

SPEAK OUT

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[Academics for a Democratic Israel](https://www.academicsforademoisrael.org/)

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NO ACADEMIA WITHOUT DEMOCRACY

Prologue

On the peaceful Shabbat morning of October 7th, 2023, we awoke to the sound of sirens and explosions. A horde of Hamas terrorists attacked Israel, leaving over 1,200 dead, many wounded, and 251 hostages abducted into Gaza. This brutal attack compelled Israel to declare war on Hamas, leading to a broader conflict involving other Iranian proxies like Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and Iran itself. One year later, while some hostages have been released, 101 others remain trapped in Hamas' tunnels. Over 100,000 Israelis were displaced, and tens of thousands remain so even now, as homes in the south and north of Israel are still under heavy fire. In this conflict, the longest in Israel's history, many Israelis feel time came to a standstill on October 7th.

The October 7th attack did not happen in a vacuum. In the fall of 2023, Israel was nearing a year of civil unrest following the rise of a far-right government in late 2022. In January 2023, this government announced a series of legislative measures dubbed the "judicial reform," aimed at politicizing the judicial system and shifting ever more power from the legislature and judiciary to the government. Similar reforms in countries such as Hungary and Poland operated to weaken democracy, offering a cautionary lesson for Israel's fate. From January 2023, we took to the streets, launching the longest and largest civil resistance movement in Israel's history. Many of us had never protested before, but the government's illiberal actions drove us to make our voices heard. Throughout these protests, we, Academics for a Democratic Israel, published several "Speak Out" volumes in Hebrew, compiling speeches delivered at demonstrations to capture the spirit of our resistance and document the changes Israel was undergoing.

October 7th changed everything. We stopped protesting and focused our efforts on supporting our nation at war. We were drafted into the army or volunteered to aid our struggling civil society when our government failed to respond. All protest organizations transformed themselves overnight into civil aid organizations. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, we had a naïve dream. In our dream, as the scale of the disaster became apparent, our prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, would deliver a heartfelt address to the nation: "Beloved citizens of Israel, I have failed. Under my watch, our brothers and sisters from the kibbutzim, moshavim, and cities who guard our borders were brutally murdered and taken hostage. I failed to protect them. I will not rest until I bring all the hostages home. My guiding principle is the supreme Jewish value of redeeming captives (Pidyon Shvuyim), which underlies Israel's unwavering commitment to never leave the wounded in battle behind. I will not stop until new security and governance measures, supported by an international coalition that I have already begun to assemble, are implemented in Gaza and Hamas' rule is ended. I was tasked with leading you and bear the responsibility for this failure. In the coming months, I will meet with the victims' families and ask for their forgiveness. Then, I will resign and retire from public life."



NO ACADEMIA WITHOUT DEMOCRACY

A naïve dream indeed. A year into the war, Netanyahu has yet to accept any responsibility for the October 7th disaster despite holding office as prime minister for 1.5 decades. As we approach the one-year mark, nearly half of the hostages remain in Gaza, yet Netanyahu continues to prioritize his far-right coalition over the hostages' lives. His allies in the press continue to fan the flames of division that tore Israel apart before October 7th, and his far-right government persists in pushing anti-democratic legislation. By December 2023, just two months after October 7th, we returned to the streets, demonstrating against our government's actions in the war. We demand a hostage deal, elections, and restoration of a true democracy.

The following pages contain English translations of speeches and articles from these demonstrations, beginning in January 2024. A masking tape with the number of days since 7/10 marks each speech. Wearing such a piece of tape became a daily habit for many Israelis in the past year. In addition to these speeches, we present the text and images from the alternative Independence Day ceremony. Two parallel ceremonies took place on the evening of Independence Day, May 13th, 2024. Both were different from the ceremonies held before October 7th. The official state ceremony, in which torches were lit, was pre-recorded and carefully edited for fear of disruptions by protesters and to maintain total control over the content.

In contrast, at the Shuni Amphitheater in Binyamina, the Hostages' Families Forum for Life organized a very different ceremony, in which torches were extinguished and - ultimately - a torch of hope was re-ignited. Unlike the official state ceremony, this event featured participants extinguishing torches to symbolize the government's failure to rescue the hostages and its feeble response to the surprise attack on Israel. The ceremony included sharp criticism of the government's actions and a call for the return of the hostages. The final torch - of hope, solidarity, and the redemption of captives - was lit by Einav Zangauker, the mother of Matan Zangauker, who is still held hostage in Gaza to this day. The speeches delivered at the ceremony are profound and shocking.. They highlight the fractures in our nation and chart a path for repair and rebuilding.

In recent months, we have endured intense emotional upheaval—with mood swings from joy to sorrow, love to hate, and hope to despair, sometimes within minutes. We are constantly torn between conflicting emotions fraying our mental well-being. Most days, we trudge forward, heavy-footed, wearing out the soles of our shoes as we press on. The north is burning; the government is advancing a law allowing the ultra-orthodox Jewish citizens of Israel to evade military service while at the same time increasing the burden on the exhausted soldiers; the cost of living is soaring; members of the Knesset cynically and cold-heartedly scold hostages' families; the “judicial reform” is back, and more. Our raw emotional responses reveal just how tightly wound our nerves are, poised to snap at any moment.

For months, we have been in the streets, fighting for equality, to topple the government, and for the return of our hostages. The speeches in this volume serve as reminders of this long period of protest. One moment stands out in particular: one of the freed hostages shared that seeing

**NO ACADEMIA
WITHOUT DEMOCRACY**

the demonstrations on television in Gaza was one of the things that gave him the strength to endure his captivity. The knowledge that people were protesting every Saturday night uplifted his spirit and gave him the courage to hold on.

