



קישור שלום ~ Kishur Sholom
Staying Connected with the Temple Sholom Community

27 November 2023 ~ 14 Heshvan 5784
Parashat Vayishlach

Shalom, chaverim - hello, friends -

Before I even get to my column - have a look [MeToo UNless UR a Jew](#). You will find facts and information to sign a petition to the United Nations.

Now for my thoughts today ...

Throughout the Thanksgiving weekend I was glued to the news, wondering: Which hostages were to be released and what were the various stories? Were the hostages physically alright? Who was there to greet the hostages upon their return to Israel? In total 58 hostages have been released. Thirteen Israeli women and children have been freed each day, per the deal's term, along with varying numbers of other nationals, including citizens of Thailand, Poland, the Philippines and Russia. Israeli men (over the age of 19) will not be considered for release because they are considered soldiers. So yes, men in their 70s and 80s are soldiers and not deserving of release.

While lead stories in the Qatar-based news network of Al Jazeera and the New York Times featured celebratory pictures of convicted Palestinian



terrorists as they returned to the West Bank in a 3:1 ratio to the release of innocent Israelis, I could think of nothing more significant to write than a column focused on the individual stories of Israeli reunions and realities.

[CNN](#) offers the names of those released and [Times of Israel](#) presents a deep look into the lives of those held captive - with annotation for those who have been released.

My eyes caught the name and story of Avigail Eden, a four-year-old American-Israeli citizen. She was orphaned when her parents were murdered on October 7. Abigail was the youngest American hostage and her birthday passed while she was being held in Gaza. I don't know who met Abigail when she was released and I can't fathom how she will adjust to this horrific reality.

I read about sisters Ella and Dafna Elyakim, 8 and 15, who were also released this weekend. The sisters were visiting their father Noam Elyakim, his partner Dikla Arava and Dikla's son, Tomer Arava. The girls' mother Maayan Zin lives in central Israel. The terrorists who entered the family home in Nahal Oz documented the attack on Facebook Live, recording the family seated in the living room where they were forced to identify themselves. Father Noam, was shot in the leg, and was seen in the live feed bleeding heavily as his daughter Dafna wept beside him. The terrorist filmed taking the parents' identity cards and forcing Noam and Tomer outside. At some point, Dikla and Tomer refused to be taken hostage and were shot and killed. Noam, Ella and Dafna were taken captive, but Noam's body was later found and only his daughters, Ella and Dafna were taken to Gaza. The girls' mother saw a video of her daughters in Gaza. They were wearing pajamas that were not their own. I cannot even begin to imagine what the last seven weeks have meant for this mother.

Shoshan Haran was also released this past weekend. Shoshan was held hostage along with her daughter and two granddaughters. Shoshan's husband and brother-in-law were murdered by Hamas terrorists on October 7. Shoshan is a world-renowned plant seed developer. She developed drought-resistant plants and crops that thrive on otherwise unusable brackish water. Instead of using her extraordinary abilities to help farmers in rich countries get ever-better seeds, Shoshan devoted much of her professional career to helping poor farmers in Africa. Shoshan understood that seeds can be developed for particular

places, with changes made for local climate, water sources, soil type and pests. Shoshan started a not-for-profit [Fair Planet](#) with the intention of developing seeds for those poor African farmers as precise as the ones she had been helping to create for American and European farmers. The project succeeded beyond anyone's expectations. In the first season using Shoshan's tomato seeds created for central Ethiopia, farmers saw a 500 percent increase in yield. Over the past decade Fair Planet seeds have nourished a million people in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Rwanda, while helping to pull tens of thousands of farmers out of poverty. Fair Planet also trains African farmers in techniques to improve crop rotation, fertilization and irrigation. Hamas and its sympathizers on American college campuses call Israelis "colonizers" and "occupiers." Dr. Haran's only offense was being Jewish and living in Israel. *Are better seeds for poor farmers what the anti-Israel, anti-Zionist, "progressive" activists mean by colonialism?*

Behind each name is a story and the stories are gut-wrenching but important to remember why Israel is fighting and working to protect its citizens. Hamas has vowed to repeat October 7th as many times as necessary. Their infrastructure is still in place and this current fragile truce is allowing Hamas to reorganize. By knowing the specific stories, the atrocities of the kidnapping become more real and the reality more urgent.

While this column has focused on the Israelis' stories, the stories of foreign-born abductees are of vital importance as well. In fact, those stories remind the world how Israel is home to far more than just Jews. We must remember that there were Bedouin who were killed on October 7th and there are Druze who fight in Israel's military. My focus on the lives of Jewish Israelis is not a denigration of other - but rather a reminder to us that Hamas came for Jews and didn't mind murdering or abducting anyone else who happened to be in the way or in any way normalizes Israel - including being a citizen.

