

ONE ON ONE

with **Naftali Bennett**
Prime Minister of Israel



Background

Naftali Bennett was born in Haifa in 1972. His father was a real estate agent and entrepreneur and his mother was active in the American community in Israel.

During his childhood, the family moved between Montreal, Israel and New Jersey, returning when his father fought in the Yom Kippur War.

Childhood

He loved to hike among the trees in the grove near his house in Haifa. “I had a wonderful childhood,” he says. “We were not especially spoiled. I would walk in order to save the bus fare.”

“Once, my mother heard her sons using the word *friar* (Hebrew for “loser”) and asked what it meant. We said to her, ‘A *friar* is someone who helps out and gives without receiving anything in return.’

My mother told us off and said in her heavy American accent, ‘If so, *friars* are good. I want you to be *friars* your whole life.’ My parents left the good life in America to live in Israel, without knowing a word in Hebrew. Not because they were forced to, but because they had ideals.

They didn’t come to receive, they came to give. They came to be *friars*... These are the kind of *friars* that make Israel great.”

Army

Six years in the IDF’s elite *Sayeret Matkal* unit and commander in the elite *Maglan* unit.

Family

Married to Galit, a professional chef whom he met on Ammunition Hill where she worked as an educator for youth groups. They have four children and live in Raanana. “Our life is very normal at home,” he says. “We like to hike around Israel. We haven’t been able to do that lately and I miss it.”

Entering politics

When the Second Lebanon War broke out, Bennett found himself fighting for his country, with Galit pregnant with their daughter.

The trauma of the war led him to the decision to enter politics in an effort to influence the country’s leadership, and he became Binyamin Netanyahu’s Chief of Staff (2006–2007). “Life is not only about enjoyment, but mostly for serving and fixing.”

“After seeing what I’ve gone through, I don’t think my children will follow in my footsteps.” Two of his kids want him to leave politics altogether, while the other two are more understanding.

“I try to educate them that their sacrifice is for the good of the country.”

Shabbat

Shabbat is family time, when the kids get to spend time with *Abba*. “When Shabbat comes in – phew!”

Jewish unity

“It’s all about tolerance, acceptance and togetherness. Uniting the Jewish people. Not in the sense that we’re trying to avoid disagreements. It’s okay not to agree. It’s important to create a dialogue, not from a feeling of superiority of one group over another, but from a perspective of partnership.”

“The State of Israel belongs to us all. We have a wonderful nation, and we all have a commitment and responsibility to take care of our country. The political disputes and divisions must not overshadow our basic concern for Israel.”

How does his kippah stay on his head?

“I am proud to be religious, I am proud of my kippah.” He uses *Kippah Keeper* – a product made of reusable double-sided medical tape. Once, he had to deliver a speech outdoors on a windy day when he discovered he was out of tape. He took a piece of chewing gum and stuck it on his head to keep his kippah in place! ■

FIVE FACTS ABOUT NAFTALI BENNETT

- In 5th grade, he burned his school’s back yard when his science project went haywire.
- After his army service, he worked as a gardener.
- He was born into a secular family and became religious of his own volition.
- One of his sons is named after Emanuel Moreno, who fell in combat in the Second Lebanon War.
- When he worked in hi-tech, he successfully made two exits worth millions of dollars.