Pause momentarily, put your phone aside, and reflect on this brief statement. There was one hostage in Gaza for whom watching the protests on television provided the strength to survive captivity. The demonstrations helped one hostage survive! This single fact makes every protest and every demonstration worth it. Everyone who took to the streets, whether at Hostages' Square at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Democracy Square at Kaplan Street in Tel Aviv, Begin Gate at the IDF and Ministry of Defense headquarters in Tel Aviv, or one of the many bridges, intersections, streets, and squares across the country, helped one hostage survive the horrors of captivity. From this moment on, there can be no doubt or hesitation. Our feet are no longer heavy, and our heads no longer hang low. We carry our blue and white flags of Israel into the streets because we are the light of hope for a better future. Whoever fills the heart of one hostage with hope fills the entire world with hope. We will continue demonstrating and continue speaking out. We love our country and will defend it against all enemies, foreign and domestic.





NO ACADEMIA WITHOUT DEMOCRACY

Table of contents

Prologue	3	Extinguishing Light and Igniting Hope Ceremony	51
Previous volumes	7	Dr. Yolanda Yavor	70
Dr. Noa Vardi	8	Prof. David Harel	72
Dr. Yeela Raanan	10	Dr. Yoav Groweiss	76
Bar Hefetz	12	Dr. Tanya Zion Waldoks	78
Rotem Stahl	14	Prof. Hanna Lerner	82
Sigalit Hallel	20	Prof. Ronny Geva	86
Dr. Carmel Blank	24	Eran Etzion	90
Avi Dabush	28	Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten	94
Prof. Haim Weiss	30	Yossi Kucik	96
Mika Almog	32	Sally Abed	100
Dr. Mazen Abu Siam	36	Prof. Yossi Levi Belz	102
Prof. Alon Korngreen	38	Prof. Merav Roth	104
Shaul Levy	40	Benny Barbash	108
Eran Nissan	42	Epilogue	112
Rabbi Leah Shakdiel	46	Acknowledgments	114
Prof. Yair Sagy	48		

This is an interactive brochure. Clicking on one of the icons in the table of contents will lead to the corresponding address, and you can return to it from any page by clicking on the small icon shaped like a house surrounding the page number.

Previous ENGLISH volume



Speak Out #1

Previous HEBREW volumes



יצאנו לרחובות #4



יצאנו לרחובות #3



יצאנו לרחובות #2



יצאנו לרחובות #1



חזרנו לרחובות #5



חזרנו לרחובות #4



חזרנו לרחובות #3



חזרנו לרחובות #2



חזרנו לרחובות #1



חזרנו לרחובות #6

Dr. Noa Vardi | No Mental Health without Democracy and the White Coats protest

Shalom, my name is Noa Vardi, I am a child and adolescent psychiatrist, and one of the leaders of the No Mental Health without Democracy and the White Coats protest groups. Like many others present here, until October 7th I was busy fighting for the character of the State of Israel. I protested, I marched, and I gave speeches. Since October 7th, I've channeled my grief and heartbreak into therapeutic work with survivors of the massacre and evacuees. Today I am back behind the podium to complement my therapeutic work – because our heart has been broken and kidnapped, because our brothers and sisters are held hostage in Gaza, because our sons and daughters have been sent off to battle, and because the state that sent them has no leadership, no accountability, and no compassion.

I am returning to the protest to fight for the wounded psyche of the Israeli people, which seeks and cannot find the cure it needs from an abandoning, indifferent government whose public services have been beaten down and shattered for many years.

92 days have passed since the earth shook, and a full year has passed since the State of Israel was hijacked by a government bent on smashing, destroying and dismantling all that is precious and revered; a government creating a rift within Israeli society and between Israel and the world. Israeli society survives today thanks to us, thanks to its civic powers, thanks to the kindness of one woman to another, of one brother to another. It survives thanks to mortal goodness.

In the face of neglectful, abusive parenting, we rose up to volunteer, to help and to mend. But if we thought that the disaster we faced would lead to rethinking and change, if we thought that the government's slogans of "together we will win" would rehabilitate our torn society, the events of the last 90 days have proven beyond any doubt that this is not the case. The Israeli government is abandoning its citizens, preferring destruction and death over saving lives. Nothing is sacred. Not the 132 citizens held captive within the inferno, not their families, not the survivors of the horrific massacre, and not the entire people in need of beneficial parenting that can heal and rebuild after the worst national disaster in Israel's history.

As a mental health professional, I can say that healing the psyche after traumatic events of terrorism and massacre requires that we stop, be able to think, feel that we have control over our destiny and that we are capable of making decisions. The catastrophe we have suffered under the present government requires us to stop and take stock, to make a different choice. Israeli society, in all its sectors and factions, needs leadership. Responsible leadership that will fix, heal, rebuild a collective for which solidarity is a central value, where resources are invested in society, in communities, in the people and not in the rulers. I call out to you here – declare elections now, step down, let a new leadership be created, let us mend what is broken.

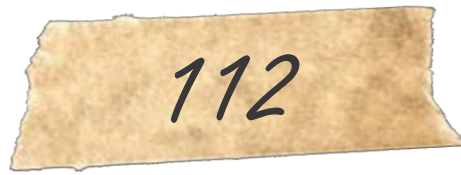
I shall end with a prayer. A prayer for life. This is my Judaism, life-loving and soul-protecting, generous and compassionate. It is a prayer for the hostages, for the soldiers, for their parents and families. A prayer for us, the people of the State of Israel, for a better future.

May it be your will that we depart and return in peace, and reach our destination with life and joy, and be saved from any enemy and persecutor and all the calamities of the world. May it be your will that we succeed in our mission to protect every person and the State of Israel from all harm. Bless us with strength and sagacity, with wisdom and might. Bless us with love, with compassion, with the upholding of good, with justice and mercy. Protect our hearts from injustice, protect our souls from despair, hatred and vengeance. In our time of hardship, show us only that which is human. Protect our souls from all evil, let the sun not strike us during the day and place a moon over our nights, and return us to our homes unharmed. Amen.

