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RABBI YITZCHAK DAVID GROSSMAN, founder and dean of Migdal Ohr educational institutions, says Passover's central message to the Jewish people is to help one another. (Courtesy Migdal Ohr)

Migdal Ohr founder calls for Passover unity

In holiday message, Rabbi Yitzchak David Grossman stresses importance of helping vulnerable sectors

• By JEREMY SHARON

Rabbi Yitzchak David Grossman, Israel Prize laureate and founder and director of the Migdal Ohr network of educational institutes, issued a call for greater unity among the Jewish people this Passover, after a divisive election campaign.

Speaking to *The Jerusalem Post* just before the beginning of the holiday, Grossman, said: "The narrative in the Passover Haggada is instructive, especially in the way it begins, which is not, as we might have thought, with the events of the Exodus but in describing the matza and inviting everyone to eat of it," the rabbi explained.

"This story of the Exodus and of becoming a people is only interesting and is only relevant if we are all taking care of each other, not just ourselves but the whole Jewish people. This is the central message of Passover for us in the Land of Israel, with so many dangers around us at the moment, such as Iran, Islamic State and others."

As well as being renowned for his work in Migdal Ha'emek in the Lower Galilee, in which he built an educational network to help youth escape the cycle of poverty that had beset the city, Grossman has also initiated several charitable enterprises which were in full swing for the Passover holiday.

In one project, the children of Migdal Ha'emek were drafted by Migdal Ohr into its "Satiated Festival" Passover operation to help pack food and supplies for the needy. More than 20,000 packages with matza, fruit, vegetables and other essential provisions for the holiday were packed and sent from the IDF's Sirkin base.

The project, in its 13th year, is carried out in cooperation with the Welfare and Social Services Ministry and local municipal authorities around the country, which provide Migdal Ohr with lists of needy people and families who have requested assistance for Passover.

The Sirkin base has a unique relationship with Grossman resulting from the events of the Second Lebanon War in 2006.

Some 700 soldiers of a paratroop battalion from Sirkin were stationed in northern Israel during the war as they were preparing to cross the border into Lebanon and go into battle.

The soldiers were being housed in a tank hangar close to Migdal Ha'emek in poor conditions, until Grossman learned of their situation.

The rabbi offered to the IDF to house them in the dormitories of one of Migdal Ohr's educational facilities in Migdal Ha'emek. The army agreed, and the soldiers spent several days in the dormitories before being deployed into Lebanon.

"We had grown close and created a bond during those days, and I was very emotional as they departed to go to battle," Grossman related.

"Each soldier was given a one-shekel coin to donate to charity after the war, and this was a way of guaranteeing their well-being and safe return, since the emissary for a mitzva is protected from harm, and I blessed them that this should be so," the rabbi said.

"Ten days later they returned from the war, and not one of them was harmed. And, as I had asked them, they returned straight to Migdal Ha'emek to celebrate with us, where I received 1,400 kisses from them, one on each cheek from 700 soldiers."

Since then, the IDF has offered the facilities at its large Sirkin base outside Petah Tikva for the packing and distribution of Passover parcels for the needy carried out by Migdal Ohr every year.

In addition to the Passover packages, Migdal Ohr arranged Passover Seder meals for more than 3,000 people, and also provided Seder services for more than 1,000 prisoners in prisons around the country through Grossman's Center for Prisoner Rehabilitation.