



IN THEIR LIGHT

8 Stories of Bravery from October 7th



הסוכנות היהודית
JEWISH AGENCY
לארץ ישראל
FOR ISRAEL

OZ DAVIDIAN

Like all Gaza periphery residents, Oz Davidian and his family were woken in their home of Moshav Maslul by the first air raid sirens on the morning of October 7. They immediately went into the apartment's protected space, but quickly realized that this was no "standard" event of battle and missiles. Oz received a warning message from his brother-in-law who lived on a farm adjacent to the Re'im music festival: "Tons of wounded kids here. Who can help?"

Arriving at the rave grounds, Oz could not believe what he saw. He had never imagined coming across such harsh, cruel sights. He began collecting the wounded into his car and realized that he would need to rely on his senses, and his lifelong familiarity with the region. Oz escaped on winding dirt paths, navigating as bullets whistled around him and terrorists shot at him nonstop. Returning fire with his own gun, and a rifle he took off a terrorist, he also ran some of them down with the vehicle: anything to bring these young people, who shortly beforehand had been partying, to safe haven. When Oz finally reached his sister's home in the adjacent Moshav Patish, he realized that he couldn't leave the rest of the young people behind. So he returned. He made the trip 15 times, from Patish to the rave site and back, saving some 120 people on that horrific Shabbat. Risking his life time and time again, he eventually made it home, alive and well, to his wife and four daughters, the youngest being just two years old.

In Oz's story we see a shining example of the selfless good-heartedness and bravery typical of Am Yisrael, the people of Israel. A regular Israeli chose to risk himself and go out into a war zone without any certainty as to whether he would return, simply to try and save the lives of others.





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SHIR AZULAY

When she heard the sirens start blaring at 6:30 in the morning on October 7, Shir Azulay went out into the yard of her house in Kibbutz Holit to observe and photograph the rockets. But a short time later, she began to hear not only the sounds of the rocket firing but also gunfire. She saw people dressed in military uniforms shooting everywhere, and when she realized that they were not IDF soldiers but Hamas terrorists, she raced home and kept taking pictures from her window.

When the gunfire subsided for a bit, Shir ran into her kitchen to arm himself with a knife. "I knew it wouldn't help me, but it strengthened my self-confidence," she said. Shir locked herself back in the safe room with her dog, Bentzi, only armed with the knife. On her phone she saw a message on the Kibbutz WhatsApp group from her neighbor Miriam, who wrote that the terrorists had set her house on fire and she was in her own safe room, choking from the smoke and was asking for help.

Suddenly the light in Shir's safe room went out, and another neighbor called her to tell her that they were setting her house on fire and that she needed to leave immediately.

Shir was faced with an impossible dilemma - leave the safe room and potentially meet the terrorists head-on, or stay inside and burn. With a moment's decision, she left the safe room, barefoot and armed with her knife, and ran to Miriam's house. Still barefoot, Shir tried to enter Miriam's house, but flames blocked her from entering the front door. She went to the window of Miriam's safe room, broke the glass, and together with a neighbor removed the metal shield over the window and discovered Miriam passed out and blackened on the window sill. Shir poured a bucket of water on Miriam to try to wake her up; Miriam started responding. Shir put a wet towel on her, and called for more neighbors, and together they managed to get Miriam out of the safe room, just as the terrorists started shooting again. Shir, an unconscious Miriam, and other neighbors went into a safe room, and after 12 hours they were rescued.

Miriam survived thanks to Shir and the other members of the kibbutz, who, under the threat of the terrorists, still managed to save the life of their neighbor.

Shir's story is a prime example of the Israeli and kibbutznik spirit and the idea of mutual responsibility for one another, showing courage and the embodiment of good neighborliness.





