



# BROTHERS IN ARMS

At Yashar LaChayal, it is really all about our soldiers

Stephanie Granot

**B**eing a native New Yorker, Avi thought the cold would be a non-issue for him. After all, he'd survived walking to school on 10 degree days, Fahrenheit. "How cold can it be in Hebron?" he asked Lior, his friend and fellow Givati soldier. But 45 minutes into their patrol, when he saw Lior blowing on his fingers to try to warm them, he could barely feel his own fingers. Ten minutes later, their commander pulled up in a jeep, bringing fleece gloves that had just been delivered

by Leon Blankrot, co-founder of Yashar LaChayal.

In English, *yashar la'chayal* means "directly to the soldiers." There is no doubt that Blankrot takes this mission seriously. A hundred percent of every penny donated to the organization goes directly to purchase items that IDF soldiers need, when they need it most. The organization is staffed mostly by volunteers, and all operational and administrative costs are funded directly by a donor family in Miami.

Since its inception in July of 2006, during the height of the Second Lebanon War, Yashar LaChayal has been providing for the basic needs of Israeli soldiers. During the war, the Moskowitz family of Miami Beach, along with a small group of volunteers, worked to purchase, collect and package much-needed supplies (basic toiletries, sunscreen, towels, underwear, etc.) and transport them directly to the soldiers at the front. On occasion, the volunteers themselves had to take





shelter as Katyusha rockets rained down. They got in their cars and drove north, beyond the last civilian, to deliver supplies to soldiers who had been hastily mobilized and were running low on essentials. They met IDF units about to enter Lebanon and sent additional supplies to soldiers deep in Lebanon.

After the war ended, the volunteers continued to receive requests for supplies from army commanders. In response to this need, Yashar LaChayal was established as a recognized nonprofit organization in Israel and the US, dedicated to helping Israeli soldiers serving on the front lines.

"Yashar LaChayal is constantly in touch with IDF commanders around the country, assessing the

needs of the soldiers to determine what's lacking and how it can fill the gap," says Jack Silverman of East Brunswick, New Jersey, president of the American chapter, Yashar LaChayal coordinates its operations months ahead of time to ensure that its supplies arrive in a timely fashion. Avi's unit got its gloves in January, not July.

"With summer here, we are working to get the soldiers water backpacks," says Silverman. "The IDF insists that all soldiers carry a supply of drinking water; but water left in a canteen for hours becomes hot and unappealing, not to mention that it is not easily accessible. Water backpacks keep the water cool and have drinking spouts, so the water is easier to carry and more accessible."

The organization has already distributed thousands of water backpacks to an overwhelmingly grateful response and is hoping to supply more to as many soldiers as possible.

By helping Israeli soldiers to be as comfortable as possible, Yashar LaChayal also goes a long way toward reminding them that when they stand guard on cold nights or under the blazing sun, there's a wall of international Jewish support standing behind them.

*If you'd like to help Yashar LaChayal provide water backpacks for soldiers to keep them healthy and well hydrated, go to [www.yasharlachayal.org](http://www.yasharlachayal.org) and designate your gift for The Water Backpack Campaign.*