

From *Maariv* Daily | Moshe Steinmetz
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Translation from the Hebrew

**The educator that gave second chances:
"He taught us that great love produces
results."**

Thanks to Dr. Chaim Peri many children from the margins feel part of society. Hundreds of them, including Knesset members and senior military officials, came to thank him for decades of achievement during a special evening of recognition.



Dr. Chaim Peri and Zion Amir (Photo: Marc Israel Salem)

"If Chaim Peri did not receive the Israel Prize for lifetime achievements or education then apparently the Israel Prize has ulterior motives", said Member of Knesset Elazar Stern on the stage of a surprise party that the students of the educator Dr. Chaim Peri organized in his honor, and he added that "it is still possible to change this."

The place: Beit Avichai in Jerusalem, the time: last Tuesday.
Participants: hundreds of students of Dr. Peri, today aged

30-60, including Knesset members, mayors and senior military officers.

"He succeeded"

Peri (73), who was born in Tel Aviv and is now resident of Zichron Yaacov, led for three decades the Yemin Orde Youth Village, founded the "Village Way" organization that developed and distributed his educational philosophy. He began his educational work in the late 1950s in Sderot as a soldier-teacher, and after his discharge he became the principal of an elementary school in Beersheba. Later he established an immigrant Nahal group, a steering center for Ethiopian immigrants in the education system and a military preparatory program in Hatzor Haglilit. Between 1979 and 2007 he headed Yemin Orde Youth Village in Carmel while continuing to develop his unique educational philosophy for which together with all his other activities he won the Prime Minister Shimon Peres "Guardian of the Child" award.



Changed immigrant children to leaders in society. Peri at the event. Photo: Marc Israel Salem.

"Peri formulated an educational philosophy that focuses on identifying the emotional needs of adolescents and on

providing a response that guides them to constructive strength", explained the State Ceremony Committee as one of the reasons for choosing him to light a torch on the State of Israel's 57th Independence Day. "In his youth village hundreds of students, most new immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia and South America and alongside them Israeli children from disadvantaged backgrounds. They live in the village, making a warm and strong community that supports young people during and after school and working in the spirit of the historical Youth Aliyah, which changed new immigrant children to leaders in society".

The surprise party organizers say that the response was so great until they were forced to limit the number of participants. Indeed, many hundreds of excited students filled the Beit Avi Chai Auditorium in Jerusalem, including Eli Moyal, past mayor of Sderot. "After the parents it is Chaim:", said Moyal excitedly, "in the middle of the 1950's' Sderot is a transit camp, down trodden family, ten children, tin shack, nothing. All of a sudden this angel arrives and becomes my teacher and after school he would come with us home to see if we had food to eat and he would do lessons with us, and he made us crazy so that we would not become criminals. And he succeeded".

Who would you be if it weren't for Chaim Peri?

"I don't know if you could interview me. Most of the kids in our class, how to say it, died under unnatural circumstances. It was Sderot of that time, I owe my biological life to my parents, I owe my life to him. When he calls me to come, even after 40 or 50 years, my brother Yossi and I leave everything and come. Still today we call him "Chaim the teacher", not Dr. or anything else, he was the teacher for life (in Hebrew - "teacher l'Chaim").

"There was no high school in Sderot, and he came and

opened a high school. If it weren't for him we would be construction workers", says his brother Joseph Moyal, "he established a youth movement club in the town, before then there were no youth movements in Sderot and he introduced us to the Israeli experience".

As mentioned above, Peri was very involved with the integration of immigrant youth in society, and also in Yemin Orde a large percentage of students are new immigrants, many of them Ethiopian. One of them was Danny Admasu, previously executive director of the Israeli Association for Ethiopian Jews and an educator himself. "Every graduate of Yemin Orde knows that Yemin Orde is like home", he says, "rarely are the boarding schools in Israel, the details and the places, the beds, the rooms and the public spaces in which the children play at the level of being like in the family home that they have, if not better. He is a man that invested in gardening and in the wide open spaces, in the playgrounds. He is the man that sees the complete child; this is a man that can look at children as if they were his own. He was not a principal that dealt only with the educational system, its management and bureaucracy".

Something you remember about him specifically?

When I was in the army, one day Chaim called and said, 'Danny, where are you? We don't have your address', I don't know how he found me. I just graduated from the boarding school and I told him on the phone 'Chaim, let me go. Leave me alone, I am a big boy'. And he said 'give me an address, I want to send you packages'. And I say to him 'Why are you sending me packages, I graduated'. In the end he said to me 'no matter, give me your address, but you know what, you need me so you will have someone to whom you can say to leave you alone because you are a big boy". That is the uniqueness of Chaim. Every second of his life he is being

philosophical. Reflecting on the conversation during the conversation itself.

