importance a Hebrew dictionary would be to a reborn nation of Jews. But how could Eliezer publish a Hebrew newspaper—a full-time job—and at the same time create a first-ever dictionary of modern spoken Hebrew? Especially since most of the words that



would go into the dictionary had not yet been created! She, who had just learned Hebrew, realized she would have to help write and publish his newspaper *The Deer* in Hebrew so he could concentrate most of his time on the dictionary.

And so just over a year after she married, she began writing simple articles that Eliezer edited and corrected—and voila! A new Hebrew journalist! In every way, she became a first-class writer and entrepreneur. She even found some clients to advertise—also a first in Jerusalem—as she knew the main issue was always financial.

At one point, her father also wrote articles for *The Deer*. At the time of

Hanukkah, he wrote an article on the victory of the Maccabees with the rededication of the Temple. Taking inspiration from their ancient forefathers, Solomon wrote, "We must collect our forces and move forward." Now, it so happens that the word "forward" in Hebrew can also mean "eastward"—as in "towards Turkey!"

When the Sabbath ended, Jerusalem's ultra-Orthodox leaders who despised Ben Yehuda for trying to make the Hebrew of the Bible into a modern everyday language, went straight to the Turkish authorities and "exposed" Ben Yehuda's attempt to stir up an armed revolt against the Turks!

#### **IMPRISONED FOR TREASON**

Sunday morning, Turkish policemen knocked at his door and took him to jail. He was booked for treason, with the possibility of execution.

His closest friend, Nissim Behar, sent an urgent plea for help to the rich and powerful Baron Edmond Rothschild in France, who, through his philanthropy, supported the poor in the Land of Israel, especially the Orthodox.

Behar also put out an immediate call to secular Jews of Palestine for a "go fund me" to pay for bribes needed to obtain visitation rights to Eliezer and prepare him for what he was to say at his trial.

The money came quickly. Hundreds of secular Jews from the First Aliyah came from all over the country to protest the arrest. A Jewish man and his Arab partner set up a special café outside the prison so Ben Yehuda's visitors could get coffee and refreshments. Many Arab officials who were friends of Eliezer risked the ire of the Turkish government by openly lining up on Ben Yehuda's side. Christians offered their help. Amazingly, the issue brought the Jews together in unity—except for the ultra-Orthodox—in a way that had not been seen before.

For eight days the emaciated, consumptive editor was kept behind bars. The first night he was thrown in a tiny cell with 15 assassins, so crowded that he had to remain standing all night, his face thrust against the small opening at the top of the door in order to breathe.

However, the next day the prison doctor, with a sizeable bribe, pronounced Ben Yehuda's tubercular condition endangered the lives of the condemned murderers. They isolated him in his own jail cell.

#### **WORKING IN PRISON**

Hemda took a rug, bed, mattress, chair and worktable, with other amenities such as bed linen, a lamp, books, ink, paper, and a small oil stove on which to make tea, so he could continue his work. Eliezer grew calmer with every passing day, satisfied to work on his dictionary in his cell as long as need be.

At the trial of Ottoman Empire vs. Eliezer Ben Yehuda, it was clear to the Turkish authorities that the ultra Orthodox Jews had officially excommunicated him. However, surprisingly, the Ottoman judges decided he was not a dangerous rebel, but he was a troublemaker. They sentenced him to one year in prison. Secondly, his newspaper that caused all this trouble would be suspended for a year!

Everyone knew the trump card was in Baron Rothschild's hand because of his financial support. He was deluged from both sides with cables and letters. No response came from the Baron until one day the Orthodox rabbis received a cable. It said, EXERCEZ VOS PRIERES. BARON ROTHSCHILD. Translation: "Stick with your prayers." In other words, stay out of what is not your business.

Suddenly the Ashkenazi Orthodox who were dependent on the Baron's good graces, backed out of the whole thing and the Chief Sephardic Rabbi publicly renounced the ban.

#### **BRIBES ARRIVE**

Ben Yehuda went back to working 18 to 19 hours a day on his dictionary. As the appeal to his sentence drew near, the Baron sent a check for 10,000 francs, half of it for bribes. Ben Yehuda was pronounced innocent. However, the court declared he couldn't publish his newspaper for one full year—another four months!

At the end of the four months, he received more terrible news. The governor of Jerusalem decided arbitrarily to close his newspaper for another year. Ben Yehuda was disconsolate. But Hemda, always his encourager, told him this was surely Providence's way of forcing him to concentrate totally on the really important task—his dictionary.

Six months later, with another bountiful bribe from Rothschild, he received permission to continue his newspaper. Jews throughout the country and in Europe who had depended on this newspaper for news from the Holy Land were thrilled, and



The Deer was more popular than ever. With Eliezer and Hemda's ingenuity and enthusiasm, a flood of articles by young Jewish writers contributed to *The Deer*. Many who became celebrated in the field of Jewish literature got their start through the little Jerusalem weekly.

#### **DEATH ON THE COAST**

Still, disease hounded the family. Hemda's father missed a boat that was to take him back to Russia for a season. Waiting for the next boat in Jaffa, he caught some disease and within a couple of weeks, died. Two of Hemda's five children died of pneumonia. Hemda herself suffered for years from malaria and rheumatism.

Throughout the country, there was nothing accomplished without incredible struggles and a high cost in Jewish lives. Some newly established settlements were completely wiped out. Every single person in the village of Hedera (now a thriving city) died of Yellow Fever.

