



Zionism 2040 - The student who wants to make the Galilee flower



photo by Itay Barnea

29-year-old Gilad Herman, a water-engineering student who moved to study and live in the Galilee, describes the transition from central Israel to the north and his motivation, from an early age, to contribute to society and strengthen Israel's periphery.

The love for the state of Israel and the desire to contribute to society and the environment were instilled in Gilad Herman by his parents from an early age. Ever since he was just a child, it was clear to Gilad - who is the eldest son of Efrat, the director of an association for the promotion of the arts in the periphery, and Omri, an organizational consultant and workshop facilitator - that his life would be devoted to something much bigger than himself. In the Israeli Army he served in the artillery corps, and when it came time to choose an academic course of study, he chose the field of water engineering. Although he could have studied in one of the most prestigious academic institutions in Israel's central region, he chose to study in far-away Galilee, at the Kinneret Academic College.





What made you move to study and live in the Galilee?

The Galilee is a winning combination of several elements. One of the things that attracted and enchanted me about studying in the Galilee, and at Kinneret College in particular, was the authentic mix of the various sectors of the population – you can see Arabs, Druze and Jews sitting together and studying together for a test. I saw genuine ties and friendships created, and realized that it was possible to establish a different type of dialogue here that is capable of integrating between all the different segments of Israeli society. This is something that has always excited and motivated me - to create a better society and to bring different groups of people together. In my view, a real and constructive discourse can lead to the creation of a different, better society. The college enables real meetings between different sectors. For example, *haredi* (ultra-orthodox) students come to the college and suddenly encounter not only the secular public, but also Israeli Arabs and Druze. For me, this opportunity to generate encounters between people is the best way to create a social fabric based on a mosaic of the general population that seeks to develop together. At the college everyone feels equal, and this accompanies us both outside the college and also later in life. In addition, I was attracted to the region because I am a nature lover, and I love the quiet of the north. The college also has a very unique curriculum along with an excellent learning atmosphere.



photo by Itay Barnea





It sounds as if you view studying here as a kind of mission.

I absolutely see studying in the Galilee as a mission. If you look at the map of academic institutions in Israel, most of the well-respected institutions are located in the Gush Dan area and in the center of the country. Ultimately, these institutions are primarily geared to accepting students who come from very specific socioeconomic backgrounds. They prefer students who have financial backing to support them during their studies. I wanted a different kind of experience, one that includes a broader perspective on Israeli society, and I wanted to contribute to society. And by the way, I don't think that contributing to society and contributing to yourself is self-contradictory. Quite the opposite – when you gaze outward to see what the world needs - not just your own individual needs - you end up giving a huge amount to yourself. It was clear to me that the decision to move to the periphery meant settling for less, but I wasn't daunted, because I knew that I would receive things that I would never get in Israel's center. Moving here has been accompanied by a sense of mission, because it is a statement that I intend to support and promote Israel's periphery and to do something larger than life. If that is what motivates you, I believe that you will also succeed much more on a personal level.

It is important for me to help create a young-spirited culture in the north. There is a large elderly population here, and students bring a new spirit and energy that is vital to this area. All of a sudden theater groups are established, there is more culture and nightlife, as well as lots of community and environmental involvement. This is all thanks to the colleges and academic institutions that bring many young people to the region. Since conditions in the Galilee are not easy - for example in terms of employment opportunities – we must be more creative and entrepreneurial. The unique situation enhances our drive and motivates us to create something out of nothing.

Back during my military service, I had a big dream. I served in the Golan Heights and fell in love with the region. I said to myself, "no matter what, I will live here", so for me, studying at Kinneret College was a natural decision that came together with the understanding that I can spend my adult life and start a family here. I moved north not as a passing episode, but with the intention of staying.

Was it difficult to adjust to life in the north? What is it like living here compared to the center?

Yes, it was difficult at first and it took me a while to adapt and adjust. There are some things that are different here, for instance, something as basic and self-evident in central Israel as regular public transport everywhere along with high frequency of buses. Here, you wait an hour for the bus to Tiberias. And in general, there are countless services that you must travel farther to receive, which in the center are just a short distance from your home.