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NETTA EPSTEIN Z"L

“He was my other half. My heart kept beating for his sake.” Iren Shavit could never have imagined that this was how her story of love with Netta would end. They met 18 months earlier at a bar in Kibbutz Nir Am, and moved in together in Netta’s birthplace, Kibbutz Kfar Aza. Iren and Netta, 22, knew theirs was an everlasting love: they planned their wedding, thought about names for future children, and a bridal gown was ready and waiting in the closet. But on that morning of October 7, Hamas terrorists brutally murdered Netta and the young couple’s dreams. When the sirens began sounding, the two entered the apartment safety room but quickly realized that this was a large-scale attack. Netta had already received the terrible news of his grandmother’s murder before terrorists broke into their tiny apartment. Managing to force the protective room’s door open, they tossed a grenade inside. Without a moment of hesitation, Netta threw himself onto it, saving Iren’s life.

A mere month prior to his death, Netta completed and was discharged from his military service as a paratrooper. He had plans to travel, study and conquer the world. In 2018, at age 17, Netta was one of the leaders of the “Let us Live in Peace” protest held by youth from the Gaza periphery suffering from the ongoing missile attacks. The protest saw thousands of youths from the Gaza periphery marching to the Knesset in Jerusalem. Netta was also an excellent athlete; when he was younger he had been the Hapoel Beer Sheva goalkeeper, and was a fan of both Beitar Jerusalem, and Liverpool. As his 22nd birthday approached, which would have been on November 9, Iren arranged a surprise, booking tickets to the Liverpool game, a birthday gift he would never enjoy.

With Netta’s sacrifice, he showed the dedication, love, integrity, bravery and respectfulness with which so many Israelis are raised.





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AMER ABU SABILA Z"L

Amer abu Sabila, 25, from Abu Taloul in the Bedouin communities, is an example of Israeli bravery and coexistence between Arabs and Jews in Israel.

Hearing the sirens on that Shabbat morning of October 7, Dolev and Odeya Suissa decided to leave Sderot with their daughters. They always had a suitcase ready for any emergency that might develop around Gaza, and preferred that their girls, aged three and six, would not experience sirens. This time, however, they never imagined that at the city's exit point they would encounter the cruel attacks by Hamas terrorists. With an eye on escaping, the family split up: Dolev, the father, took the three-year-old but was shot not long afterwards. Before collapsing, he managed to tell his daughter to run quickly back to her mother. Stunned, Odeya raced back to the car with her daughters but froze, unable to function further. Amer abu Sabila came to the rescue, having come to visit Sderot that morning. Getting behind the steering wheel, his goal being to bring the family to a safe location, he turned the car toward the Sderot Police Station, never realizing that terrorists already had it surrounded. Hamas terrorists murdered Amer, Odeya and a police officer who came over to help them. The girls, hiding in the back seat, were saved.

Ali abu Sabila, a relative, in his interview with the Maariv media outlet, said: **“Amer was an amazing person. He loved helping others. He worked in Sderot, and as he arrived that morning, he came across the vehicle at the city's entrance with the father's body inside and the mother in a state of paralysis. He went over to help, keeping his father informed of developments by phone. Amer's father asked his son to leave the area, but Amer wouldn't. He insisted on helping. He drove the family to the Sderot Police Station, not aware of how matters were playing out there. He was a wonderful young man, and his loss is very hard on us.”**





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RACHEL EDRI

Rahel Edri became one of the symbols of this war. Born in Ofakim in 1959, she grew up in a family of 14 siblings to parents from Persia (now Iran) and Morocco. At 12 years old she began cleaning stairwells as a job and left high school in 11th grade. After marrying David Edri, a truck and crane driver, she worked for 43 years in the Tze'elim Military Base Shekem store. In June 2023, she received the Excellence Award at the President's Residence for outstanding, long-term service. Rahel and David have three children, two of whom are police officers, and two grandchildren, and enjoyed a calm life in Israel's southern city. That is, until that fateful October 7.

As streams of terrorists broke into Ofakim under cover of nonstop missile fire, five terrorists gained control of the Edri family's home where David and Rahel were at the time, taking both as hostages. Stunned, David and Rahel were in a constant state of life-threatening danger and anxiety caused by the heavily armed intruders. There was no way for them to escape the house or overpower the terrorists. With her keen senses, Rahel realized that she needed to get the terrorists chatting and find a way to make them like her enough to avoid harming her. She showed a keen interest in them, asking where they were from, what their lives were like, and offering them a meal and drink to ensure they would not become angry due to hunger. Rahel also realized that she was able to send messages which would help the police forces surrounding the house. She went to the bathroom several times, enabling the police to take note of her, each time being accompanied by one of the terrorists. She also dressed and bandaged one of the terrorist's wounds. Signaling with her fingers to her son waiting with other police officers outside, she indicated how many terrorists were in the house. At 2 am, following 19 hours of sheer nerve-wracking fear, the Special Forces unit were able to take control, freeing Rahel and David.

