

## Alpha Epsilon Pi: Providing the Fraternity Experience to Students in Israel

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A major element of the American college experience is in the process of being introduced to IDC: the fraternity, an extra-curricular organization that hosts social, philanthropic, and athletic events and a brotherhood that creates deep bonds between its members. Alpha Epsilon Pi (AEPI), one of the largest and most popular Jewish Fraternities in America, is expanding and beginning a new chapter at IDC.

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The mission of AEPI is to enable young Jewish men to develop the leadership tools necessary to better serve the Jewish community and contribute to the future of the Jewish people. The fraternity believes that each student should make it his goal to develop character, learn responsibility, and adopt values of leadership and loyalty during the course of his college experience.

I had the opportunity to speak to Steven Kaplan, the Director of Expansion for AEPI, regarding the reasons behind the beginning of AEPI at IDC. Kaplan, explained that, “The network, leadership, and social opportunities that a fraternity provides is something that students at the IDC would probably find very enticing”, and that “The IDC is the most interesting [location in Israel] because of the large international school. We thought that the IDC is a good starting point for us because it’s similar to a college in North America”. Kaplan explained how IDC students who expressed interest in starting AEPI contacted him around 7 months ago; this enthusiasm on both ends further strengthened the hopes of AEPI members and leaders about starting chapters in the homeland of the Jewish people.

The goal to spread the fraternity concept to Israel was developed seriously a couple of years ago, when members of AEPI began formulating idea about how to spread their movement to other countries. The IDC will not be alone in this venture, one of the ambitions of AEPI’s founding fathers was to provide a home for North American students in Israel. In addition to the IDC international students, there are around 100-200 AEPI brothers who study abroad in Israel every year. Kaplan spoke of his eventual goal to create a big brother chapter for the IDC colony, where brothers from Israel and America could talk through Skype, plan joint events, and network in various ways.



The emblem of Alpha Epsilon Pi

Ron Bronstein, a second year RRIS Government student, as well as a founding father and executive board member of AEPI at IDC, shared his views regarding how the fraternity could impact the school. Bronstein



explained that, among the IDC student body, there is less social unity and cohesiveness than one would find at American colleges. Because of this, AEPI would have a chance to make up for these missing social aspects by adding another forum for student interaction. He also noted that, "Because we are in the unique position to build it from the ground up, we can shape it to best suit the nature of IDC and its student body"; in this way, he addressed some concerns of the new chapter simply being a stereotypical American fraternity imported to Israel. Bronstein added the fact that there exists a standing 'Cultural Committee', in the newly formed fraternity, whose duty it is to plan events and programs, for the purpose of familiarizing non-Israeli members with Israeli culture and bridging the gap between the international and Israeli schools.

There are high expectations regarding the growth and expansion of AEPI at IDC and in Israel. Kaplan explained how a fraternity "is not just a club, but a brotherhood". Because many students are probably seeking a deeper social connection with fellow Jews, there would be a high incentive to join. In addition, Kaplan made a distinction between AEPI and other Jewish organizations such as Hillel; AEPI's basic purpose, according to the AEPI mission statement, "is to provide the opportunity for a Jewish man to be able to join a Jewish organization whose purpose is not specifically religious, but rather social and cultural in nature." Due to the unique experience that the fraternity promises to offer, and because of the low level of extracurricular opportunities at Israeli schools, AEPI would be appealing to many students at IDC who wish to enhance the social dimension of their Jewish life.