



Behind the Headlines in YESHA

Meet the new generation, born on the Land. "They'll never give up the Land, the dream or the reality," says one observer. Will the change in leadership restore Zionism to the nation?

by Judy Lash Balint

They don't have an office; they don't even have a budget — yet late last year, this group of young Israeli activists confronted the Barak administration's efforts to dismantle scores of settlement outposts in Judea and Samaria [*Yehudah + Shomron + (G)aza = YESHA*]. Planting themselves in front of the bulldozers sent to tear down the simple homes and caravans, members of Dor Hemshech, (the Continuing Generation) riveted the attention of world media and the Israeli public on a fundamental principle of Religious Zionism — the bond between the people of Israel and the Land.

Refusing to go along with the compromise agreement between the YESHA Council and Prime Minister Ehud Barak, a loose-knit group of strong-minded individuals, many the sons and daughters of well-known set-

tlement visionaries, decided this was their time to galvanize and seize the mantle of leadership. The result has been a shake-up of the Religious Zionist community in Israel.

The decline of idealism in Israeli society and the challenges facing the national religious population in bridging the ideological gap with their secular brethren is apparent to numerous Zionist leaders. [See "Is Religious Zionism in Crisis?" in the Fall 1999/5760 issue of *Jewish Action*.] These are the central issues which Dor Hemshech leaders are taking on. Is this new movement just a younger, more energized version of Gush Emunim and the veteran YESHA activists, or are we witnessing the emergence of a revised interpretation of Religious Zionism, an attempt to reach out of its theoretical confines?

Shimon Richlin, a Bar Ilan trained archaeologist who lives in Maale Michmash, is the most visible leader of Dor Hemshech. He states succinctly: "The main objective of our movement is to create a peaceful Jewish revolu-

tion." Richlin believes that since there is no longer a struggle for the physical existence of the state, the task today is to galvanize the majority of Israelis who want a state based on Jewish values. In his view, the willingness to give away parts of Judea and Samaria is symptomatic of a lack of Zionist education and appreciation of Jewish history on the part of secular Israelis. He also blames the influence of negative aspects of western culture which have become so prevalent throughout Israeli society in recent years. Israel at the dawn of the 21st century is simply a very different place from the Israel of 30 years ago, when the young idealists of that era pioneered the early settlement communities. While the issue of giving away parts of the Land takes precedence due to the present crisis, a primary goal of Dor Hemshech is to disseminate Jewish values as an integral part of Zionism.

Richlin has no intention of supplanting or negating the work of the YESHA Council or the Golan Residents Committee. But he does

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want to change the image of those who oppose giving away Jewish land. In contrast to the perception of Gush Emunim as "extremists and fanatics," Richlin wants to build a movement in which every mainstream Israeli would be united in the desire to build a Jewish state.

"Maybe it's because I was born in Tel Aviv: I feel we have to reach out to the secular masses. How is it that after more than 20 years of settlements, people still don't understand our message?" Richlin asks. So one of the first strategies of Dor Hemshech was to arrange informal meetings with anyone open-minded enough to pay attention. "Building communities in Judea and Samaria isn't enough. We have to do that too, but we need to speak to the people in the rest of Israel." At a strategy session last December, one non-observant young man from Tekoa stood up and told the group how people were more open to listening to his right-wing views because he didn't fit the stereotype of the "knitted-kippah settler."

Many of the first generation of ideological settlement pioneers, mostly residents of smaller communities far over the Green Line, identify strongly with Dor Hemshech. They see in this new group a resolute core of motivated individuals ready to carry on their struggle. In some cases it was the "veterans" who directly inspired the next generation to get involved. Oded Porat, 26, an administrator at the Golan yeshivah of Chispin, and nephew of former MK Chanan Porat, decided to take on a leadership role in Dor Hemshech after Yisrael Harel addressed a conference marking the 31st anniversary of the religious *yishuv* of Ramat Hamagshimim. "During the time of Gush Emunim, people your age set up the movement and created a revolution," Harel told the group. "Now is the time to stand up and do something, to take responsibility the

way your parents did. You have to figure out what to do to save your homes," he exhorted.

