



THE ALEH Negev facility for the severely disabled is designed with the needs of the patient in mind, but also 'the human experience of the family,' says Jewish National Fund CEO Russell Robinson. (Aleh Negev)

Doron Almog and Alan Dershowitz connect over defense of the most vulnerable

• MAAYAN JAFFE

For some people *tikkun olam* ("repairing the world") is a catchphrase, or the day they volunteer at a soup kitchen. For others, *tikkun olam* is a way of life.

For Maj.-Gen. (res.) Doron Almog, it is his life.

During his military career, which included leading an operational task force in Tripoli in 1973 against the terrorists who murdered the Israeli Olympic team during the Munich games, and commanding a number of clandestine missions to bring about 6,000 Jews from Ethiopia to Israel, Almog was known for ensuring every soldier felt like part of the team and that no soldier would ever be left behind.

"It was the most difficult battle, the one I did inside myself," said Almog. "But I made a commitment, on behalf of my brother Eran, to fight for the security of Israel."

Russell Robinson, CEO of Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund, explained, "When you have tragedies, when you find out your brother was left behind as a soldier, you can be angry or you can be a leader. A leader says, 'How am I going to change the system? How am I going to make it better?'"

Articles and videos of Almog in the field show him running with the last soldier, offering encouragement, treating every man and woman as the most important individual – and instilling in his troops the message that no one, ever, should be abandoned in the field.

He made a similar decision a decade later for his late son, Eran (named after Doron's brother, who was killed in the Yom Kippur War), who was born with severe brain damage. At eight months, Almog was informed of the severity of Eran's condition – that he would never speak or use the bathroom on his own, "never be normal" or at his age level. Almog recalled that many people recommended he and his wife, Didi, send their son away.

"I think the most significant decision we made was to raise him, love him and never be ashamed of him," said Almog. "He was my greatest professor... He was a constant reminder that I am a human being. You know, we may be considered heroes, we may fight critical battles for Israel, but we are also vulnerable – flesh and blood – and sometimes we will find ourselves completely dependent on a higher power."

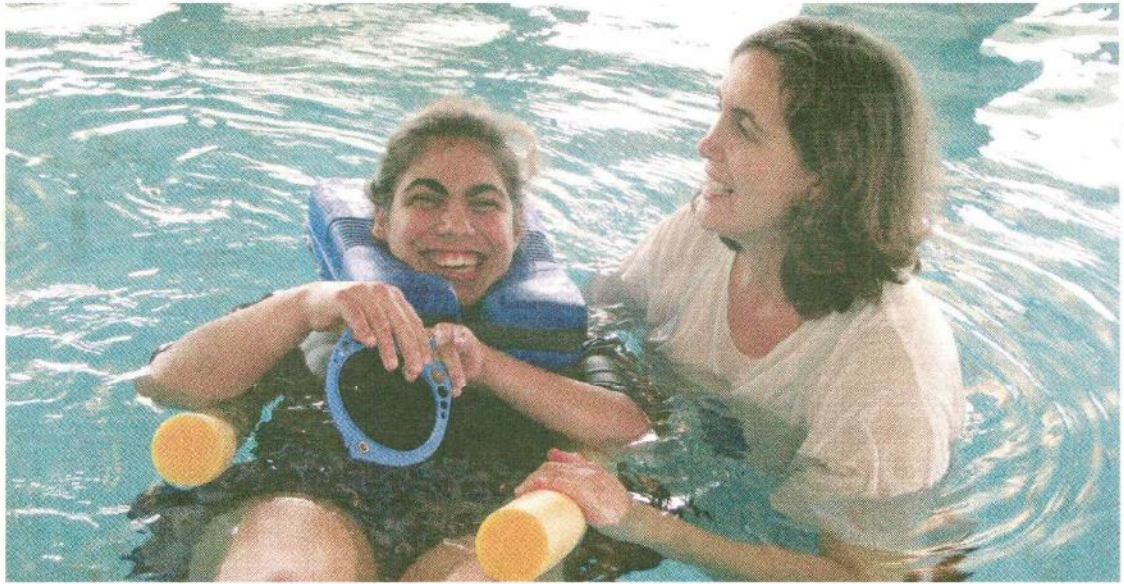
Eran died in 2007, but Almog's choice to raise his son continues to impact his own life, the lives of hundreds of children like Eran and their parents and caregivers

through his creation of and continued investment in Aleh Negev Nahalat Eran.

Aleh Negev, in the news lately for its location near Ofakim in the South – a hotbed of Hamas rocket attacks – is a community for severely disabled people that gives them the opportunity to live in a beautiful, quality home, be treated with dignity and love, and develop to their fullest potential. With 135 children and young adult residents and 4,000 outpatients (with a growth plan of serving as many as 12,000 outpatients), it is the only village of its kind in Israel and among the most renowned centers in the world.

"Eran was the spirit and inspiration for the founding of the village, which provided him with so much joy and love," said Almog of Aleh Negev. "On behalf of my son, Eran, I want to offer hope for the weakest and most defenseless members of Israeli society."

