

IDF Wounded Veterans Capture the Hearts of New Yorkers

12 disabled IDF veterans who were wounded in action visit New York in a life-changing journey sponsored by Belev Echad

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- A delegation of disabled IDF veterans departed Israel Monday, March 7 to New York for a tour sponsored by the humanitarian organization [Belev Echad](#). "Our purpose is to give these heroes a break, introduce them to the Big Apple's world-famous sites, and embrace them in the love of the local Jewish community in order to help them rehabilitate emotionally and give them strength to return to life."



The Belev- Echad delegation in New York. March 15, 2022 □

The journey is not uniquely about the soldiers; it's also about sharing the experiences of an Israeli civilian-cum-soldier defending his homeland and educating Americans about what's really happening in Israel.

“

The State of Israel owes you a huge debt of gratitude,”

Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Gilad Erdan

“Throughout the ten-day trip, our soldiers meet thousands from our community who are deeply moved by the sacrifices they've made. Belev Echad means ‘With one

heart,’ and this isn't just a slogan; it's a way of life,” says Shevy Vigler, who co-founded Belev Echad with her husband Rabbi Uriel.

The current tour is led by Doron Akiva, 25, of Petach Tikva whose life story is all-too-familiar to Belev Echad. It's the tragic story of thousands of Israelis who fought valiantly to protect their fellow citizens and barely made it home...

"I was 18 when I was drafted into Givati Brigade, after which I was assigned to a commando unit as a sniper and the squad leader of a physical combat unit. Following two-and-a-half years in service, including operations and detainments in Judea and Samaria and Ramallah, our entire unit was transferred in March 2017 to the Qalandia refugee camp. Our mission was to nab a terrorist, and I was standing guard to ensure that the coast was clear. They apprehended the terrorist and spirited him away. "As soon as he was in custody, noise sounded from every direction. A terrorist ambushed me from the roof of the adjacent house and dropped a cinderblock on my head from a height of four floors. The cinderblock made direct contact with my skull. I lost consciousness, but somehow, was still aware of my surroundings and that I lay prone on the floor, unable to move.

"The terrorist lifted another block to finish me off, but at the last second, my buddy Guy dragged me out of death's path and underneath a protruding roof. It's thanks to Guy's quick thinking and action that I'm alive to tell this tale, because even with it, I barely made it.

"Unfortunately he wasn't entirely quick enough, because a second later, a second cinderblock crashed onto my foot. My body was one mass of agony. My neck was exploding in pain; I couldn't move my left hand, but I still had no idea how badly I'd been wounded.

"I was taken to Hadassah Hospital where a slew of tests revealed that three of my neck vertebrae were torn. Following a difficult period lying motionless in the hospital and another four months



This week, this group of veterans were wined and dined in Manhattan's finest establishments, toured the Stock Exchange and Statue of Liberty, drove around in Lamborghinis and were treated to a luxury helicopter tour.



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at home in bed, I commenced intensive physiotherapy and hydrotherapy, until I regained most functions.

“Most. Because in the aftermath of my injury, I lost my capacity to compete in martial arts matches which shattered my lifelong dream of being an Olympic champion. It was odd, because after all I endured, this realization was what crushed me. My dreams vanished in a puff of smoke, or more crudely, a dropped cinderblock.”

It was Belev Echad that helped him emerge from his morass of depression. In July 2018, Doron was invited to join a group of wounded IDF veterans on a trip to New York, in the course of which he met Rabbi Uriel Vigler who showered him with warmth and admiration and opened his heart and home to him, letting Doron know that he could still go far in life. “Rabbi Vigler taught me that disabled people like me can still live our dreams. Maybe not the ones we originally planned, but other new and meaningful ones. He taught me never to give up hope.”

“Belev Echad is actively involved in helping IDF soldiers rehabilitate in a nurturing, emotional and spiritual way. These trips, hosted by many in the NYC Jewish community, provide the soldiers with a memorable, meaningful adventure that remains with them for life. We’re so proud of what they do to help safeguard our country, and the trip is one way for us to express that appreciation,” says Yossi Nasser, Belev Echad Board Member.

After Doron and his new buddies returned to Israel, Belev Echad kept in touch, refusing to let the inspiration of the ten days dissipate, and sponsored them in various capacities so they could pursue new dreams. Today, Doron directs the sports department and mixed martial arts at Belev Echad’s Israel center. Having felt the long-term benefits of the trip in his personal life, he’s also started leading groups of veterans to New York, teaching them by example and witnessing the journey’s rehabilitative effect on other soldiers.

This week, Doron had 11 veterans were wined and dined in Manhattan’s finest establishments, toured the Stock Exchange and Statue of Liberty, drove around in Lamborghinis and were treated to a luxury helicopter tour. Belev Echad hosted them along with 300 guests for an elaborate Shabbat dinner, and over 1000 will be joining for the upcoming Purim parties.

The veterans also met with Israeli Ambassador to the UN Gilad Erdan. “Every time I meet these heroes, my heart swells in love and pride,” expresses Erdan. “Achieving international legitimacy for what we do in Israel is essential. I shared my personal efforts to achieve recognition and expose the anti-Semitic lies and hypocrisy that characterize much of the international conversation about Israel and the IDF. I told them then, and I’ll say it again: The State of Israel owes you a huge debt of gratitude, and I’ll continue doing everything in the international arena to protect you and the IDF’s freedom of action. You’re an inspiration to us all!”

Ayala Mandelbaum
Ayala

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