

## METZUDAT KOACH — the Koach Fortress

By Peter Abelow

**S**andwiched between Pesach, the holiday marking our redemption from *galut* (exile), and Shavuot, the holiday when we celebrate receiving the Torah and our commitment to building a Torah society, are Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut. On the first of these two days, Israel Memorial Day, Israel commemorates the heavy price of our freedom, the more than 20,000 lives that have been lost in defense of the State of Israel since 1948. The somber mood of Memorial Day gives way, at sunset, to the festive mode of Israel Independence Day, a day of rejoicing at the establishment of the modern state of Israel, this year celebrating her fifty-eighth anniversary.

Metzudat Koach, the Yesha Fortress, is one of many places in Israel

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that inspires these conflicting emotions: the pain of the price we have paid for independence, and the beauty of that which we have created in the fifty-eight years since. The fortress is actually a British Taggart fort, which was built during the period of the Mandate (1917-1948) to control a key junction in Ramat Naftali, overlooking the Etzba HaGalil and the Hula Valley. The British left the fort on April 15, 1948, in anticipation of their imminent departure from Israel one month later. As in so many other places, they simply handed over control of this critical location to the Arabs. (Rarely did the British hand a fort over to us. They either gave their forts to the Arabs or abandoned them to be fought over.)

The Jewish leadership understood that the key to the future of the towns and farms in the valley below (places like Metulla, Kiryat Shmoneh, Kfar Blum and others) depended on controlling this strategically located fortress. So, on April 20 and 21, the Palmach, the elite striking force of the Haganah in the days before we had a state and an

army, attacked in an attempt to wrest control from the enemy. The assault was repelled with heavy losses. On May 16, we attacked once again, and this time succeeded in capturing the fortress. Twenty-eight Jewish fighters were killed in the battles, thus the name by which

*The commanding view of the Hula Valley from the fortress.  
Photo: Peter Abelow*



the fortress is known today, Metzudat Koach—Koach Fortress. (The word *koach*, which literally means strength, is spelled with a *chaf* and a *chet*, which in *gematria* equal twenty-eight.) The original name, Nebi Yesha, is based on a Muslim tradition that Yehoshuah, Moshe Rabbeinu's successor, is buried there.

Today, the fortress serves as a base for the Israeli Mishmar Hagvul, border police, but the surroundings have been beautifully restored by Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael—the Jewish National Fund. A sign in the parking lot points the way to a short path that leads to a magnificent panorama of



*Twenty-eight men died in 1948 while fighting to gain control of Metzudat Koach, a strategic spot located in the upper Galilee. Today, the fortress serves as a base for the Israeli border police.*

*Photo: www.sassontiram.com*

the Hula Valley below. At the overlook, notice Kiryat Shmoneh and Metulla to your left and the Golan Heights across the valley. The recently restored Hula Lake reflects the area's beauty. On a clear day, the towering slopes of Mount Hermon, to the northeast, are visible, and frequently, even as late as May and early June, are still covered with winter snow. The site also includes a memorial plaque that lists the names of the twenty-eight men who died fighting there in 1948. A bit further along the path is a small grove with twenty-eight trees, planted in memory of the men.

The fortress can be reached by a brief ascent from the main north-south road, Route 90, which connects Tiberias to Kiryat Shmoneh. Tzomet Koach (Koach Junction) is about ten kilometers south of Kiryat Shmoneh. Turn left if heading north and right if heading south. After driving along a winding road for about five minutes, turn right at the Yesha Junction; the parking lot is immediately on your right. Although a bit "off the beaten track," Metzudat Koach is worth visiting if you are in the area. To me, the most meaningful image is that of the flag of Israel flapping in the breeze with the fortress in the background. A non-descript concrete building that was built by the British and held briefly by the Arabs now secures Jewish life in this part of Eretz Yisrael.

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Metzudat Koach is a place to pause, admire the scenery, take pictures and reflect on the flow of Jewish history ... from *galut* to an independent nation to the ultimate dream of redemption. **IA**



*A small grove of twenty-eight trees was planted in memory of those who fell at Metzudat Koach. The word koach means strength and is spelled with a chaf and a chet, which in gematria equal twenty-eight. Photo: Peter Abelov*