People like Daniella Weiss, mayor of Kedumim, also helped nurture the young activists. Weiss, one of the original settlers at Sebastia in 1975, acts as an unofficial senior advisor to the group. These young people, Weiss notes, have a deeper connection to the Land. Many of them were born and raised in the *yishuvim* with Judea and

Samaria as an integral part of their childhood landscape. "They have a very pure, very intelligent attitude," she says. "They're a new generation, born on the Land. They have the Land

"...a resolute core of motivated individuals ready to carry on their struggle"

Photo: Ariel Jerzolimski



*Opposite page: Maon Farm outpost
Right: Military police lower a settler from the roof of Maon Farm*

in their blood. They'll never give up the Land, the dream or the reality."

According to Weiss, despite imbibing the ideology of Gush Emunim as they grew up, the new leaders have dedicated a lot of time to discussing their own philosophical notions regarding the tie of Jews to the Land. But Dor Hemshech was spurred from talk into action by government demands to evict Jews from the small ideological communities in Judea and Samaria.

Their first public activity was a hastily called demonstration in front of Prime Minister Barak's residence in Jerusalem right after the YESHA Council agreed to dismantle some of the outposts last October. It was a risky move, since a small showing would have been taken as a sign of weakness. But the event, which drew more than 5,000 participants, signaled the shift of power in the settlement movement from the old guard to their children — the 20-30-year-olds, born and bred in Judea, Samaria, Gaza and the Golan. The battle-weary old-timers stood off to the side, out of the limelight, looking on with pride at their ideological offspring who used the demonstration as the first public expression of Dor Hemshech ideology and tactics.

"We don't negotiate about the Land of Israel. It's not negotiable," Richlin

explained without rancor to the crowd — a thinly veiled reference to the compromise agreement. In a show of Jewish unity rarely seen at political demonstrations in Israel, a group of four friends from Erez, three of the four standing bare-headed, led the crowd in a Naomi Shemer song about building the *Beit Hamikdash*, then each told of his commitment to the

Land and to its preservation.

An observant young man named Chevron Shilo addressed his remarks to Prime Minister Barak: "If you continue along this path of destruction, Honorable Prime Minister, we will be forced to begin a struggle — a just struggle; responsible, tolerant, but determined. We will sit on the roads and sing, we will stand next to the



Photo: J. Balint



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tractors and we'll dance. No one can promise us victory here and now... But rest assured that in the end, [our] faith will emerge victorious."

Sure enough, during the eviction of settlers at the Maon Farm a few weeks after the rally, the hundreds of people who came to try and prevent the government action used song and peaceful civil disobedience to make their point.

Demonstrating another of the 'red lines' of Dor Hemshech, none of the protesters raised a hand against IDF soldiers or police who had been sent to disperse them. "First of all, we understand that this is their job," said Richlin. After being arrested with other Dor Hemshech members in early December for attempting to establish a new outpost at Nokdim, he declared, "I'm completely against the use of violence. There are many ways to be radical, but our goal is to build and be creative, not to destroy. The real violence is the acts of those who would destroy the Land of Israel."

There's a diversity of opinion and lifestyle even among the observant members of Dor

Hemshech. Take, for

instance, Yehoshophat Tor, 29, founder of the outpost of Maon. Tor wears a large woolen *kippah* and colorful clothes. He is a man seeking spiritual quiet in the Judean Hills who speaks of his strong conviction that Jews belong in the place where King David sojourned and which had remained barren until the Jews returned to settle the land thousands of years later. He feels he is expressing his commitment to the God of Israel in the most tangible way, by cultivating the land and raising his family there.

Top: Tzippi Schlissel, a great-granddaughter of Rabbi Abraham Yitzchak Kook, at home in Charasha

Lower: Shimon Richlin, Dor Hemshech leader, urges civil disobedience

Opposite page: An IDF soldier removes a settler's child from the scene during the evacuation of Maon Farm. It was reported that some soldiers suffered conflict in the performance of their duty and cried when the operation was over.

