

'Chutzpah' Explains Israel's Spirit of Innovation

Jonathan Kirsch, October 16, 2019
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Amid the dire headlines out of the Middle East, we sometimes lose sight of the good news about Israel. That's exactly what we find in "Chutzpah: Why Israel Is a Hub of Innovation and Entrepreneurship" (HarperBusiness) by Inbal Arieli, a former Israeli intelligence officer who today is a tech entrepreneur and the CEO of a company that pairs Israel Defense Forces (IDF) veterans with cutting-edge companies in the private sector.

In a sense, "Chutzpah" continues the story that began in "Start-Up Nation" by Dan Senor and Saul Singer. Arieli argues that the history, culture and traditions of Israel — which she calls "a tribe-like community" — explain why the Jewish homeland boasts a thousand "mature" tech companies and more than 5,000 startups, the world's highest concentration of startups per capita, one for every 2,000 citizens.

"At the root of this approach is the Israeli chutzpah, a determined approach to life, which might seem to some as rude and opinionated, or, to others, seen in a more positive light, as preferring directness to political correctness for the sake of achieving one's goals," she writes. "With the right amount of chutzpah, anything is possible.

Arieli insists that the entrepreneurial impulse starts in childhood among Israeli children, including her own three sons. Even the common word "Yalla," — which is borrowed from the Egyptian language and means "Let's go!" or "Hurry up!" — represents a core value of Israeli life, according to the author: "An expression of eagerness to get down to brass tacks," she explains. "Can also express haste, impatience, enthusiasm, or simple practicality."

One concrete example is found in some preschool playgrounds. Instead of standard playground equipment and "structured toys," she explains, Israeli children are given an opportunity to play with "furniture, tractors, ladders, beds, tires, barrels, old stoves, pans, teacups, cutlery, fabrics, wicker baskets, paint cans, paper, straw, etc." She concedes that it's a risky environment, but she also argues that it encourages the skills of entrepreneurship.

"[L]etting young children climb chairs, handle heavy wooden objects, and play with rusting pots and pans gives them a chance to experience and evaluate risks," she writes. "It's true that children may get hurt while playing. But getting hurt is an integral part of living. Life entails all kinds of risks."

Arieli introduces us to another word that sums up an Israeli value: balagan, a Russian word that has taken on "a quintessentially Israeli meaning," that is, "a state of mess, in which things have no preordained order." Israelis are compelled to deal with "a lot of balagan and, surprisingly, this has been a good thing. [I]f it were not for balagan, how would we ever learn to deal with conflict and disagreement?"

INBAL ARIELI MAKES A GOOD CASE FOR THE PROPOSITION THAT "LEARNING TO COPE WITH UNCERTAINTY, AND DEVELOPING SKILLS TO ADAPT TO CHANGING EXPERIENCES, IS IN THE DNA OF ISRAELI SOCIETY."

A third key word is *chavurah*, which American Jews use to describe a circle of friends but which is also used in Israel to identify what Arieli calls a "gang." While we regard gangs as a curse, "its connotations couldn't be more positive" among Israelis, as Arieli argues. Starting in childhood, "the core members of the gang [remain] a constant, creating a strong support group for one another." Citing the experience of her 14-year-old son, Daniel, who belongs to such a gang, she insists that the founders of successful startups must know and like one another. "Like with Daniel's gang, you want to surround yourself with potentially long-term partners as cofounders, ones you can really trust."

Arieli also praises the scouting movement in Israel, which includes more than 55 youth organizations whose membership totals a quarter-million. One such organization is *Cyber Girlz*, whose members often go on to serve in technological units of the IDF. And she points out that mandatory conscription, which she describes as "nearly" universal presumably because of the exemptions and the forms of alternative service that are available to the Charedi community, is yet another Israeli experience that equips most young men and women for civilian life. "Israelis are constantly crossing the borders between the military and civilian realms, and leveraging this fluidity in both realms," she points out.

Out of such "organized chaos" of life in Israel, as she puts it, and thanks to the "positive tension" between the individual and the collective in Israeli life, she makes a good case for the proposition that "learning to cope with uncertainty, and developing skills to adapt to changing experiences, is in the DNA of Israeli society."

She also acknowledges that Israel is highly diverse, "one of the most heterogeneous countries in the world," and boasts that its population "consists primarily of immigrants from more than seventy different countries." She sees diversity as a positive quality, arguing that "diversity is a hotbed for creativity and innovation."

Even the most harrowing experiences of life in Israel contribute to Israel's successful coping skills. Arieli acknowledges Israelis live under the threat of attack by its enemies, ranging from rocket fire from Gaza to terrorism on the streets of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. But she sees the experience as a source of strength.

"It is no wonder that children who grow up in Israel under a constant state of uncertainty — who are given the guidance and tools to deal with this situation — can develop important skills for dealing with uncertainty in all aspects of their life," she writes. "No wonder so many Israelis are drawn to the entrepreneurial world, with all its challenges and uncertainty — the uncertainty feels like home."

One more Hebrew phrase is cited by Arieli as a key to understanding Israeli culture: *yiheye beseder*, which she defines as "a positive, some would say blind, belief that things will be all

right." To understand what the phrase really means, she writes, "we need to tap into the heart of Israel — its language, history, community and practices." Yet she also suggests that a stirring line from a song by Israeli singer Meir Ariel holds a clue: "We survived Pharaoh, we'll survive this, too."

For anyone who is tempted to regard Israel as so similar to the United States that it could be our 51st state, "Chutzpah" is a healthy corrective. As Arieli shows us in vivid and persuasive detail, Israelis live with risks and stresses that we only rarely encounter, and they have developed their own approaches to dealing with them. We all have something to learn from Israel, and not just when it comes to startups. Buy "Chutzpah: Why Israel Is a Hub of Innovation and Entrepreneurship" on Amazon [here](#).

QUESTIONS

1. Explain in details the Term '**Chutzpah**' in your own words **1 page**
2. According to the term 'Chutzpah' what do you think Rwandan Young people need to do so that our country becomes a Hub of Innovation and Entrepreneurship? **Your answer should be 800 words minimum**
3. **Describe World Mission High School simply 300 words**
4. **Write the World Mission High School Mission statement, Vision, and Values.**

SUBMIT YOUR ANSWER ON THIS EMAIL

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