



**SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE**  
Lev Aharon Program for Senior IDF Officers



## Lev Aharon in Numbers

In 2012, Lev Aharon will reach some 1,675 IDF officers in 48 different courses

	Number of seminars	Number of participants per course	Total number of participants
Majors	12	51	612
Lieutenant Colonels	13	23	299
Colonels	5	23	115
Brigadier Generals	1	12	12
Military College participants (commanders and staff)	3	60-100	~260
Organic seminars	12	12-50	~327
Cathedra program for Lev Aharon graduates	2	25	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>		<b>~1,675</b>

“Before this seminar, I lived in a bubble. I did not understand Israeli society. Now I understand that the IDF must be a model organization.”

–Major, Air Force

### About the Shalom Hartman Institute

The Shalom Hartman Institute is a center of transformative thinking and teaching that addresses the major challenges facing the Jewish people and elevates the quality of Jewish life in Israel and around the world. A leader in sophisticated, ideas-based Jewish education for community leaders and change agents, SHI is committed to the significance of Jewish ideas, the power of applied scholarship, and the conviction that great teaching contributes to the growth and continual revitalization of the Jewish people.

## Fighting the Long-Term Battle for National Existence

One of the most pressing existential threats facing the State of Israel is the growing alienation of the population from its conviction in the idea of a Jewish national homeland. Many of today's youth, having come of age in a post-nationalist environment, do not identify with this realization of the Zionist enterprise, although they are asked to risk their lives for it during their military service. Understanding that enlisting Israel's youth in the struggle for national existence requires a deep personal belief in or understanding of the basic elements and values behind this struggle is what prompted the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to partner with the Shalom Hartman Institute (SHI) in 2006 to create the Lev Aharon program for senior officers.

The goal of the Lev Aharon program is to become a resource center that will provide the topmost echelons of Israeli defense officers — who are likely to continue holding leadership positions in Israeli society — with the tools to instill in their troops and themselves a deep awareness of their Jewish-Israeli identity and an understanding of its complexity and diversity. The program nurtures an appreciation of how this understanding can and should affect the officers' immediate roles while beginning a process that motivates them to influence their broader communities.

The program curriculum, based on SHI experience in providing pluralistic Jewish-Israeli identity training to thousands of Israelis, assists senior officers in developing a strong, positive relationship with their Israeli identity. Understanding the relevance of Jewish values and heritage to their role and developing a personal identity empowers these leaders in their mission and motivates their service, thereby strengthening the ethos and operations of the IDF in a time of declining enlistment and retention rates.

“These seminars benefit from the fact that participants come from variety of units and include career officers and reservists alongside officers of different religions. I have taken away several personal lessons. I had lost my connection to certain values and therefore did not pass them on to my children. This seminar reminded me to see every soldier as a whole world.”

– Lieutenant Colonel





## Lev Aharon Seminars for Senior IDF Officers

Lev Aharon seminars for majors, lieutenant colonels, colonels, and other high-ranking officers, many of whom have attended Israel's most elite military academy, initiate a personal process in more than 1,500 officers a year. Based on core values of Jewish culture and heritage, participants explore leadership ideals in Judaism and Zionism through lectures, text study, and intimate group discussion led by a cadre of top SHI and guest scholars representing different streams of Jewish thought, heritage, and history. The program is not aimed at changing perspectives or providing particular answers but at providing an open and intimate environment in which to ask questions and discuss challenging issues.

Targeted at secular and religious Jews as well as non-Jewish officers, the seminars focus on values and morality, exploring the gaps between different sectors in Israeli society, the idea of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, the history of the Jewish people, and Jewish heritage. The seminars enrich participants by introducing new viewpoints to their existing perspectives of Israeli society, providing them with new manners of understanding their culture, heritage, and personal relationship to Israel. The officers study two elemental IDF texts—the IDF Spirit, an outline of the moral responsibility of the IDF, and David Ben Gurion's *Yi'ud v'Yihud* on the commitment of the Jewish people to serve in the IDF and the responsibility of the commander as an educator.

Lev Aharon seminars, which consist of an orientation, core seminar, and post-seminar follow-up session led by distinguished academics and experienced senior officers, provide participants with a break from their regular, stressful, regimented schedule to critically and emotionally explore various facets of Israeli society. The transformative seminars often provide officers with their first opportunity for intimate, unguarded, honest expression within the military framework. Many senior officers report that they are extremely proud to serve in a military that makes this type of open discussion an integral service component for its leaders.



## Faculty and Facilitators

The director and life breath of the Lev Aharon program is Yaakov Castel. He holds an MA in Jewish history from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and is a (retired) IDF colonel. Most recently, Castel served as head of the IDF Education Department and director of education at Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi. Today, Castel serves as a personal advisor to the IDF chief education commander and directs a program at the Yitzhak Rabin Museum. Prior to his current position at the Shalom Hartman Institute, Castel served as the Institute's assistant director of education.

There are approximately 40 Lev Aharon faculty members drawn from the Hartman Institute, the IDF, and leading institutions in Israel. Faculty members include, among others, Rabbi Professor David Hartman, Rabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman, Professor Asher Cohen, Dr. Micah Goodman, Professor Moshe Halbertal, Professor Moshe Idel, Professor Menachem Lorberbaum, Professor Ron Margolin, Dr. Ariel Picard, Professor Avi Sagi, and Professor Eliezer Schvied. Workshop facilitators are doctoral candidates and lecturers in Jewish studies and thought.

## Impact

Participant feedback reveals that Lev Aharon seminars instill in officers a feeling of empowerment, pride in their colleagues and the military, and a sense of responsibility to take an active role in improving Israeli society.

A survey of colonels and lieutenant colonels carried about by the IDF found that:

- > 95% say they are highly satisfied with the course
- > 94% of colonels say that the course caused them to behave differently in at least one of their areas of responsibility
- > 81% of lieutenant colonels say that the course greatly strengthened their self-perception as commanders and educators and their understanding of the importance of debate on values and educational principles in their units

**“As a non-Jew, it is impossible to command Jewish soldiers without understanding the tradition that binds them together. The seminar strengthened and enriched my professional activity. The workshop sharpened my ability to see people as individuals with different opinions and feelings.”**

**–Lieutenant Colonel**



SHALOM HARTMAN מכון  
INSTITUTE שלום הרטמן

**Shalom Hartman Institute**

11 Gedalyahu Alon Street  
Jerusalem 93113 Israel

Tel: +972 2 567 5320

Fax: +972 2 561 1913

**Shalom Hartman Institute  
of North America**

One Pennsylvania Plaza, Suite 1606  
New York, NY 10119

Tel: +1 212 268 0300

Fax: +1 212 239 4550

[www.hartman.org.il](http://www.hartman.org.il)

