

July 14, 2011 Thursday 12 Tammuz 5771 16:26 IST  Print  Back to original article

THE JERUSALEM POST

Israel's best-selling English daily and most-read English website

We must be watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem, working to ensure the rights of all faiths in the Holy City.

Voice Your Support

Become a Watchman on the Wall of Jerusalem and receive a FREE bookmark ▶



Photo by: Courtesy

Appreciation: Remembering Avi Schaefer (1988-2010)

BYBY BENJI DAVIS
22/02/2010

For this remarkable young man, there was no contradiction between defending Israel as a soldier and on campus and reaching out to the other side.

The lack of potential leadership is an ongoing concern among Israelis. When, we often ask, will a leader emerge who has the ability and integrity to unify the people of Israel, and bring peace among Israel and its neighbors? Two weeks ago, we lost one of those potential leaders.

Early on the morning of February 12, while crossing a street in Providence, Rhode Island, Avi Schaefer, a 21-year-old student at Brown University, was killed by a drunk driver.

Avi was my friend, my inspiration, my hero. Immediately after graduating high school, Avi and his twin brother, Yoav, made aliya from Santa Barbara and enlisted in the IDF. Beginning in the Special Forces unit of Nahal, Avi finished his distinguished service three years later as a counter-terrorism instructor to Israeli and international soldiers.

Avi frequently spoke about his decision to move to Israel to youth groups and new immigrants. He was an outspoken proponent of Nefesh b'Nefesh and the Friends of the IDF. Shortly after enlisting, he appeared with Yoav on the Yair Lapid show on Channel 2. When asked why they made aliya, Avi replied, "Goldstar, hummus and the girls." He always knew how to put a smile on everyone's face.

Avi had an intimate way of speaking about Israel. He also had the capacity of an authentic leader to connect with people. From his peers to the contemporaries of his parents, Avi made you instantly feel like a close and beloved friend. When speaking with him, you felt as if you were his only concern in the world, because at that moment, you were.

His friends from the army talk about Avi with the love of a brother and the admiration for a redeemer of Zion. "We all looked to Avi for answers to everything, and he always had something important and wise to say," notes fellow soldier and close friend Nir Knoller.

FOLLOWING HIS army service, he enrolled in Brown, concentrating in international relations and Middle Eastern studies. He instantly became a leader on campus. Just recently, he organized a student fundraising party for Haiti, with over 500 attending, raising nearly \$6,000 for Israid, an Israeli organization working on the ground in the disaster-stricken country.

He devoted himself to the seemingly paradoxical task of being at once a pro-Israel activist and a leader of Mid-East dialogue efforts with Arab and Muslim students.

But for Avi, there was no contradiction between defending Israel against defamation and reaching out to the other side, searching for potential partners.

After attending a meeting by the group Common Ground: Justice and Equality in Palestine/Israel, he wrote an open letter to the group that appeared in the Brown Daily Herald. "I don't know how to convince you that I dream of peace," he wrote, "desire it more than anything and have devoted my life thus far to it. How do I convince you of this, after I tell you that I volunteered to fight in the Israel Defense Forces? If I said that I decided to go not because of hatred, but rather to work for peace, would you believe me? I went to the army so that my children will not have to - a dream I fear may not come true."

Seeing the former IDF soldier's passion for peace, Professor of Judaic Studies David Jacobson recruited Avi, and Palestinian student Sami Jarbawi, to develop a course examining narratives from both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"I was delighted that the two of them had this open mind, and they really became friends," Jacobson said. "It was quite a thing to see."

AVI AND Sami planned on living together this summer, traveling in Israel and the West Bank in their mission to understand each other's stories, and educate others that "an enemy is someone whose story you have not yet heard" - a lesson Avi learned from his father.

On the wall of Avi's dorm room was this quote from Psalms: "Seek peace and pursue it."

But even as he pursued peace, he continued his commitment to the war against terrorism. Avi had several meetings with the Providence SWAT team in his short time at Brown, training them in instinctive shooting tactics he specialized in during his IDF service.

"A young man of inordinate strength and integrity, Avi had already begun to have an impact on the Brown community," President Ruth J. Simmons of Brown University wrote. "By all early signs, he was a student who was going to make the most of his time at Brown and his mark on the world after Brown."

Avi's parents, Rabbi Arthur and Laurie Gross-Schaefer, have established Avi's Foundation to further his dream of dialogue.

In introducing Avi posthumously to people who didn't have the privilege of meeting him in life, I hope not only to preserve his memory but also to inspire Avi's peers in their commitment to Israel's safety and to peace. May his memory be a blessing.

The writer is a new immigrant from Los Angeles who will be joining the IDF in October. For more information on Avi's Foundation, please contact Benjidav@gmail.com

[Print](#)[Back to original article](#)

[About Us](#) | [Advertise with Us](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [RSS](#)

All rights reserved © 1995 - 2011 The Jerusalem Post.