



Sharing Their Stories, Part 4: Voices of Young Israelis

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To:



Voices of Young Israelis, Part 4

We continue to check in with our Israeli community, seeing how we can help and offer care during this difficult time. Below are several accounts written by young *bogrim* (alumni of Amitei Bronfman). We'll be sharing more of these stories going forward, as well as voices from our North American alumni community. Shabbat Shalom.

The following are all translations from Hebrew; please excuse any mistakes.



Name: **Irit Feingold '06**

Normally lives in **Nataf**

Currently lives in **Nataf**

I closed my eyes and I remembered that on Friday, the day before the very nature of our lives changed, we went to the beach.

After a week of nights that weren't nights, I closed my eyes and I remembered us at the beach.

I remembered the feeling of slick shards of seashells on the soles of my feet with every step that we walked. I remembered the weight of the sand that Ayala-Almaz, my daughter, took from the shallow water and spread on my arms and thighs. I remembered the whisper of the waves and the quiet hush that took over everything when I dove into the water as the three of us entered the depths. I remembered the deep

sigh that escaped from me when I saw David and Ayala-Almaz coming out of the water, sitting themselves down on the blanket that we spread out and gobbling up watermelon covered in sand. I remembered the pleasant sun of early October that caressed me and helped me believe that maybe there's some order to my private universe. I remembered all of this and, finally, I succeeded in sleeping.

I've already succeeded in managing without David for a month; he's in the reserves and I am succeeding at managing. There are so many around me who have worse situations than I do, so the proportion [of my burden] or guilt helps me to hold on most of the time. My time during the days moves in small, if extreme, movements. I am solely responsible for Ayala-Almaz now, and every decision that I make feels like it's life or death. Usually, I hope that she'll make the decision instead of me. "So, we'll make hot porridge? Yes! You wouldn't prefer a pancake? Yes! So, yes to a pancake? No! So, back to porridge? Porr...no...porr." In the end, she throws it all on the floor anyway. "And what do you say to the idea of going back home to sleep? Even if there's no shelter? You'll forgive me if there's a siren and we don't have any place to hide?" I'm not even able to mention the real fear of sleeping alone at home after October 7th.

The need to cry the cries of the hostages burns within me. Since this mess began, I haven't been able to get to the tent encampment protest in Tel Aviv, and when I heard that there was a demonstration in Jerusalem, I felt compelled to go. It wasn't pleasant for me to ask my mother to watch Ayelet-Almaz again, so I decided to bring her with me.

We got there at the end of a packed day, but she became so curious about the event. We stood on the side of the first crowd, Reform rabbis made Havdalah, and it was nice to hear the voices and to feel part of something spiritual. At some point, Ayala-Almaz saw the poster with the photos of all thirty kidnapped children. Photos of faces, one next to another.

"Oy! *Dim! Dim!*" [part of the word for children, "*yeladim*"]. She pointed at the poster and waved her hands excitedly!! I kissed her forehead and said to her that we'll all be happy to meet the children. "*Dim! Dim! Come!*" She put her hands up and signaled them to come to her. "*Dim! Take mah-mah!*" [baby talk for 'pacifier' in Hebrew]. She took her pacifier out of her mouth and pointed it towards the photos. I kissed her again and told her that she is a kind child and a good friend.

At the same time, I felt tremendous distress. I understood that I had exposed her to too much. That suddenly the pressure of recent weeks, the fears and worries that surrounded me had faces and significance. She figured out the puzzle. Now she understands.

We left and I was sure that she would doze off in the car in a second, but the whole drive, she wept bitterly. At first, I thought that many that's how all of the children in Gaza are

crying now. But after a few moments, I understood that she was crying the cries of the mothers. My daughter has a special soul; I need to protect her more



Name: **Peleg Bar On '17**

Normally lives in **Jerusalem**

Currently lives in **Beit Horon**

A month has passed since October 7, but it feels like much longer. On the other hand, I feel like only a moment has passed—the days are jumbled together into a blurry stain.

And despite that, after a month, a kind of emergency routine begins: We make plans, knowing that any moment they might change—because of a telephone conversation from a partner that informs you that he was granted a surprise leave [to come home], or God forbid because of a bad notification, or simply because, by mistake, you see a horrifying video clip that sticks with you, and now you don't have the strength to leave your bed.

I went back home to live with my parents. My husband has been on reserve duty since Simchat Torah. I pass my time between reserve duty in the Tel Aviv military base and visits with my partner's family (both my sisters-in-law live there now, each of them alone with a small child), and the rest of the time I try to fill with small activities that give me strength: meeting up with friends, writing, and going out for walks in the community.