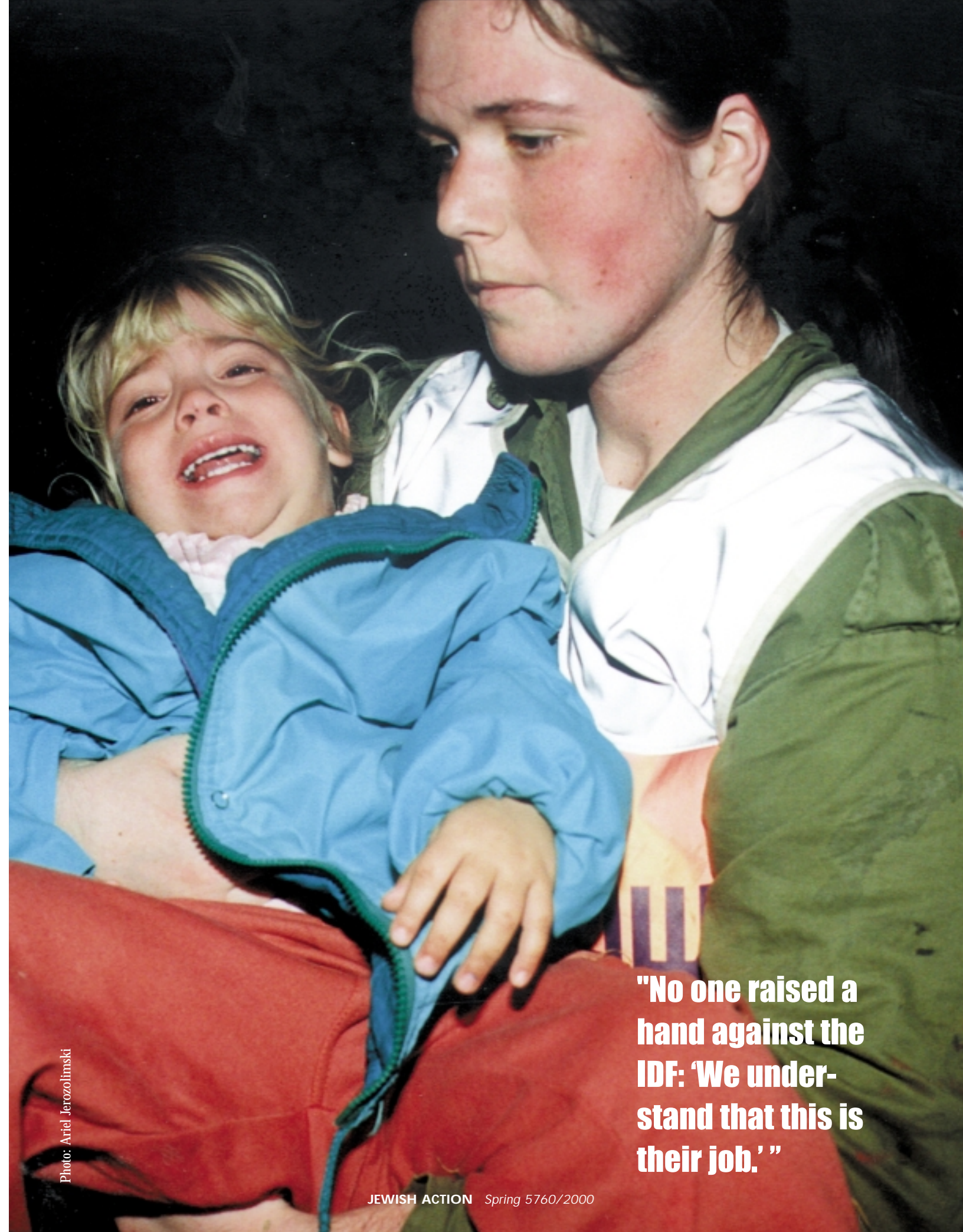


Photo: Ariel Jerozolimski

"No one raised a hand against the IDF: 'We understand that this is their job.'"

