

The Delegitimization of the Legitimization of Corruption: The Etrog and its Flaws

By Avinoam Bar-Yosef

The revoked appointment of Major-General Yoav Galant as IDF Chief of Staff has aroused feelings of frustration not only in the Army, but also among Jews and friends of Israel around the world. Even if it does not sink to the level of the Boaz Harpaz forged document affair, which raised serious questions about the conduct of the IDF elite alongside convictions and lawsuits involving some Israeli leaders, it has not escaped the notice of the young generation of Jews, nor has it bolstered their feelings of pride and identification with the State of Israel. However, these revelations, which can also be seen as part of a purification process -- cleaning out the stables -- may, in the end, strengthen ties with the Diaspora and the understanding of the resuscitation mechanisms of Israeli democracy.

Despite the delegitimization campaign conducted against Jewish sovereignty in the Middle East, in which IDF officers have become the primary targets, the IDF is still perceived by many Jews throughout the world as of the embodiment of "beautiful Israel." Pictures of handsome soldiers in uniform still decorate the offices of Jewish leaders in organizations and communities, community centers, and even private offices of Jewish doctors or kosher restaurants around the world.

Yoav Galant is rightly perceived as one of the nation's heroes. His contribution to the security of Israel, its operational ability, and the positions that he filled qualify him as an appropriate candidate for any security position. The allegations against him are not, on the face of it, any different from the misconduct of Moshe Dayan z"l when he expanded the area of his villa in Tzahala, or of Ariel Sharon in claiming the Shikmim Farm for himself and his heirs. There may have been others, and it is possible that when Barak mentioned that Galant could have been appointed Minister of Defense he is speaking about something that he knows and we don't, yet.

Much ink has also been spilled describing the ratings-obsessed media's role in exposing the affair. The Galant story was not revealed in episodes of *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, *Israeli Idol*, or *Dancing with the Stars*, and, therefore, criticism of the media's behavior should not be judged in those terms. Even if there were occasional displays of exaggeration and questionable taste, generally speaking, the media fulfilled its role properly.

Cases of problematic behavior on the part of senior figures have been disclosed in Israel since its inception, as is the case in other democratic countries. We may assume that this conduct will not disappear entirely, even with the revocation of Galant's appointment. The junction of money, power and media interests is inherently problematic and most likely will not go away easily.

However, it must be emphasized that Israel experienced an especially difficult time in this regard during Ariel Sharon's premiership. He too is a man of many deeds, a charismatic hero of Israel who took care of his own while also showing a willingness to sacrifice his life for the Zionist project. The Greek Island affair, as well as his

connections to Martin Schlaff, Arafat's partner in the Jericho Casino, were not, strictly speaking, symbols of the revival of the Jewish people. That was, actually, the proper circumstance in which to criticize the legal system for turning a blind eye, the media for keeping silent, and the decision by several pundits to treat him like an Etrog (with extreme care and delicacy) as a result of the Gaza disengagement and his ideological shift.

Ignoring Sharon and his associates' conduct brought about an even worse phenomenon than corruption: the legitimization of corruption. This did not reinforce the pride of the younger Jewish generation around the world. With his tragic exit from the political stage, Israel's democratic mechanisms resumed functioning. This led to convictions, investigations, and measures taken against public figures that strayed from the norm. In this context, with all honest regret for the price paid by Galant - who was also Sharon's military secretary at one time- one must hope that the revocation of his appointment will also lead to the delegitimization of the political Etrog.

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