

# Leadership, Healing and Caring



## Yonatan Link

A Tzohar Bar Mitzva Counselor, Medical and Public Health Student

### The Decision That Changed My Life

I made Aliyah from Australia with my family when I was seven years old. I remember that moment when my parents told me that we were moving to Israel and the celebrations that followed. There is no doubt that was the decision that impacted my course in life more than any other, and I am deeply grateful to my parents for the gift that I have each and every day to live here in Israel.

### The Key to Leadership

I learned at the Chorev High School in Jerusalem followed by the Hesder Yeshiva in Yerucham. I then served six extremely meaningful years in the IDF in the Intelligence Division and in the Officer Training School. I think my most rewarding service was training officers who would command units and brigades. Today, I continue to meet with both civilian and military groups where I lead workshops focused on leadership skills. Since the morning of Simchat Torah, October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, I have been serving in milluim.

### Getting Married

I recently got married. Friends of mine and friends of Yifat attended a "Matchup" event together and our names were suggested but it initially never came to pass for various reasons. Last December 25<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of my family's aliya, I got a very brave and honest message from Yifat proposing that we go out. That first date led to a second and the rest was history leading us under the chupah together.

### To Serve as a Physician

Since age 16 I have been volunteering with Magen David Adom in various roles. To work as a doctor provides the privilege to be there for people in their individual times of need, while delivering compassionate care and relying on all the relevant knowledge to provide the most professional and appropriate care possible. For me, the study of medicine is very similar to studying issues of faith, and it's always incredible to discover the intricacies of the human body and how all the systems work alongside one another. We rarely stop and appreciate just how much is taking place at any given time within our bodies allowing us to function and thrive.

### The Only Religious Person in the Room

When I first encountered the work of Tzohar, I immediately felt that I had found something really special. In different areas of life, I often find myself as the only religious person in the room, particularly in the army, and I thought that this could be a great opportunity to provide a bridge and access to our Jewish traditions in a way that is open and respectful of others. I became involved with the Tzohar Bar Mitzva program and underwent training to become a counselor which has only allowed me to feel more confident in this path.



### Not Just Reading the Torah

When I finished my army service, I began actively working as a Bar Mitzva counselor and that continues until today – even in the busiest times in my life. I see these moments as a counselor as a sort of island of sanity and calm amongst all the other things I'm involved with.

Preparing a young man for his Bar Mitzva is so much more than just getting him ready to read the Torah. Over the course of eight meetings, I make the effort to introduce him to a world of ideas that he can relate to and that will remain meaningful to him throughout life. We discuss what responsibility means when reaching this stage of Bar Mitzva, what is the importance of Shabbat and Tefilla, how to use a Siddur, why we put on Tefillin, and why this occasion of Bar Mitzva is such a source of celebration and importance in the Jewish life cycle.

### The Importance of Family

For me this process isn't just about the Bar Mitzva boy but a path that we travel along together with the family. I make sure that they aren't coming to me but that I am traveling to their home where they feel comfortable. That involves me accepting a sense of humility where I work to ensure that I am approaching them in the most respectable and accommodating manner.

One particular family that I established a strong bond with was a diplomatic family. The father was an Ambassador and most of the time they were located abroad, representing the State of Israel. But they weren't necessarily prioritizing Jewish practice on a daily basis in their home. The Ambassador and his wife had married through Tzohar and they had reached out with the hope to continue that connection with their son's Bar Mitzva celebration. We learned via Zoom where I reviewed topics related to Jewish tradition and Zionism. We had the chance to send a package to the embassy where the family is stationed with Tefillin ahead of his Bar Mitzva along with a Tanach. The moment where he put on Tefillin and I was watching from afar on Zoom was particularly moving. His father was standing alongside him and the occasion was really special for him and his family. Those are the moments where we can really appreciate the value of what we're doing for these boys and families.

Photo Credit: Arik Sultan

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