Then there are the scions of renowned families such as Malachi Levinger, son of Chevron pioneers, Rabbi Moshe and Miriam Levinger. Given his upbringing, it's not surprising that Malachi Levinger is one of Dor Hemshech's more pragmatic activists. It's Levinger who's responsible for signing up volunteers for a broad array of activities. A sign-up sheet circulated by Levinger at a December meeting listed everything from guard duty and hunger strikes to hosting informational meetings in private homes.

Tzippi Schlissel, daughter of Rabbi Shlomo Raanan who was murdered by terrorists in Chevron in 1998, lives and breathes Religious Zionism. A native Jerusalemite, she is the great-granddaughter of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook and the niece of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. Together with her American-born husband, Rabbi Israel Schlissel, she is raising their seven children in the tiny, one-year-old outpost of Charasha, on a hilltop overlooking Ramallah. The entire community consists of ten "caravans" (portable pre-fab homes), housing 20 adults and 15 children.

Mrs. Schlissel's commitment to work for Dor Hemshech arises out of her conviction that part of the Land of Israel is being given away and that the public must be roused and united. Like Richlin, she believes that a fundamental task of the new movement is a return to Torah-based values. "People today are confused. The media and the cultural elite have hammered into our heads that we don't have enemies anymore, only peace partners, so people are reluctant to talk about *Eretz Yisrael*. The first job is to teach and demonstrate what Zionism — *Am Yisrael b'Eretz Yisrael* — is really all about."

In the early days, Religious Zionist

ideology was largely shaped by certain *yeshivot* and certain rabbis; most notably, Yeshivat Mercaz Harav Kook, and Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook.

Today, though many rabbis are consulted there is no single rabbinic advisor to Dor Hemshech. Mrs. Schlissel for one, misses the influence of Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook. "He had so much strength and leadership. He was not afraid to speak out against the government in those days," she says wistfully.

One potential area of conflict within the movement is the notion of condemning the actions of the duly elected government as "illegal." In a widely circulated public declaration

the Redemption," the state takes on the attributes of a *Malchut Yisrael*, a Jewish Ruling Authority whose dictates may be disputed, but never declared illegitimate.

In their efforts to be inclusive, Dor Hemshech leaders point out that there are those among them who follow the position of Rabbi Yitzchak Ginzburg, whose criteria is to analyze the actions of government leaders, not their status, since he does not see the current State of Israel as a stage of Redemption.

Of course, there are many respected Torah scholars in Israel today who see more complexity in the issue. And some speak up, indeed, to support the government's efforts and promote the idea that if giving away land will save Jewish lives, it must be sanctioned.

But Mrs. Schlissel sees the fight in pure terms of preserving the Land of Israel for the Jewish people. "We're simply at the point where the destruction of Israel is a serious reality. You can cover it up with nice words, but anyone who listens to Arafat realizes that his goal is the elimination of Israel." She points to recent efforts by Arab MKs to diminish the Jewish character of the state, which should have been a wake-up call. "Dor Hemshech is trying to unite those people who believe that Hashem gave this land to the Jewish nation," she says.

Golan Heights activist Oded Porat views the role of the new leadership in the context of the Patriarchs. "Avraham made the breakthrough; he was the first generation. Yitzchak strengthened what existed: that is our task, to establish roots, to strengthen what already exists. And Yaakov broke new ground — that will be the task of my children." **JA**



Photo: J. Balint

Yehoshaphat Tor addressing supporters at his home three weeks before Maon Farm was dismantled. His wife, Shira, and child are in the background.

endorsed by many right wing groups, including Dor Hemshech, the policy of uprooting Jews from their homes was condemned as "an act of brutality, violence and barbarism that is palpably illegal." This idea is problematic for those who follow the teachings of Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook. For Rav Kook, who viewed the State of Israel as the *atchalta d'Geulah* — "the beginning of