In this week's Torah portion, Vayishlach, we read about Jacob and his family as they are heading from Haran back to the land of Canaan. The text says, "Then they moved on from Beth-El. While still some distance from Efrat, Rachel began to give birth with great difficulty. As the labor was hard, the midwife said to her, 'Don't despair, for you are having another son.' As she breathed her last - for she was dying - she named her son Ben-Oni but his father named him Benyamin. And thus, Rachel died on the way to Efrat, which is Bethlehem." (Genesis 35:16-19).

This sad story tells us a lot about naming. Ben-Oni means "son of my sorrow." Rachel imprints her child with the sorrow she was feeling, but Jacob could not tolerate such a reminder - neither for himself or his new son. He changed the infant's name to Benjamin, "son of the right hand," meaning that he would be the source of his father's strength. And with that new name, Benjamin receives the blessing of a promising future. Rachel's death would be forever remembered but the chance for life and strength would be a sign of hope and source of inspiration.

For those who have come home this weekend, I cannot imagine the sorrow and the pain - mixed with gratitude and hope. There are those who still await loved ones and there are thousands who mourn those who will never come home. The psychological warfare of Hamas is unending but so too is Israel's constant resilience and will to secure its nation - for all who dwell within her borders. As these individuals who have been released search for - and please God find - level ground and understanding, may their affliction never be forgotten and may their strength only grow.

L'shalom v'livracha, with peace and blessing,

Rabbi Mark Cohn

Recommended Resources from the Rabbi's Desk

Constant and important updates, podcasts, blogs, and articles from [The Free Press](#), [Times of Israel](#) and [Tablet Magazine](#).

Reading (or re-reading)

["Us & Them: Your only two choices are Zionism and anti-Zionism. Pick wisely."](#)

by Liel Lebovitz in *Tablet Magazine*. Written over two years ago (May, 2021) -



**"Lunch & Learn" with
Rabbi Mark Cohn
Tuesday, Nov. 28
12:00pm**

Tuesday, Nov. 28

The Jewish Left: What's left?

Lebovitz is, sadly, prescient and prophetic. By way of reminder, he was writing after the barrage of several thousand rockets from Hamas in May, 2021 and Israel's response ... and then the global response.

"My friends on the left are calling for a ceasefire, why aren't they demanding Hamas surrender instead?"

by Carly Pildis in the *Forward*. Pildis works for the ADL Associate Director of Community Engagement.

"The US College Campus as a long-term strategic threat to Israel, the US, and global security,"

by David Bernstein in *The Jerusalem Strategic Tribune*.

"Choose counterspeech over cancel culture," by Nadine Strossen and Pamela Paresky in *Time*.

Listening

"Israel at War: Hostage Nation" Rabbi Donniel Hartman and Yossi Klein HaLevi of the Shalom Hartman Institute.

"The Israel-Hamas War and the future of Zionism." Einat Wilf, former Member of

How the Left is similar and different in America and in Israel and what happens when our friends can't stand with Jews and Israel in this moment.

GET READY FOR A HANUKKAH PARTY AT THE SHERMAN JCC!!

Hanukkah Party
Sunday, December 10th
1-3pm @ the JCC in Sherman (9 CT-39, Sherman)
Details to follow!

In the meantime, check out the JCC in Sherman's outstanding schedule - including:

"A Life Apart"
Sunday December 3rd
2:00pm
A FREE afternoon showing of "A Life Apart: Hasidism in America" with special guest Oren Rudavsky, Producer.

JCCINSHERMAN.ORG

PETITION TO SIGN

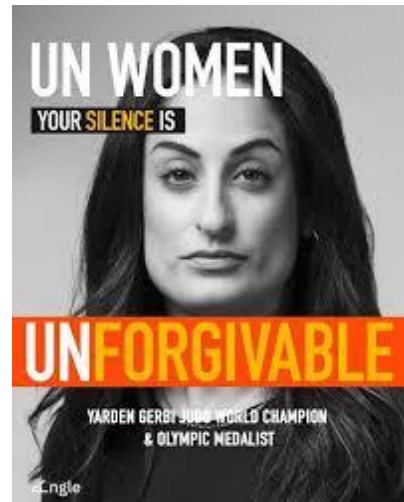
UN Women - I will not stay silent. Every woman's life is equally precious.
This is -

Knesset of the Labor Party, and Michael Koplow, Chief Policy Officer of the Israel Policy Form discuss the short and long term implications and impacts of the October 7th attacks on Israel and American conceptions of Zionism.

UNbelievable
UNjustified
UNforgivable

Sign the petition and be the voice of the women who were brutally raped, abused, burned alive, murdered, and kidnapped.

[#MeToo UNless
UR a Jew](#)



Temple Sholom
122 Kent Road ~ P.O. Box 509
New Milford, CT 06776
(860) 354-0273

[Temple Sholom Website \(www.tsholom.org\)](http://www.tsholom.org)
[Temple Sholom Facebook](#)