יהי רצון מלפניך כי נצא ונשוב לשלום, ונגיע לחיים ולשמחה, ונציל מכף כל אויב ואורב ופרענויות העולם. יהי רצון כי נצליח במשימתנו להגן על כל אדם ועל מדינת ישראל מכל משמר. ברכנו בכח ובחכמה, בתבונה ובעצמה. ברכנו באהבה, בחמלה, בשמירת הטוב, ובצדק, ובמשפט, ובחסד וברחמים. שמור לבנו מעולה, שמור נפשנו מן היאוש, השנאה והנקם. בצר לנו הראה לנו רק את האדם. שמר נפשנו מכל רע, יומם השמש לא יכנו וירח שים על לילנו, והחזירנו לביתנו ללא מתם. אמן



תל אביב



Dr. Yeela Raanan | Sapir Academic College
Resident of Kibbutz Kissufim and social activist

Anemones. Green fields.

This time of year is the prettiest of all in my home, in Kissufim.

I am filled with a powerful yearning to return home. To the scenery, to the house. To a routine...

My name is Yeela – Dr. Yeela Raanan. On October 7th, I hid with my 12-year-old daughter in our home bomb shelter. We were apparently saved by the miracle of the second bomb shelter: the house is old, it was created out of two previously-separate units. Early in the morning, the handle came off the door of one of our shelters – so we moved to the other one. The terrorists who were inside my house tore it up and looted it – but they did not think to look for a second bomb shelter...

I wake up every morning in a hotel room. I get up quietly, so my daughter will not wake up. I make my coffee in the bathroom sink. With the coffee, I read a little bit of the news.

My mind and soul are tormented by so much:

The hostages: when will the state finally take action in every possible channel, in every possible way, to end their suffering – and that of their families?

And the soldiers, on reserve duty for long months, getting killed. . . And the mothers of the soldiers, anxious, spending long sleepless and restless nights, weeks and months.

And the people in Gaza, suffering horrors: tens of thousands dead, about half of them children, destruction, hunger, no medicines.

And I want to go home.

I vaguely remember the mass protests before October 7th. What happened to them? Did they achieve their goals? Yariv Levin and Simcha Rothman, who led the attempted regime overhaul, look faded on the other side of October 7th. But despite their silence, they are still there. Still preparing...

And here, in the Negev: the people of the Bedouin villages, despite their heroism and casualties on October 7th, and even before this bloody war is over – already the government has resumed the cruel practice of sending bulldozers to raze their homes...

Yes, our heads are spinning with so many horrors and such chaos.

But not really. The situation isn't really chaotic. It's all in perfect order, it's all connected:

A prime minister for whom kidnapped citizens are not a top priority – and who even attacks their families when they demand that he take action to get their loved ones released. According to journalist Mohammed Magadli, “The two primary mediators in the hostage talks (Egypt and Qatar) have had a breakdown in communications with Israel because of the relationship with the prime minister, Netanyahu.”

A government that has not yet decided what the war is for. A war without an end and without a purpose... A senior government minister who threatens, “if the war does not continue – there’s no question, we will leave the government!”

This is an appalling statement.

And the soldiers: our brothers, our partners, our children and our friends – are fighting, and dying.

A defense minister who calls for a “complete siege of Gaza,” and a president who claims that there are no uninvolved citizens in Gaza – who spur the country and its soldiers on to inflict harm that is disproportional, certainly unnecessary, and surely immoral.

A prime minister who “manages the conflict,” passing suitcases filled with dollars to Hamas, while withdrawing the troops from the border with Gaza to guard the settlers who attacked the villagers of Hawara in the West Bank – despite intelligence reports of an imminent attack from Gaza...

A government that gives billions to sectorial politics encouraging ignorance and tightening Israel’s hold on the territories, taking those billions away from the poor, the elderly, the homeless, from programs intended to reduce social disparities and to diminish the violence within Israel’s Arab society.

A government that makes people afraid to speak: any post on social media, even if it refers only to faith in God (sorry, in Allah), gets the writer arrested and charged with incitement. Many of us here feel afraid to demand peace. As though demanding peace were an act of treason.

So no, it’s not chaos. It’s conduct perfectly orchestrated to create suffering, unrest, destruction.

There is another way. But walking it requires wisdom, courage and compassion.

We owe it to the hostages and their families, to the soldiers fighting and to their mothers at home, we owe it to our neighbors in Gaza – who, after all, will always be our neighbors ... And we owe it to ourselves: we must take to the streets, act, protest – until we topple this government, until we replace it with a new one. A government that will be able to think and plan how we want to live here, a life of dignity for everyone from the river to the sea. A government that will know how to give people on both sides hope.

Our only chance of never having something like this happen again – is striving for peace.

And then I will be able to go home. With my daughter. And walk down the anemone paths again.

Bar Hefetz | An avocado farmer from Kibbutz Nirim

126

My name is Bar Hefetz, and I am an avocado farmer from Kibbutz Nirim. On October 7th, my family and I were scattered throughout the kibbutz, barricaded inside bomb shelters in our homes, while Hamas terrorists paraded outside. On that day, we were abandoned by the State of Israel, whose leader for too long has been Binyamin Netanyahu, the man who transferred money to Hamas to “keep Gaza quiet”.

Today I stand here in Beer Sheva, the city that extended a warm welcome to myself and to the Nirim community. Here we have found a temporary home, until we can return to Nirim. However, our community here in Beer Sheva is not whole: Some were murdered on October 7th. Some have succumbed to the anguish and distance. And we are missing Nadav and Yagev who are still to this day held hostage in the Hamas tunnels under Khan Yunis in the Gaza strip, a stone’s throw from our home in Nirim (Bring them home already!).

And there stands our government, talking about unity, using the empty slogan “united we will win”. What unity do they speak of? A prime minister who daily dispatches his ministers to speak against the commander-in-chief of the IDF; A prime minister whose son tweets from Miami against a senior member of the war cabinet who recently lost his son in combat defending our home. A man who never set foot in Nirim before October 7th, and even now has not come to speak with us, the displaced refugees, and is not even capable of expressing any sorrow – what unity does he speak of? A man who visited our kibbutz only now that it is burnt down and empty – what unity does he speak of? A government which until recently was full of incitement against us, calling us traitors and accusing us of shirking our duty – what unity does it speak of? A government which sees our friends taken hostage as a burden to be rid of – what unity does it speak of?