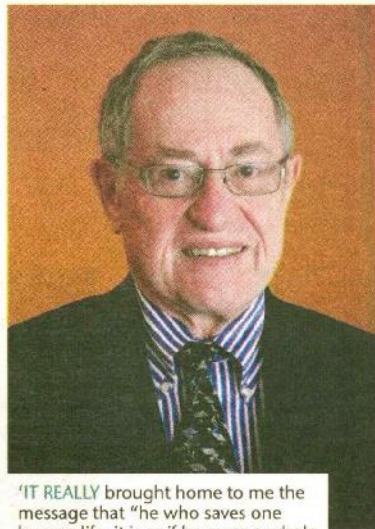
The battle to provide the youth at Aleh Negev with every available means to grow and develop their potential, is more challenging for Almog than his toughest military missions, he said. In Operation Entebbe, for example, the soldiers had to fly 4,185 kilometers, kill terrorists, free hostages and make it back home. But "in a military mission, the goals are clearly de-



A YOUNG girl swims in the pool with the help of an Aleh Negev worker. The facility is home to 135 children and young adult residents and sees 4,000 outpatients. (Aleh Negev)



MAJ.-GEN. (res.) Doron Almog was the driving force behind the expansion of Aleh Negev Nahalat Eran, named after his late son. (Aleh Negev)



"IT REALLY brought home to me the message that 'he who saves one human life, it is as if he saves a whole world,'" says Alan Dershowitz of his visit to Aleh Negev Nahalat Eran. (Marc Israel Sellem)

fined. If you complete all the steps from A to Z, the mission is a success. But with children like Eran, step A is endless; it's not clear how you even define success," said Almog.

Prof. Eric S. Maskin was introduced to Almog a few years ago by a mutual friend. When he first learned of the general's passion for Aleh Negev, he said he found it to be almost a contradiction. How could you be a high-ranking officer, focused on physical and mental endurance and success, Maskin asked himself, and spend your days at a place where residents suffer from the most devastating developmental challenges?

However, upon meeting Almog, "I realized the two go very well together. He is someone who wants to protect people and there is more than one way you can do that: One is through a strong defense, another is through a project like the one he runs in the Negev."

Robinson said Almog has approached Aleh Negev with the drive of a military man; every square centimeter of the facility is constructed with the living experience of the patient in mind, but also "the human experience of the family." He noted the detailed architecture, the pathways lined with plants and the ornate chandeliers in the entryways.

"He put his own sweat, blood, tears and soul into it," said Robinson. Last month, Almog met a soul mate in Alan Dershowitz, the world-renowned Harvard law professor, who made a first-time visit to the Aleh Negev campus. While on paper these two have

seemingly little in common, according to Danny Grossman, former director of the American Jewish Congress's Israel office, when the two met there was no denying their immediate synergies.

"Each one, in his own way, is a hero of the Jewish people," said Grossman. "One has stood for Israel's defense on the front lines militarily. The other, on a daily basis, is defending Israel on the battlefield of public diplomacy."

Dershowitz, who shied away from the comparison, claiming Almog to be "a true, true hero" (Almog did likewise), called his visit to Aleh Negev "the most important one" of his whole trip - and Dershowitz had meetings with top dignitaries, including Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

The similarities emanate not as much from their CVs, but their outlooks. Aleh Negev, said Dershowitz, encapsulates everything he has stood for throughout his lifetime.

"It really brought home to me the message that 'he who saves a single human life, it is as if he saves the entire world,'" said Dershowitz, quoting *Ethics of the Fathers*.

Dershowitz said that a society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable. In his life, he has offered pro bono legal counseling to thousands of people who could otherwise not defend themselves. He has stood up in the public sphere against the vilifying and marginalization of Israel, and tikkun olam has been his driver.

"My support for Israel has cost a considerable amount in terms of honor and acceptability," said Dershowitz. "It is a small price to pay for trying to do the right thing."

As the child of Holocaust survivors, Dershowitz said he was taught to always defend the underdog. In New York, that meant African Americans who were subject to segregation, the poor or those on death row. In the international sphere, it means the tiny State of Israel against the collective Arab nations.

"He defends the process," said Robinson, "he defends the human factor."

In the past two years, Almog has taken on an additional mission of bringing equality and opportunity to 200,000 Beduin citizens living in the Negev. Robinson said Almog positioned Aleh near Ofakim in hopes of bringing greater employment opportunities to one Israel's poorest towns.

"Finding someone who has the courage and conviction to stand up for what he believes in, who has true ethics and morality, is a rarity," said Robinson, noting he would have liked to have been there on the day that Dershowitz and Almog came together. "Finding two people like that is even rarer. Alan and Doron are those kinds of heroes."

Noted Grossman: "Aleh is not just about helping disadvantaged children, and what Alan does is not just about protecting civil liberties. It's about fighting for those who cannot fight for themselves - the key to making our society better. That's tikkun olam."

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