

light broke through the clouds and I thought God had joined our ceremony. Even today, since I have learned to regard the memorial service critically, I think back to that moment

and know that it helped create my identity. I would not want children to grow up in Israel, in any community, without such moments of remembrance, and belonging at school. 🕊

## Minister of Defense

Mishael Zion

A song written by Israeli troubadour Ehud Banai, “Real or a Dream,” raises questions that many Israelis have wanted to ask their defense ministers. Where are you taking us? Where are we headed? Why have we been dragged out to unrecognized fields, in Lebanon, Sinai, Gaza? Can we hope that the ancient wind that is being renewed in the light-filled fields of *Eretz Yisrael* will become a soft welcoming breeze, or is it doomed to turn into the torrent of violence we’ve seen in our homeland time and again?

As Israel reaches its 60th birthday, I look toward a vision that might pull Israel out of the strange night. I hesitate, not wanting to produce a naïve vision — here, in Israel, where many a vision has crumbled in the face of a harsh, violent reality. Yet between bouts of Israeli cynicism, one such vision might look like this: In Hebrew, my job is called “*Sar HaBitachon*.” *Bitachon* translates not only into safety and security, but also into confidence and faith. How do we help Israel reach a place of *bitachon*, of confidence and faith?

Paradoxically, *bitachon*, I believe, will best be achieved by reducing the constant discourse about Israel’s security — by shifting the spotlight on Israel from issues of securing life to issues of celebrating life. My goal as defense minister is to get Israel’s defense concerns out of Israelis’ faces so that we can reorient ourselves toward other pressing concerns.

Obviously, the first step is to reach a peaceful status quo and basic agreement with our Arab neighbors and, most importantly, with our “co-dwellers,” the Palestinians. After many decades in which ministers of defense believed that the only way to maintain security was by controlling other people’s lands — in Lebanon, the Golan, Gaza, the West Bank, and the Sinai — we have recently moved to a different and radically simple defense strategy: we will protect our borders from *within*. Though this new strategy has yet to prove itself fully, as the citizens of Kiryat Shmona and Haifa, or those of Sederot and Ashkelon,

can testify, I believe it will eventually become the best option for Israel and our neighbors. It is time to reestablish this country with clear and fixed borders.

Admittedly, it will be hard for Israeli Jews, and for Jews across the world, to readjust to these new borders. We will be forfeiting places in which some of our most profound historical events took place, including — in all probability — the place we consider to be the center of the world. Though relinquishing borders requires relinquishing dreams, memories, and expectations, it will allow us to build a new, fresh relationship with our country, state, and land — free of guilt, injustice, and the *hilul haShem*, desecration of God’s name, that accompanies sacrificing life for “holy” space.

Maintaining safe borders will not be easy. Many experts believe that fences (or concrete walls) lead to good neighbors. This may have been a necessary first step. But if we are to maintain safe borders over the long term, we must build partnerships through joint industrial zones, centers of research and education, and places where we can share our contradictory historical narratives. Eventually, we might take down those fences.

Yet beyond all this lies a greater vision for the ministry. To date, the agenda and focus of Israel’s defense (albeit an understandably dire concern), has prevented the country from creating a vibrant Jewish-Israeli culture — a just, multifaceted society, and a cohesive, minority-embracing, Israeli identity. My vision for the ministry and Israel’s defense forces includes a process of *tzimtzum*, of contraction and restriction, which would allow other discourses — on Israel’s defense and on broader issues such as Israel’s identity, culture, and society — to surface. By removing the constant discussion about the fragility of the present, we allow people to imagine their futures in bold and creative ways.

Yes, the safety of our borders and the eradication of terror are of crucial importance. Yes, we take pride in our army, in its officers and its

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*Professor Alon Tal, from the Blaustein Institute of Desert Research at Ben Gurion University, is the past chairman of Life and Environment, an umbrella group for 100 Israeli environmental organizations.*

soldiers. Yes, we are proud to serve in the IDF, and believe that it really does strive to act as a moral body within harsh circumstances. But we must stop expecting the IDF to serve as the glue that connects Israelis to each other. The IDF cannot be, and should not be, Israel's "melting pot." We shouldn't expect Israel's memorial day for fallen soldiers to be the catchall day for Israeli solidarity. Rather, let's build, enrich, and recreate Jewish and Israeli ritual and culture that doesn't center on threats but rather on possibilities, that doesn't linger on enmities but rather on covenants.

It is also time that Israel builds its relationship with Diaspora communities on

shared memory, mutual respect, and a combined future, rather than on the basis of fear and insecurity.

Living in Israel, I have often felt that people are afraid to dream bold dreams here, since they are so bogged down in an insecure reality. But if we can re-center the discourse outside the language of threat, we can reinstate confidence and faith and the ability to dream. My vision for Israel is one in which no one remembers who the minister of defense is, because they are so busy dreaming and creating the possibilities inherent in the amazing, challenging, and paradoxical project that is the State of Israel. 

## Minister of the Environment

*Alon Tal*

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Israel's Ministry of the Environment. The fact that it took 40 years for the state to provide "ministerial" protection for its environment says something about national priorities during the country's formative years. And the circumstances surrounding the ministry were not auspicious. Unlike many western countries where grassroots green activism galvanized support for a new government commitment to the environment, Israel's ministry was created as an adhoc solution to solve a political crisis: a Likud minister had been promised a cabinet portfolio and there was none available. These humble beginnings portended a history of ministerial mediocrity. Israel's modest environmental achievements have often been achieved *in spite* of its minister of the environment rather than because of his or her leadership. Before addressing the specific environmental agenda, there are three underlying structural changes that Israel's minister of the environment must pursue in order to produce substantial progress.

First, an adequate budget will indicate the government's commitment. Thus, the first thing a minister of the environment needs to do is to receive a commitment to increase funding five-fold; that would allocate one percent of the government's budget. Such an increase hardly seems excessive, given the severity of the problems and the enormity of the responsibility associated with protecting the "Holy Land." The results would ensure more and higher quality technical personnel, increased inspection hours

in the field, greater assistance to small industries to purchase pollution control equipment, additional support for environmental education programs, more precise monitoring, and much else.

Second, given the historically sporadic uncommitted tenure of people holding this portfolio, the new minister must make a personal, long-term commitment to the position (given the obvious political constraints). More important, the minister should design programs and policies with clear quantitative objectives for the coming five and ten years.

Finally, the ministry must be given authority in areas where the absence of such authority currently prevents successful operations. Currently, Israel's minister of the environment frequently finds him or herself to be "irrelevant" in a range of critical environmental issues. Consolidating new ministerial authorities is critical for an integrated national environmental policy.

### The Agenda

First, conduct a serious comparative risk assessment to help the country set ecological priorities. There seems to be some dissonance between the resources invested in environmental problems and their actual severity. For example, air pollution in Israel is responsible for over 1000 premature mortalities a year. In 2007, although 46 percent of the spot checks at factory chimneys revealed violations of emission standards, the number of enforcement actions was trivial. The result is that there were 45 days of air pollution violations in Israel last

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