Rahel's courage is a testimony to her ingenuity, her strong intuition, and her ability to function under extreme stress and uncertainty.





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ILAY NACHMAN, MATAN ECKSTEIN, ADDIR MASIKA Z"l AND SELA MAAGAN

Like thousands of others, four best friends from Even Yehuda thought they'd be joining the party of the year. They were 23 years old, post-army service, and had begun planning their futures. They loved, they had fun, they lived and breathed the sea and the waves, they traveled, and most of all, they did all that together, always. So of course, they would be driving to the Nova Music Festival at Re'im together with some other friends.

Seven friends went to party. Three never came back.

On October 7 at 6:30 am, their world turned upside down. As sirens splintered the air, the group thought it was just another round of missiles, so they jumped into their cars aiming to reach one of the mobile shelters along the main road.

But the mobile shelters were packed with other partygoers who had fled. When they found an available mobile shelter, they left their cars, hoping to take cover from the missiles. Sela and Matan noticed someone on the ground injured by shrapnel and decided to help him, but a group of terrorists opened fire on them. Not wanting to lead the terrorists to the mobile shelter, they stayed outside and were both shot. Matan was murdered and Sela critically injured.

Sela managed to get into a car being driven away from the terrorists as they shot at it, and then sheltered in a field until he could be evacuated.

Ilay, Addir and their three female friends were still in the mobile shelter and had no idea of their friends' fate. Suddenly, a terrorist reached the shelter. Ilay and Addir hid the girls under a pile of trash inside, and in a burst of unfathomable heroism, charged the terrorist with nothing but their bare hands, shoving him forcefully out of the shelter. They were shot dead on the spot. But their actions saved Romi, Yuval, and Yuli, because the terrorists assumed no one else was in the shelter.

Hours later, Sela was taken to a hospital and underwent several surgeries. He now has a long rehabilitative path ahead of him. The three young women were also evacuated but the formerly inseparable group which had lived their lives together to the fullest, is no longer as it was.

The heroism shown by Ilay, Matan and Addir z"l, and their friend Sela, is a manifestation of the fighting spirit, determination and sacrifice that the deepest friendships engender. Their willingness to take action to rescue others, even at the cost of their lives, is beyond admirable.



On the right: Ilay Nachman, Addir Masika, Matan Eckstein z"l and Sela Maagan



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SHLOMO RON, Z"l

Bravery can come to light in the most unexpected moments and in the most unexpected people. It comes to light when someone charges towards a danger, or when someone functions inspirationally under tremendous pressure. And sometimes it expresses itself in faith: faith in people, a place, a land and a country. That is the best way to describe Shomo Ron, 85, a founding member of Kibbutz Nahal Oz.

Shlomo lived on the kibbutz for 65 years. He and his wife, Hannah, raised their three children there. Shlomo was a regular guy, working the fields and keeping busy in the kibbutz's metal workshop. He was a man of the earth, a Zionist through and through. Nothing could break him. He never broke during the tough period of the 1950s when the kibbutz was first established. He never broke when the Palestinian Fedayeen insurgency invaded the kibbutz fields, aiming to cause damage to the western Negev's agriculture. Nor did he break during the Six Day War, when he defended the kibbutz against the Egyptian army. And his spirit never broke during rounds of battles in Gaza, and under the threat of missiles and tunnels.

For all those years, Shlomo clung to his home, and to the land and kibbutz he loved so much, and never gave up faith that one day peace would come. Nor did Shlomo's spirit break that fateful morning of October 7, when the sirens wailed continuously, and terrorists surrounded his house. That morning, his wife, two daughters and a grandson went into the home's protective space. But Shlomo went out into the living room, where the terrorists found him. First, the terrorists riddled the house with gunshots from the outside, then they went inside and murdered Shlomo in cold blood. Other terrorists entering the house saw his bloodied lifeless body, presumed him to be an old, childless man living alone, and never searched for anyone else. That is how Shlomo's family, hiding in the safe room, survived the horrors.