Our only urgent need right now is an election by consensus, to form a new government. A responsible government which will be committed to work for all Israeli citizens, including our Bedouin neighbors – who risked their lives on October 7th, rescuing survivors from the Nova music festival, and whom the current government consistently maligns. We need a government which will serve everyone – the Bedouins, the Kibbutzim, the cities and towns, the refugees and displaced families from the south and north of Israel, the religious and the secular. We need a government which strives to achieve a greater good, and not one that is bent on sowing divisiveness and discord. Critically, we need a government of serious professionals, who will expend their energy to the benefit of all Israeli citizens, and not on petty tweets.

And you, Mr. Prime Minister, take your family and just be gone. Forget the trial, forget everything else, just leave and never come back.



Alon Korngreen



Arielle Skladman

141

Rotem Stahl | Ben Gurion University of the Negev,
Member of Kibbutz Kfar Aza, whose mother was murdered

My name is Rotem Stahl, and this year I will be finishing my undergraduate studies at the Department of Life Sciences, with a division at the School of Sustainability at Ben Gurion University. I was born in Kibbutz Kfar Aza in August 1994, two months before the peace with Jordan, and a little over a year before peace was assassinated.

That's it. Ever since then, more or less, we have been at war. 2001 marked the first Qassam rocket, 2002 and 2003 were years of rockets with no warning sirens, in 2004 one such rocket flew over my head during P.E. class, in 2005 one fell on the lawn of the Berman family, 2006 is hard to remember because our brothers from the north of Israel stole our thunder, but don't worry – we didn't have peace in that year either, 2007 saw the launch of mortar shells, in 2008-2009 we were evacuated for the first time, 23 days away from home during Operation Cast Lead, in 2009, the late Jimmy Kdoshim, a member of our Kibbutz, was killed at his doorstep, and exactly 21 days later a mortar shell landed on my parents' doorstep.

I could continue this lovely review for quite a while, never getting to October 6th, not to mention the 7th.

Why, then, am I listing all these events, you may ask? Why am I sharing my so-called heartbreaking, though not so special, story? You don't need me to tell you that war is crap...



You don't need me to tell you that war leaves people angry. Hurting. Consequently seeking more wars and more pain. That loss and bereavement are not much of a turn-on and that it currently seems that the Israeli society is thinking – or at least acting – completely the opposite. You don't need me, a freshly-bereaved son since October 7th (rest assured, I will fill you in on the details later in my speech...), in order for any of you – dear people who gather here tonight – to become supportive of a diplomatic solution aimed at peace. Nor am I really needed for you to think that the utmost duty of the State of Israel and its leaders is to bring back all the hostages, yesterday.

So why did I, nevertheless, choose to write these words, let alone read them to you from behind the podium?

From age 7 or so, I was forced to be overly involved in Israeli politics. Whether or not I was allowed to watch the news, I experienced firsthand the responses of our kind neighbors to the events in Israel, which motivated me, strangely enough, to try and figure out the reason. I was not even 10 years old and already knew whether I was for or against the disengagement from Gaza (some of the evacuees from Gush Katif were my classmates), remembered names of Ministers of the Interior and of Foreign Affairs and was acquainted with the policy on allowing commodities into Gaza. Way too early in my opinion.

This forced involvement in such momentous events never taught me anything about the reason. Never, in my nearly 30 years on this planet, did I feel like I truly and comprehensively understood the reasons why people fire rockets in my direction in order to kill me, while other people fire rockets in the direction of the first rocket. It is not because I do not know the facts, or did not



pay attention in history classes. It is not because I did not participate in programs that facilitated meetings with people from the other side.

Today, I am convinced. I know that although the complexities of the “conflict” are many, they are not the reasons for it being violent, or lasting so many years. The real reason we have to live on our sword is the fixation of Israeli governments, generations back, cowardly avoiding choice or responsibility. Responsibility – not in the sense of absolving murderers and terrorists of their own responsibility, but rather in the sense of mature assessment of the situation. In the sense of acknowledging Israel’s strength and leveraging it to create a real future for both peoples.

To create such a future, we need leaders. Leaders we do not currently have.

For the sake of fair disclosure, my decision to leave Israel was made earlier than 7:32 AM on October 7th, although it was made that morning. Judge my decision and be angry if you wish, but I, having lived a life of war for most of my life, having had to escape my home and seek asylum at least three times in my not-that-many years, I have had enough. I will try to reclaim my injured soul elsewhere. Regrettably, I will invest my energy in action and seeking good, but not here. When I travelled in Australia, I thought about the meaning of the phrase “I have no other country”: is it a self-fulfilling prophecy or merely recognition of the facts. Today, after Bibi and his lot killed the romance, I feel like I have no country, betrayed by my own home. When I was young, my mother used to say that I would bring peace. Unfortunately – I think I cannot fulfil this task.

Having said many words – some more pleasant than others – this is my last will as I leave the country.

Get into politics. Go be politicians. We have plenty of engineers and high-tech people. We have an abundance of lawyers and judges. We are short of leaders. People not yet spoiled by our outdated and competitive system. People whose heart and conscious are not yet shrunk by materialism and the chase after fame.



We are short of responsible, unwavering people, who can assure us that our way towards our ultimate goal – peace and prosperity, will involve the deaths of more soldiers and civilians; rather than promise the destruction of Hamas within a given time frame, and then inflict upon us a colossal disaster while they are absorbed in fouling and degradation.

Israel is short – desperately short, to be honest – of qualified people. People who have held one or two managerial positions. Who had to make crucial decisions in the name of a collective. Enough with inarticulate and incompetent public servants! Israel deserves a leadership with a résumé.