You also have to get used to different standard of living, to a smaller salary. I settle for less material possessions, but have a greater satisfaction that stems from other things - the connection to nature, wilderness and a different pace of life. Maybe I'm not earning as much as I used to earn, but I am much more tranquil and relaxed. I am in a place where I focus on the things that really interest and matter to me, and I do not pursue unimportant things. And of course, there is the sense of community. Life here is much more communal, there is a sense of cooperation and solidarity, and a sense of family - values that are very important to me. On one of the holidays, for example, I couldn't go home because I had to work, and I really wanted company and a family feeling, so the neighbors and I all celebrated the holiday together, and I totally forgot that I missed my family.



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When you made the decision to study in the Galilee, did you have any concerns about how you would manage financially during your studies? The periphery has fewer employment options.

I had some concerns, but I was confident I would be able to put roots down here. I am resourceful and a natural entrepreneur. I also realized that anyone who chooses to stay here must become part of a community. You need to create your own social structures and networks in the area. And anyone who is committed to succeeding will succeed. I see it in people who have succeeded in establishing themselves here before me and I see it in myself.





The KKL-JNF scholarship was another significant factor that enabled me to study and support myself here in the Galilee. Before I received the scholarship as part of the Scholarship 2040 Program, I had to work at two and sometimes three jobs simultaneously just to support myself. The scholarship enables me to study calmly, invest more time and energy in my studies, and excel. Beyond the important financial backing it provides, it also makes you feel that people care and see you. When a significant and important organization like KKL-JNF creates a scholarship program like this, it propels the entire area forward and encourages countless young people to move, study and make their lives here in the north, and in Israel's periphery in general.

What attracted you particularly to water engineering studies? What do you like most about this field?

What interests me most in this field is the community aspect. There is not enough awareness regarding water as a significant component of the environment and the lives of us all. The ecological impact of water on the environment is enormous. For example, a factory that releases water with high ammonia content into the earth rather than channeling it into the sewage system can pollute water sources used for drinking water and the irrigation of agricultural fields. There is also an understanding that there is a gentle equilibrium in nature, and I feel it is my mission to protect it in the best way possible.

What can transform the Galilee into a thriving region that will attract more and more young people?

The first thing we need is investment and the creation of job opportunities in the periphery. We need companies that come with in-depth thinking and a broad worldview of how to develop the people who work for them. For example, a company like Intel in Kiryat Gat is something the northern periphery region yearns for. You need an international-sized business that says "I'm willing to invest money in the people who live here". We need a factory that will attract academics and other entrepreneurs to move here. As soon as there is a population with the necessary skills and education, more entrepreneurs and enterprises will move here, and the entire area will flourish.

What do you think of the KKL-JNF 2040 plan for settlement in the Negev and the Galilee? Is it really possible to get 1.5 million Israelis to move to these regions over the next twenty years?

I think this is a clearly and perfectly feasible plan, but it must be carried out with the cooperation and encouragement of government ministries and the support of additional outside investors. Hi-tech and manufacturing professionals must move here to the north and to the rest of the Israeli periphery. KKL-JNF provides invaluable support to students through the Scholarship 2040 Program, which in general is an incredible initiative. Programs like these encourage people like me to see our future here in the north. Unfortunately, the





government is not doing enough, it needs to do more to encourage and push this over forward. More energy is needed.

How do you see your life once you graduate?

I see myself living here with my partner who has a child that I am raising as a second father, and we plan to expand our family in the next two years and have more children. I am currently working at Greenfield Eco, an industrial wastewater treatment company. My hope is to continue working here in the Galilee, because my intention is to put my roots down and start a family here. The time has come for the state of Israel to have three vibrant and successful centers that are life hubs - the south and the north, not just the center. This is authentic Zionism today, and given the rate of population growth and the size of the country, I think Israel's future depends on the realization of this vision.