Visionary

As mentioned above, even MK Stern honored the event with his presence as well as MK Shimon Solomon, (Yesh Atid political party) a Yemin Orde graduate.

Although he never studied with Peri, Stern defines himself as a disciple. He met him while establishing the community settlement of Hoshaiya in the Jezre'el valley, where Stern resides. "Chaim had an idea to establish the settlement together with Youth Aliyah children from Iran, so we met, and all these years, with all the challenges for Israeli society like absorption of former Soviet and Ethiopian Jewry you would always see him there," he says. According to Stern, in Peri is "a rare combination of an educator with vision, connecting all of this vision to current and future needs of Israeli society. Look at Shimon, and whatever I say is the superfluous, this is the embodiment of Chaim's success, look how far he has come".

Shimon, who is MK Solomon, says: "I came to Yemin Orde as an insecure child, without Hebrew, far from home, and Chaim let me feel that I am not alone and that I am capable. Instead of focusing on studying, he focuses on personality and empowerment".

Many educators have given personal attention and focus on personality. What distinguishes him from others?

"I talk about Yemin Orde today as if I just graduated yesterday, because life does not end in high school or college, and if in every stage of life you know how to utilize what you learned from Chaim, that's what is special".

Mehereta Baruch, who first became known on "The Ambassador" TV program and now serves as Deputy Mayor of Tel Aviv, also passed through Yemin Orde and has fond memories of that period. "Like most of the Ethiopians here, we also immigrated without parents and were absorbed in Youth Aliyah boarding schools", she says. "When we needed to go to high school, I asked to go to Yemin Orde, it was THE boarding school. Chaim is my guide. I studied at the boarding school for two years and he supported me also afterwards, for example when I participated on the TV show "The Ambassador" and I needed to bring a figure that influenced me and was meaningful to me – I brought him. So he even appeared on "The Ambassador". I will never forget Chaim's Shabbat talks, their message was "don't be a jellyfish, know who you are and be yourselves'. What distinguishes him from others is that he did everything from the heart and is one of those rare educators, who have Torah, intention and a way. And when you receive this, it influences you greatly".

"If we had a lot of Chaim Peris the educational system in the State of Israel would be in a different place", said Zion Amir, one of the senior criminal lawyers in the country, who was also a student of Peri's. "This was not a teacher who does something because he is supposed to, but rather a teacher that continues to support you for many years".

"In 1984 I arrived in the village and those four years were of personality formation", shares Tiberias mayor Yossi Ben David his impressions, "at the age of 14 you were taught independence, to deal with things and to believe in yourself. And Chaim has taught us that great love produces results".

Small link in an eternal chain

Education, as expected, also came into the home. "When I was 14 years old my father entered the world of youth

villages, and the work was 24/7, he was frequently outside of the home and a lot of the work entered the home", says Adi, his oldest son. "It was to grow up in a reality where children came into to eat with us or to talk with father at every hour and every situation because that is what is must be done and sometimes it was to put the family after the work, but it was not something that hurt us, rather it was something we learned to respect and to value.

What is the power that drives him?

"Wherever there was distress – that is where he was, and that was something that evolved with him and in addition, his belief in the real connection between all of the Jewish values and universalism, repairing the society, the State of Israel and Zionism.

Did any of you follow in his footsteps and is involved in education?

"We are five children and no one is involved in education, but we all are. Each went as far as possible from being an educator and each one of us in his own way is involved in education. My younger brother is a poet and intellectual, and for many years has been involved with residential homes for adults with Asperger's and supporting people with special needs; another brother is a chef, who is involved with workshops for special needs groups; one brother is a photographer, whose work is related to education; there is a brother who is a historian who is involved in instruction and teaches in a university; and I am a psychologist".

After the words of appreciation of the students, Dr. Peri himself goes up on the stage and says in modesty: "what I am is really just a small link in eternity". "I learned from all of you". He said. "In Sderot I learned the love of my fellow man, we felt humble next to these people, and the same thought and the same idea were in Sderot and in Yemin

Orde . It is not my story, it is the story of you and of my teachers that I pass to you and you will pass it on, today we are a village that spreads it's "way". Here in this auditorium sit several Muslim youths, our graduates, we love them very much. When we took them in to Yemin Orde we were blamed - 'Why are you putting them in a Jewish institution?'. The answer was – because this IS Judaism. The State of Israel must embrace children that experienced horrors in the place where they were born', that makes us only greater".