Israel is short of principled leaders. Leaders with integrity and honesty. Who will manage public funds with transparency. Who will feel committed to report their acts to us. Who will find their own method to provide the public with a scale to compare Knesset members and their work in order to create competition for public opinion, our opinion, via doing. Who will provide true value for their salaries. Leaders who will be unable to bear the shame of leaving hostages captive in enemy territory.

Brave leaders are needed. Leaving things as they are is the easiest choice. The same choice that led us to the October 7th disaster. The stagnation of Israeli governments over the last two decades resulted in an impoverished and exhausted civil service. The persistent choice to ignore Israel's most acute problem, i.e. the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, stems from cowardly leaders, hesitant in making decisions and preferring the status quo. Courage means taking a stand, while knowing that all decisions bear consequences. Brave leaders my ass. Where are the leaders who will face the hostages' families and tell them squarely that they have other priorities over bringing their loved ones home?

Get into politics then! You, in particular. If you hear me, you are probably on the righter side of



Adi Khen

history than those occupying those seats. You are probably more principled. I don't know what skills you have, and whether you are up to such a lofty job, but even by just joining this crowd you are contributing more to the State of Israel than the members of its current Knesset.

Every era presents its own challenges. Our grandparents fought to build the country, turn the desert into a blooming garden. Our parents followed in their footsteps and made Israel a western, prosperous country. Each of these generations faced its own challenges. It is now our turn to protect the country, but also the State.

In conclusion, I would like to use this stage to call on the man at the top. As the firstborn of Mira Stahl, who was murdered in her home, the home of my parents, at 7:32 on the Saturday morning of October 7th, whose blood shall be avenged by nobody – for such a pure soul must not be tainted by childish seek of revenge, I call on the primary guilty, AKA their master, the Prime Minister. I call on you to resign. I call on you to permanently withdraw from life in Israel. I want you to know, although I'll be damned if you ever hear my speech or care the slightest, that I hate you. That I wish upon you that each and every human soul taken from this earth due to your wrongdoings will haunt you to your dying day. Your soul shall be forever restless, just as you condemned our souls. You are guilty, you know you are, and by not stepping down from your clowning chair, you multiple your guilt minute by minute.

You are to blame for my siren-filled childhood and my anxiety-filled adulthood. So is Hamas, but this does not lessen your guilt, mate. It is your fault that even the shreds of childhood I did have, were buried on October 7th. You are to blame for the rise of hatred in this country, the brainwashing, the dumbing down. You are to blame for the violence, the racism, the aiding and abetting of crime. You are guilty of the degradation of the dignity and symbols of this state, you are guilty of contempt of the court and its status. You are to blame for so many things, that the mere utterance of the word “guilty” brings your image to my mind. The only positive thing you can do before evaporating from our lives is this – bring them all back. Now.



Alon Korngreen

Alon Korngreen





Sigalit Hallel | Bereaved mother of Ori Tchernichovski, Nova music festival victim and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev student

I wish to begin by sending a blessing to the IDF soldiers on all fronts, to wish a speedy recovery to the injured, and my condolences to all bereaved families. I call for the return of all hostages – now!

“Hi, you’ve reached the Dream Factory – how can I make your wishes come true today?” This is how my son Ori answered his phone. My Oriki was a wonderful person, full of human compassion. He was a 4th year electrical engineering student at the university in Beer Sheva, and was working as a bartender at the Nova Music Festival when he was viciously murdered. He was only 29 years old.

As a mother, I raised my children with the values of personal integrity, social justice, humanism and love of our country. So I was not surprised when Ori’s many friends told me how he used to answer phone calls. Ori, with his deep sensitivity and wisdom, truly saw each and every person, especially those who were marginalized in some way, and went out of his way to offer a helping hand. Anyone who shared any difficulty with Ori, even in a casual conversation, immediately received his full attention, help and good advice. Ori made everyone feel that they were his closest friends, practically family members. He simply, humbly and generously extended a helping hand, a kind smile and an open heart, as though he were doing nothing out of the ordinary. My Ori was murdered in Re’im, which in Hebrew means friends or companions – symbolically befitting the friend that he was.

Ori’s life followed the elite religious-zionist path – private schools and yeshivas, a pre-military prep program, meaningful military service in the Air Force Intelligence, travel around the world and then to university. The salt of the earth.

As a people’s person, Ori was concerned about the fissures dividing Israeli society. As an educator, I am also pained by the tears in the social fabric of my beloved country, and wonder how long the ground will continue quaking below our feet. This cursed war did not come upon us out of the blue, this horrible personal and national breakdown. Our lives have been forever changed since that terrible Saturday. I seek a national anchor point, and come up empty-handed.

In my son’s eulogy I wrote that one half of my heart was gone, departed with Ori. I shared my hope that as a liver can regrow a missing lobe, so my heart would regenerate itself. But my heart cannot grow a leadership that this country deserves, which is why I am speaking my mind here today.

I have never been a political person. I stand before you today as a citizen who knows something about democratic values, as a bereaved mother who lost the light of my life. And I have something to say to anyone who thinks it is unseemly to raise my voice for change at this time; that now

is a time for unity and solidarity. I say to you: This is my way of expressing unity and solidarity with my fellow citizens. Citizens of my broken and beloved country, those fighting at the front, those who ran for their lives inside our sovereign state, those who are praying for the safe return of their children from battle, those who are mourning their dead – so many of us! I raise my voice for changing this unbearable reality in which innocent citizens were slaughtered. This is exactly the right time to demand different leadership.

Leadership that in times of emergency focuses exclusively on citizens' critical needs, and is not working to promote personal or political interests. Leadership that has its eyes, ears and especially its heart tuned to any and every sign, to every hint, to understanding cause and effect, that takes full responsibility for guaranteeing citizens' security

Leadership that does not curtail free and open discussion between heads of the military and the security forces, because such discussion is required to ensure civilians' and soldiers' safety

Leadership that respects culture, any culture! Leadership that treasures and rewards excellence and value-driven accomplishments – any accomplishment, Mr. Minister of Education¹ – even the accomplishments of a bereaved father who does not support the current government.



