

“... It was one of the most rewarding things I have ever done.”

VOLUNTEERS FOR ISRAEL (VFI)

Give them your very best... you!

BY RON MANGEL

Most of us contribute to Jewish organizations and Israel in particular. We send in our checks, take our deduction at the end of the year, and that is the extent of it. Sometimes we remember which organizations we give to, and sometimes we remember how much.

Several years ago, I gave in another way. My wife, Sheila, and daughter, Jaquelin, and I had scheduled a trip to Israel to volunteer for three weeks on an Israeli Defense Force, IDF base in Israel. We were scheduled to go and then the war with Gaza broke out. We questioned whether or not to go, but we felt that if they ever needed volunteers, it was now, so we went. This was my first stint, my daughter's third, and my wife's second. All of the preparation work was done by Volunteers for Israel, a non-profit US organization.

We were on an army base with about 30 men and women of all ages, ranging from early 20s to 80s; I was 76 at the time. We worked from mid-day Sunday to mid-day Thursday, and at that point we were escorted to the bus station to travel wherever we wanted to, with the proviso that we return to the bus station early Sunday morning to go back to our base.

During the week, together we packed 59-pound field medical backpacks. The items in the packs allowed the medics to not only administer to slight injuries, but also to perform minor surgery in the field. It was one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. We were all supervised by one of the regulars because the work had to be exact.



As an example, the packs had to be organized in such a way that the soldier would know exactly where an item was and wouldn't have to look for a syringe for example.

We slept in army barracks, with the men on one side of the road and the women on the other; we were divided about 50/50. The mattresses, sheets and blankets were supplied by the army—and definitely weren't up to Motel 6 standard. There were six of us in my barrack, and some of us have remained friends since then. There were meetings in the evenings with the IDF soldiers who were there to help and guide us, but we mostly made our own entertainment. I was lucky there were two yeshiva boys, and I learned Talmud with them.

For those of you who want a rewarding, life-changing

experience—not instead of giving money, but in addition to it—please consider giving your time. It was a very self-satisfying experience that I will never forget. You will need to pay your own way to get there, but once you are there, the weeks on the base are taken care of. That includes a place to sleep and three meals a day. This is an experience you will be proud of, will never forget, and will tell your children and grandchildren about. For more information, please visit vfi-usa.org and also feel free to email me at rmangel66@gmail.com or call me, my cell number is 609-992-4975 or Sheila Mangel sheilsun@aol.com, 949-322-3480. ☆

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