This week on Monday, I was at my cousin's *bris* [ritual circumcision]. His father is on reserve duty now, he came out on leave for the birth and on the evening after the *bris* he already had to return to the army. The *bris* was held on a gorgeous farm. I met up with my extended family and all of us in a celebratory and unburdened mood. We were excited to see the new baby and emotional about the name that they chose: Neta Oz [seedling of strength, "Oz" specifically references the communities near Gaza that were targeted on October 7th]. All of the men at the *bris* were walking around with their guns, some of them also wearing uniforms—they just got out and they were already about to return [to their bases].

When they sat to eat after the *bris*, my aunt told the story of a friend of hers from a kibbutz in the Gaza Envelope, who survived hell and started to describe what she'd been through, and my uncle signaled to her to stop, and whispered to her that this wasn't the time [for that story]. It turns out that some of the guests who sat with us at the same table were themselves survivors of Kfar Aza.

We returned from the *bris* with air in our souls, full of the beauty of the farm, with the sweetness of family, and in wonder at the new life.

That same night, I saw in my friend's Instagram story that the soldier who I heard was killed this morning in Gaza is her brother-in-law. It scared me a lot. She's my age; like me, both her husband and brothers-in-law are conscripted, we're so similar! It suddenly turns out that this name, that in my head and my heart had joined the endless list of people killed since October 7th, to which I'd almost become indifferent: he's someone's brother-in-law, the brother-in-law of someone who could have been me.

A few moments later, it was publicized that the soldier Ori Megidish was freed through military action and Instagram stories filled with photos of her, with emotional words, joy and pride.

I don't know how to explain why this, specifically, suddenly broke me.

Everything is so mixed up together. After October 7th, it will take a long time until we'll be able to once again be happy with truly all of our hearts. Now, even what makes us happy is so diluted with sadness.

On the very same night that the entire country is celebrating a small, miraculous victory, one family just got awful news. At the same time as lives are beginning, so many lives are ending. I don't know what's truer—all of this death or the throbbing life. And sometimes it's so hard to hold both of them at once.

It's true, there's still beauty in the world, babies like our Neta Oz are still born, I'm still holding tightly onto the love of my partner, to our life. But I sometimes feel like holding tightly to one another is closing our eyes to the horror and suffering, to the hurt and broken hearts, to the cries of the families of the hostages. Sometimes I feel guilty for my desire to make things better for myself, this desire that compels me to close my eyes briefly, and to just pray that I never endure the suffering of those suffering now.

The mind works overtime; pressure in the chest does not relent. When I am successful, I try to focus only on what is happening now: on my breath, to inhale, to hold it, and then to release. I focus on the knowledge of what is correct now: my partner being in a safe space; my coffee; my mother's hug; my nephew's sweet baby scent.

It's all true: the death and the life, the evil and the beauty. But I don't have time to involve myself with it now, now I'm just living, day after day, moment following moment.



Name: **Shir Achdut '21**

Normally lives in **Adam**

Currently lives in **Kfar Adumim**

I'm Shir Achdut, 19 years old, in my second year of preparatory studies before I'm inducted into the army.

In the past four weeks, I've been volunteering anywhere I can, and there's a sense of dynamism in the air. We heard that there's a hotel in Netanya that evacuees from the Gaza Envelope arrived at and I immediately went up to Netanya with friends and we activated a war room to care for the families who had just then arrived from the front line. A war room for everything: clothing, hygiene products, shoes, and even games and something sweet for the kids, all with the aid of donations that good people brought. Throughout all hours of the day, people arrived, some of them still in shock. A meaningful encounter that I had in the first week was with a pair of girls who arrived late in the evening, when we'd already thought to close. I was absorbed in organizing things and when they entered the room, I immediately asked them, "What do you need? We'll take care of you!" And they said, "A hug." I immediately understood that this was the entire point of our being there: to look at people with "embracing eyes" and tell them that we're here [for them].

After a week and a half of being in Netanya, an application came to us from the Welfare Ministry in the field that the hotels at the Dead Sea needed organizing work. We packed up our bags and went down to the Dead Sea hotels. We went from room to room with the objective of making some order of the chaos, to understand what kind of population was found in the hotels—if there are disabled people or seniors, what ages the children were—in order to transmit that information to the Education Ministry so that a school could be opened for the children, facilities made accessible for the disabled, and which doctors needed to arrive, which rooms needed visits from mental health professionals specializing in trauma, etc. A very meaningful feeling. And also, there, under all of the reasons why they needed us, the true reason that we went from door to door in hotels was in order to say to our brothers and sisters: We're here with you together. How can we lighten the time you spend here? With what can we help? A feeling of responsibility in its entirety.

This is the feeling of dynamism that I spoke about at the beginning—where they tell us that we're needed, we'll take our things and go. It doesn't matter where and it doesn't matter what's required.

With blessings for quiet days for us and for all of our siblings in the Diaspora.