Alon Korngreen

1 The reference is to Minister of Education Yoav Kisch's decision to withdraw the prestigious Israel Prize for Technological Entrepreneurship and Innovation from Eyal Waldman (the former CEO of Mellanox Technologies), whose daughter was murdered at the Nova Music Festival. The decision was later overturned.

I am not naïve. I am aware of the complexities, and I yearn for leadership that will know to engage with and address these complexities – we cannot afford anything else!

The current government offers no such leadership. Instead, it is plagued by a lack of dignified discourse, glaring disharmony between politicians and civil servants. Our government has made an ideology of dealing in minutia, and has drained value-based identities of any meaning.

Mr. Prime Minister, what goes through your mind every time you call for “total victory” in your speeches? Pray tell me, what victory could you possibly be talking about? What victory can we claim after the disaster of October 7th, in which many hundreds of babies, children, parents, elderly, teen-agers and soldiers – including my dearest son – were massacred? What victory can we claim after the colossal collapse of the entire civilian government infrastructure? I searched for my son for 5 days. Since October 7th, not a single government representative – not a member of parliament, not a minister – has come to express their condolences to me or to any of my many bereaved friends. Not even a phone call.

Mr. Prime Minister, I know little of politics and of warfare, but I understand leadership and principles of good management. You had all the information laid out in front of you, and nothing raised your suspicion? How is this possible? We fed the beast for years, and finally it turned on us to destroy us, there were warning bells, who is responsible?

Mr. Prime Minister, you rightly say that the guilt is shared among many, but the responsibility lies squarely with you and only you! Because you are the Prime Minister. Being Prime Minister means not only enjoying the comforts of your station, or dominating the airwaves. Being Prime Minister carries a heavy responsibility – are you up to it, Bibi? In your current condition? After seeing the horrors of that Saturday, and realizing how many warning signs you missed, do you still believe you have what it takes? The necessary accountability?

If so, call for an election and seek to renew your popular mandate.

In every press conference you repeat the slogans “Together we will win” and “Power in Unity”. The Israeli people have been wrenched apart under your last watch, which culminated in the horrible disaster, and you speak of unity? If I wasn’t so despondent and heartbroken, I would smile bitterly.

Tell me, Bibi, what unity can we hope for when you send out Likud agents to sow discord and divisiveness, and especially to protect you from yourself! Do us all a favor, release us, call for an election and turn over the leadership to someone else. It is time. The time has indeed come for unity and amity, but these cannot flourish under your auspices.

Believe me Bibi, I am not a “leftist”, and I definitely enjoy no privilege. I even voted for Likud once or twice in the past. As a bereaved mother I am telling you, my tormented and beaten people yearn for leadership. We seek a Pillar of Fire that will show us the way, and not burn down our house. The people crave leadership, in which cabinet ministers do not vilify military commanders,

in which members of Knesset do not reveal the identity of secret agents of Israel and endanger their families, in which cabinet ministers are not so tone deaf as to say “Releasing the hostages is not our top priority”. We want leadership that when such awful things happen clearly commands “Don’t!”, or at the very least does not encourage the perpetrators behind the scenes.

I want a leader who will take the reins and cry out “follow me!”, and we will trust him to gallop after him. I don’t need a leader who won’t even turn his head to see if there is anyone behind him.

You know, Bibi, sometimes I feel like an invisible hand has invaded my body, grabbed my heart, and is dragging it down into hell, to my Ori. Perhaps the only way for me to come back to life is if things here will be different, better. Please, leave us with your immense contributions as well as your abject failures, and call for an election. Another leader will rise to replace you.

I want a better future for my toddler grandson Oren, and for our next generations. My son Ori wanted a better future, but “The music of his life suddenly stopped. A pity! There was another song in him. Now it is lost forever”. My beloved son’s voice is silenced for eternity, but his song is here and it will be heard!

“Hi, you’ve reached the Dream Factory – how can I make your wishes come true today?” – this was the music of my son’s life, how he will be remembered by his many friends. My Oriki, I have a dream, that things will be different. My friends and comrades, we stand here together, raising our voices for necessary change, so that the death of our best and brightest will not have been in vain. This change is my solace, my anchor, my safe harbor. We all deserve more than this, we all deserve change.



161

Dr. Carmel Blank | Department of Behavioural Studies, Ruppin Academic Center

October 7th caught us all by surprise. The coalition of parents I lead together with the irreplaceable Tami Yakira and Meirav Manoshevit – “Keep Kahanism, Racism and Homophobia Out of Our Schools” – was at the peak of its activity. We had nearly ten thousand parents on our WhatsApp groups, and I provided daily consultation to parents who decided to organize against the racist and messianic forces that took over the Ministry of Education, and stop their uninterrupted operation in their children’s classrooms. Our active groups, also here, in the Shephelah region (the Judaeen foothills) – Galit in the Gezer Local Council, Adva in Ness Ziona, activists like Guy and Assaf and others in Rehovot and Rishon LeZion – were successful in introducing liberal and democratic content and blocking the messianic takeover of the schools.

When October 7th came, our hearts broke, with some shreds of it still in Gaza – with the hostages, the soldiers who are risking their lives, the scars that will be forever carried by all residents of the Gaza envelope.

We all stepped up.

I established a project which is still ongoing, to help connect volunteers with farmers in the Gaza Envelope. Some became a catering center, packing or transporting food and equipment to IDF bases, others help evacuee families, are active in the hostage headquarters and many, many more amazing initiatives. For a single moment, we felt like one united people again.

The cozy comfort offered by the slogan “Together we will win”, combined with the deep discouragement, anxiety and depression that touched almost each and every one of us, brought the protest to a standstill almost immediately, and the issue of education was pushed to the sidelines. This is not a personal problem. A study I performed in November together with Prof. Yossi Levi-Belz and Dr. Yoav Groweiss, found that nearly every other person, 45% of the adult population in Israel, had experienced depression beyond the clinical threshold. The rates of anxiety were almost the same and one third of us were experiencing post-traumatic symptoms. The rates of depression and anxiety are inverse to political participation, since they compromise our ability to imagine a better future. In the absence of hope, all the rage and anger we hold against the government of destruction and calamity fail to transform into protest. Protest is a call for change – and when we are broken, change seems impossible.