## HERZL RISES TO LEADERSHIP OF THE ZIONIST MOVEMENT

In 1896, Theodore Herzl, now known as the father of the modern state of Israel, wrote a bombshell book called *The Jewish State*. That was the beginning of the awakening of the Jewish people to return to their ancient home. He followed up with a call for a First Zionist Conference of Jews to take place at Basel, Switzerland, in August 1897.

It was natural that Ben Yehuda would attend that First Zionist Conference. But he couldn't go! He had thought he should become as "native" as possible in the ancient Land of Israel and had taken on Ottoman citizenship early on. Now they denied his leaving the country.

Herzl wrote Ben Yehuda, letting the editor from Jerusalem know he had been unanimously elected a member of the executive board. Ben Yehuda was very honored, but alas, if he accepted the membership, his days of activity in Palestine would quickly come to

an end. In fact, he was warned not to ever mention the word "Zionism" in his newspaper.

And now an added worry arose; Hemda became pale and thin with reoccurring malaria and rheumatism. And so on the spur of the moment he decided to take her to Europe. In fact, they spent six months there, while Eliezer researched ancient Hebrew words in the top museums and libraries of Europe, and conferred with the most renown Orientalists in the world.

#### **SEARCHING FOR HERZL**

While in Europe he had a burning desire to meet with Herzl as he esteemed him as the leader of the whole Zionist movement, to which Ben Yehuda had dedicated his entire life. He agreed completely with Herzl's vision of a homeland for the Jewish people. But Ben Yehuda was deeply concerned that Herzl never mentioned once the importance of the Hebrew language in bringing the Jewish people together.

In England, he visited Dr. Max Nordau, right-hand man of Herzl. Eliezer spent much time explaining the critical importance for a Jewish national language and Hebrew dictionary and Nordau agreed. Dr. Nordau encouraged Eliezer to go to Basel and talk to Herzl himself.

Wearily, he said he would go. He and Hemda traveled to Basel, but when they arrived, a friend told them Herzl had left the day before for Vienna.

The friend quickly sent a telegram to Herzl saying the Ben Yehuda's were on their way to Vienna to visit him. But when they reached Vienna they received another blow. His wife said he had left for an important interview with Emperor Francis Joseph. Herzl told her to urge them to come to the Hotel of the Three Kings in Ischl.

Back at the railway station, the Ben Yehudas just missed a train, and had to wait several hours for the next one. Upon arrival, they went straight to the hotel. The concierge told them, "You no doubt are the people Mr. Herzl went to the train station to meet. But when you were not on the train, he expressed his regrets, as he had to go back to Vienna and then to Basel."

Eliezer didn't have enough money to keep traveling. They headed home to Jerusalem via Constantinople.

### WAITING FOR NEWSPAPER PERMIT RENEWAL

Eliezer decided to stay in Constantinople to renew his permit to publish *The Deer* while Hemda returned home. Coughing blood night and day, he became confined to his bed for eight months. Eliezer was a very sick man.

As fate would have it, Theodore Herzl came through Constantinople on his way to meet again with the German Kaiser. But Eliezer was too sick to meet him! Furthermore when Herzl finally visited Jerusalem, Eliezer was still in Constantinople. Even Hemda could not attend any of the receptions for the honored guest because she was in bed waiting the birth of their fourth child. Herzl sent

word that he would visit Hemda in their home. But he never came.

Finally after he recovered, Ben Yehuda decided that he must talk face to face with Herzl. He must find him at any cost and explain why a spoken modern Hebrew language was the strategic key to a national movement of Jews returning to the Holy Land.

#### **HERZL AT LAST**

He took a train from Turkey to Vienna, and there the two men finally met. Ben Yehuda laid out in great detail his plan for uniting the Jewish people through one language—Hebrew. He told how his life's work was to print a worthy Hebrew-language newspaper and create a Hebrew dictionary. He told how he was pushing schools in the Land of Israel to teach in Hebrew and how he was creating committees to decide on Hebrew words, and encouraging teaching the arts and literature in Hebrew, and even helping the early Jewish farmers to learn Hebrew.

But Herzl simply couldn't see it. He was convinced the best language for a future state was German. Herzl's focus was to convince German royalty to pressure the Sultan into giving the Jews a charter for their homeland. Eliezer Ben Yehuda knew it was not going to happen. He left for home a broken man.

Herzl wrote of this visit in his diary: "I also met a young fanatic who tried to convince me that what our movement needs is to adopt Hebrew as our national language. It is, of course, ridiculous!"

#### **ELIEZER DEVASTATED**

Eliezer's letter to his wife was quite different: "The situation is desperate. Herzl is convinced he will succeed in buying a charter from the Turks and will not talk about anything else. He has no interest in either the newspaper or the dictionary. We are indeed an unfortunate people."

Ben Yehuda never saw Herzl again. It is said by a few historians that Herzl later understood his mistake and even took some Hebrew lessons himself, besides making sure his children learned Hebrew.

What we do know is that Ben Yehuda always stood with Herzl and saw him as leader of the Zionist movement. Though Herzl never once recognized any of his activities and efforts for the cause, when Herzl died in 1904, Eliezer mourned deeply the father of the Zionist movement.

#### Principle Sources:

Fulfillment of Prophecy, Eliezer Ben Yehuda, by Eliezer Ben Yehuda (grandson) 2008; Tongue of the Prophets, The Life Story of Eliezer Ben Yehuda by Robert St. John 1952; https://goo.gl/MVmMUK; https://goo.gl/8r29uN

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