Shlomo's stunning courage typifies Israel's foundational generation. Stoic when facing seemingly insurmountable difficulties over dozens of years, determined when facing decades of threats, and finding ways to beat them, Shlomo loved his kibbutz, loved his family, and loved his Hannah'leh, and was willing to give his life in order to protect them.





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AVITAL ALAJEM

Residents of Kibbutz Holit just 2.6 kilometers from the Gaza border woke on the morning of October 7 to a barrage of missiles and sirens that shook much of Israel. Avital Alajem, a kibbutz resident, went into her home's protected space but very soon afterwards heard shooting and shouts in Arabic. She realized that the worst possible scenario was playing out: terrorists had penetrated the kibbutz. Stressed residents maintained WhatsApp contact to stay updated. Avital, who was on her own, was joined by another resident, simply to be together while terror raged outside.

The whole time, Avital's next-door neighbor, Adi Kaploun, was in her home with her two children, Negev, aged 4, and Eshel, the 15-week-old baby. Avital and Adi maintained contact until 11 am, when Adi sent her final message and no longer responded to Avital.

Seven hours after the attack began, terrorists reached Avital's house. Avital and her neighbor hid in a closet but the terrorists blew the protected room's door open, murdering Avital's neighbor. They pulled Avital out of the closet, and suddenly brought Adi's children Negev and Eshel into Avital's home. The three of them were moved from house to house while terrorists continued their horrific acts until they decided to head back for Gaza, forcing Avital and the children to come with them.

Walking along, Avital was horrified at the carnage and destruction, the bloodshed, and her neighbors' homes burnt to a cinder. Avital cared for the two youngsters and despite the extreme difficulty, she never lost her commonsense. Right before entering a settled area inside Gaza, the terrorists signaled to Avital, in what can only be described as a miracle, that she and the little ones were free to go.

Stunned, Avital overcame her exhaustion and made her way back to Israel, walking for hours, Eshel in one arm, and Negev, bearing a leg wound, in the other. The three of them were saved, but days later it was confirmed that Adi, their mother, had been cruelly murdered.

Avital's story, in which she, Eshel and Negev survived, is an example of the neighborly dedication and devotion in the kibbutz. Despite the incomprehensibly demanding situation, Avital did not relinquish the hope that she could keep her neighbor's children alive, making sure to bring them to safe haven.





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NAME OF MY HERO

A BIT ABOUT MY HERO

HIS/HER HEROIC STORY



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Shalom!

This “In Their Light” kit contains eight inspiring stories of courage and heroism shown by men and women during the early events of October 7 in the face of terrorism by Hamas.

Sometimes their acts of bravery saw them being injured, or losing their lives. The Jewish Agency’s Fund for Victims of Terror has been supporting bereaved families and families of the injured since that accursed Shabbat morning. The sorrow and grief are unbearable, but through the depths of such darkness, countless stories of valor shine. We are here to highlight at least some of them.

How can you use this kit?

Each night during the eight nights of Chanukkah, choose one of these heroes’ stories to light up our world by dedicating your candle lighting to that person. This kit contains eight stories of courage as well as two empty cards so you can add your own heroes if you wish, such as the student who stood up to antisemitism at college or the retired teacher who came to Israel to help southern farmers. Stories of bravery are not limited to the local community, nor to Jews, and everyone is invited to choose their own heroes to think of, in addition to those we have included, when you light your Chanukkah candles.

After lighting the candles and sharing the story of your chosen hero or heroes, we would love for you to share your photos with us. Gather around your menorah, hold up the card with your hero’s story, and tag us on your favorite social networks using the hashtag #InTheirLight. You can also tag The Jewish Agency’s pages in various languages, and the Shlichim (Israeli emissaries) units.

HAPPY CHANUKKAH AND AM YISRAEL CHAI!