

YAD L'AMI – DAY 221 – 14 May, 2024

Passover is behind us and the days of remembrance are here with Yom HaShoah (commemoration of the murder of six million Jews). I have never felt this day as intensely as I do now, because in many ways it was so similar to the days we are now experiencing. Shlomo, 85 years old and a Shoah survivor, remains a prisoner in Gaza since 7 October. This man has experienced two holocausts.

On Sunday evening, 5 May, Yom HaShoah began here, the commemoration of the genocide of six million Jews during the Second World War. Every year it is a very emotionally charged day, especially for the remaining Holocaust survivors and their families. This year we commemorate while Israel is at war and the horrific terror of 7 October is still fresh in everyone's minds, knowing that 132 innocent people are still being held hostage in Gaza. The official memorial ceremony at Yad Vashem had a doubly deep meaning: the saying "Never again is now!" is everyone's cry from the heart. As we listened to the poignant life stories of Holocaust survivors, we saw and heard their inner strength. May their perseverance and hope be a support to all the Jewish people today. *Silvia*

At the Gaza border, the tension is still very high. Last week I was with some people in Kibbutz Zikim, which is located next to Gaza by the sea. It is a beautiful place where we have had projects for years. We were receiving an explanation from someone when twenty-five extra combat units were called in due to warnings that there were infiltrations from Gaza. This was confirmed by friends from Netiv HaAsara who had received a message at 2 a.m. warning that there was danger. Friends who had returned home after having moved five times since 7 October left the village in the morning for a few days because it was too intense.

As I write this, the alarms are going off in Kerem Shalom and Ashkelon in the south and along the border with Lebanon in the north. There, too, about 80,000 people have been evacuated for elsewhere in the country.

A great number of homes and other buildings have been bombed and destroyed by Hezbollah. In the villages on the Gaza border, sirens are wailing every day. In some villages, 30 percent of the population has returned, and in some villages a little further from the border, 60 percent.

In Karmia, where about 30 percent of the population has returned, a group of children are receiving surfing lessons led by various therapists. A lot of therapy is through actions and play.

We will share more on that next time.

In Kibbutz Kfar Aza, I caught up with Shachar and Ayala, a couple with a heart of gold (see previous update) who prepare an extensive meal for the volunteers and soldiers once a week.

The kibbutz of around 970 people, where sixty-seven people were killed, seventeen were taken hostage, and dozens of houses burned, is still in the same state only a little cleaner. The heavy rains washed away the blood and ashes from the burned houses.

They still haven't started renovating all the burned homes. If they were to start now, the residents could return in 2026. Because of the tanks, etc., the infrastructure would also have to be renewed in some areas.

Monday 13 May was Yom Ha Zikaron (day of remembrance for the fallen). My heart weeps with all my friends who have lost dozens of loved ones since 7 October. In all the villages and kibbutzim in the south there were ceremonies, and the residents mourned the twenty-one, sixty-seven, or 100 people they lost in one day. And how did they die?: “More than 1,200 fell throughout the campaign... some by fire and some by suffocation, some by the sword and some riddled with bullets. Some on the doorstep of their homes, some in the warmth of their beds and some on the street, while being raped. Some at a guard post and some on the battlefield, some at a bus stop and some at a police station. Some in a car and some in an armored vehicle, some on the kibbutz paths, some in the meadow and some at a party, some by missiles and some in tunnels. **Forever, forever we remember them.**”

The country is in deep mourning and more deaths are added each day:

Dror had been murdered on 7 October and the terrorists had taken his body to Gaza. Yonat Or, Dror’s wife and mother of their three children, had been killed on the spot. Days later, they found her body. The neighbors saw how the family had been forced to leave their bomb shelter when terrorists set fire to the house. The older brother, Yahli, and their dog, Nella, survived. Yahli Or had been serving in the military in northern Israel for a year and wasn’t at home on 7 October. Seventeen-year-old Noam and thirteen-year-old Alma Or were held captive in Gaza for fifty days by the terror group and were released on 25 November. They knew nothing of what had happened to their parents. When they were released, they discovered that their mother had been murdered in the kibbutz massacre, and that their father had been abducted to Gaza. In captivity, the children had been separated from each other from the first moment and had no contact. They only received the bitter news about their parents when they were released and reunited with some family members. Now, after seven months of hoping and longing for their father’s return, the three children are needing to accept that their father was also murdered and that they are left as orphans. Dror was a devoted father of three children, Yahli, 18, Noam, 17, and Alma, 13, and husband to Yonat. **May their memory be blessed!**

Yom HaZikaron is followed by Independence Day, Yom HaAtzma’ut, which is normally a great celebration. On 14 May 1948, the modern state of Israel was born, and today Israel is celebrating its 76th anniversary in a more muted fashion: no fireworks and no noisy parties. It’s hard to celebrate freedom as a nation, knowing that your loved ones are still trapped in the tunnels.

It’s abhorrent how much pressure is being placed on Israel. How far are we from the 1940s? I am sickened by all the lies and horrible Jew-hatred in the world. The hatred of God and His people Israel only seems to be getting worse; that’s why my heart cries. How much more does God the Father’s heart weep for His eldest son, Israel! Think for yourself: how strange is it that no one is demanding that Hamas stop the rocket attacks and give back our innocent people? Lies are being propagated in the mainline news. I urge you to seek out honest news; do your own research. In this way, we can keep our consciences clean and not be influenced by lying reports. Come with questions and/or ask where to read accurate news.

What can we do?

- # First, as believers, we cannot remain silent in the face of hatred for God’s people. Like Esther, the church/congregation plays a role in the fight against anti-Semitism.
- # Second, we must keep our eyes towards Heaven. If we fight this battle alone, we will lose. Why? In the natural, we are completely outnumbered. Israel is surrounded by twenty-two Arab nations.
- # Third, we must remember that God has a plan

For ZION’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. *Isaiah 62:1*

With warm greetings and blessings in and from Israel.

Ria Doekes

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