“They”, however, never stopped. The poison machine continued to vilify opponents, the looting of the State budget intensified, unequal shouldering of the burden is far from over and the government of chaos continues to crush the State in the service of the offender and the messianic-orthodox-Kahanist section.

In the area of education, if prior to October 7th we had a system in which almost all academic discipline committees were controlled by officials from the religious-national sector, who designed textbooks and content in their image and their likeness; and we had Avi Maoz controlling the ex-curricular programs that proliferated in the education system, and we had an acute budgetary discrimination in favor of the national-religious and orthodox education, if prior to October 7th principals and teachers were afraid to express any critical opinion about the government – then after October 7th it all continues, on steroids:

Budgets going to the homophobic, misogynist and racist Avi Maoz keep growing, while the rest of the educational system is undergoing painful cutbacks. Nationalism in schools is skyrocketing. Blatant racism against Arabs has become almost legitimate (perhaps not “almost”, when parents’ demands to terminate the employment of Arab assistant teachers in kindergartens are given serious consideration), militarism has become a top value and, of course, war is the classic platform for silencing and threats against anyone “suspected” of being politically left wing, i.e. a “traitor”, as demonstrated by the dismissal of professors and teachers, or virtual (nearly actual) lynch of any person daring to express compassion for uninvolved citizens in Gaza, or even imply that any exist.

In the field, we heard in recent months of girls in national-service and teachers who explained in class that the massacre in the Gaza Envelope was due to non-observance of the Shabbat, we hear of videos in support of returning to Gush Katif (the former Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip) shown in elementary schools; we notice the fear to talk about values which are the heart and soul of secular education in a democracy – equality, sanctity of life and mankind, tolerance, reconciliation and, of course, peace.

This ominous surge is threatening to drown the last bit of our depleting strength, extinguish our remaining shred of hope. But hear this: rather than drown, we grow stronger!

Your presence here is the best indication that we will not surrender! It took us, the liberal-democratic people of Israel, a while to come around, but getting back on our feet is a gamechanger. Just like we did before – we will now once again take a deep breath and get back out on the streets and in the schools to say: “Enough”!

I would like to share some new data we gathered just two weeks ago: the rates of depression and anxiety are almost back to their pre-war levels. Nearly 50% of the people feel betrayed by our leadership and 55% of the public hold the Prime Minister guilty or very guilty for the October 7th calamity. Public rage hasn’t gone anywhere, and discouragement is more and more translated into acts of resistance against the Government.

Each and every one of you here imagine that a better future is possible!

And do you know what is the primary ground for creating such a future? In your children’s

schools. Yes, we are still overwhelmed and the simplest task may sometimes seem difficult. Emotional inundation and discouragement also derive from a sense of powerlessness, from State acts that are performed beyond our control. But in your child's classroom – you do have the power!

All of us, as parents, want our children to be raised in light of values such as knowledge, equality, love of mankind, respect, tolerance, curiosity and criticism. But now, more than ever, schools promote the values of ignorance, obedience, discrimination, xenophobia, violence and nationalism.

In the face of this dark shadow, stands a mighty and determined force, that must stand tall, reclaim its voice and speak up. It is us – you and me, mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, who stand against the evil forces, declaring – no more! Not my child. Not in our school!

Be vigilant to what is going on in your schools – the content of worksheets and texts, holidays, the pictures decorating the class walls. Be attentive to the tasks assigned to your children and the discourse they are exposed to. Persistently hold on to humanness also at this time.

Show zero tolerance for messianic content disguised as “war efforts” or false “unity”. Unity equals partnership, but those who want to brainwash our children are no partners. Notice which NPOs enter the schools for ‘bringing together’ gatherings, aimed solely at bringing our hearts closer to their values.



The ominous surge we currently face is made up of thousands of drops, in each school, in every classroom. No more!

Even tomorrow, each one of you can find out where the school trip will be this year, how Purim or Pesach are taught, go over the text books and above all – connect with more parents for joint action. Talk to the teacher, or school principal (talk, not attack – they are our partners) and encourage them to hold critical and thought-provoking discussions in class. Encourage them – now more than ever – to promote pluralism, tolerance and diversity of opinion, and teach our children ways to delve into issues and argue their positions beyond the reciting of Tik-Tok slogans.

Make a decision: My daughter will not grow up to become a Ben Gvir voter!

Your child will not grow up to be racist!

We will not entrust our children's education to Yoav Kisch and the Government of destruction!

We must, and we can, become once again the human shield against a messianic, nationalist and racist dictatorship. Be the sound of reason and say: Enough! No more! Not in our school!





Avi Dabush | Refugee from Nirim, Director of Rabbis for Human Rights
Leader of Protests for Democracy in the Negev

“Those without faith find living hard this year”

“Those without faith find living hard this year” wrote the poet Leah Goldberg

Even if we all have faith, like our forebears before us. If we have faith in humanity and its spirit, in god, or in hope itself. Even if we have faith, we find living this year to be very hard.

On January 23, 2023, we held the first demonstration in Beer Sheva against the regime overhaul. Amit Deutcher, a lawyer, and myself launched it – we scrambled together some money for a sound system and told the police that there would be about 100 participants. However, hundreds came to the protest. Hundreds of high spirited people.

We had set in motion the largest and longest-standing protest the Negev has ever seen, with a peak of 20,000 protestors. We persevered. We marched on Jerusalem when the need arose. We marched on weekdays when necessary. We played a central role in curbing the regime overhaul, which aimed at turning us all into passive subjects, and allowing the corrupt and irresponsible Right wing government to govern for eternity.

On October 7th we received a devastating blow. The previous morning I met in Ofakim with members of the Torah Core Group, for a loving and heated argument, in Moshe Ohayon’s Sukkah. Moshe, may he rest in peace, was killed the next day when he ventured from his home to open bomb shelters. That evening, of October 6th, we celebrated the 77th anniversary of our Kibbutz, Nirim. On the holiday morning of October 7th, 50 years and one day after the outbreak of the Yom Kippur war, all hell broke loose on me and my family, in our home.

This week I visited Nirim with family members of one of those murdered in the massacre. We entered the burnt homes, riddled with bullet and RPG holes. We turned our gaze towards nearby Khan Yunis, with its now missing mosque minarets. The sounds and odors of the ongoing war were all around us. I ran to my own home, to pick up a few things to bring to our temporary residence in Beer Sheva, where we moved about one month ago. Those without faith find living hard this year...

It is sometimes difficult to realize that we are living an inconceivable reality. We have paid the highest price. We have lost hundreds of friends and acquaintances. Hundreds were taken hostage. Our own Yagev Buchshatev and Nadav Popolwell are still being held hostage in Gaza, with 132 others, for 168 days!! Almost six months!! We are refugees in our own country. After spending 36 hours in the bomb shelters we were smuggled out and taken to Eilat. We spent four months in hotel rooms, and then moved here, to our beloved Beer Sheva. Our children are only now returning to school.

We have paid the highest price and we are still paying. We have paid the highest price, and others refuse to pay. When I visited Nirim, I learned that the towns and villages have not yet received the government compensation necessary for rehabilitating their communities, including demolition and rebuilding of the hundreds of houses ruined by the Hamas. The rail line between Ashkelon and Sderot is still not up and running, because the Ministry of Transportation is unwilling to spend the necessary 800 million Shekels. Businesses in the area have not been fully compensated for their losses. Where is money being spent easily? On more settlements in the West Bank and Jewish identity as defined by the far right minister Orit Strook, as if we do not know our own Jewish identity, and on more orthodox religious schools that do not teach basic math, science and English, and whose graduates do not enlist in the military. All this while our children, brothers and friends have been making the ultimate sacrifice for the last six months.

We have paid the highest price, and the politicians who are responsible for the greatest disaster in Zionist and Israeli history, do not bother to even accept responsibility. They refuse to pay the minimal price of resigning and losing their salary. Instead they are fully invested in their self-interest, in fortifying their rule, and in avoiding free elections. This will not stand!

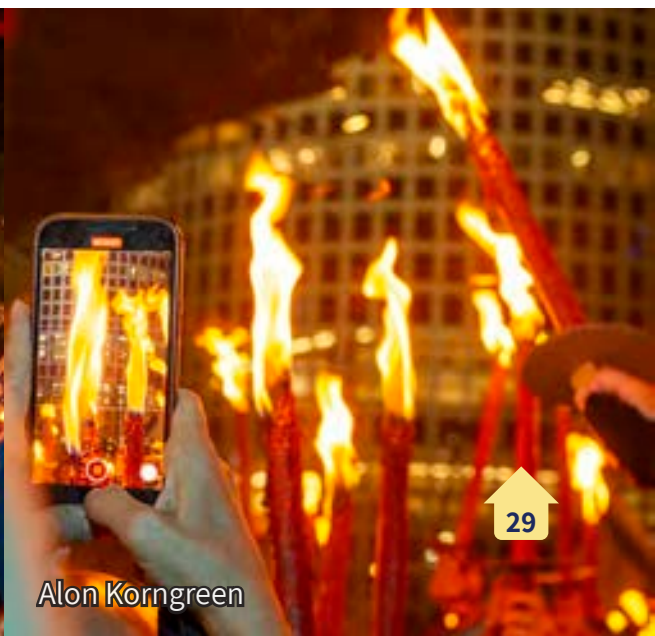
We are shocked and speechless. We have started our rehabilitation. We are strong, but we are broken. By no means will we be silenced! We refuse to be the poster children of silent, grieving refugees. We will raise our voice, forcefully. For our children. For ourselves. For our dead. For our hostages.

What is your job? Not to abandon us, as we had been abandoned for 23 years. Take time this week to convince 5 friends, neighbors or family members to join us here next Saturday. So that we are not alone. So that our bleeding is staunch. We have no more blood left to lose...

Leah Goldberg concludes her poem with the question "How can I wake up if there is no faith in my heart?" I have faith. WE have faith. We must awaken and herald the change. Our hope is not yet lost!!



Alon Korngreen



Alon Korngreen

168

Prof. Haim Weiss | Department of Hebrew Literature, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

At a time when more than 130 of our brothers and sisters are being held hostage by Hamas terrorists, and the government of Israel is failing in its duty to bring them home to their families; at a time when the lives of thousands of soldiers are at stake, and the government of Israel is not doing enough to end the war, a war that is inflicting death and horrible suffering on Israelis and Palestinians alike; at a time when tens of thousands of citizens from southern and northern Israel are refugees in their own country – at this time, the most difficult and terrible in Israel’s history, we might have expected Education Minister Yoav Kisch to devote himself entirely to the tremendous challenges now facing Israel’s education system. We might have thought he would work tirelessly to provide this system with all the help that it needs. Instead, since the beginning of the war, and in fact since the creation of this failing and dangerous government, the Education Minister has chosen to abandon his responsibility for the flourishing and well-being of Israeli education. Instead, he is devoting his time and energy to a childish, inexplicable fight against the education system in general, and against Israeli academia in particular.

Over the last few weeks, he has made unsuccessful efforts to cancel, for the first time in history, one of the State of Israel’s best-known, most beloved national symbols, the Israel Prize, which every year reflects our nation’s foremost achievements in art, the humanities, industry and medicine. The Israeli public, the Israeli academia, and the Attorney General, all staunchly opposed the Minister’s attempt to cancel the prize, and the prize will ultimately be awarded on Independence Day as originally planned – including the prize for innovation awarded to Eyal Waldman, a high-tech entrepreneur and prominent protester against the regime overhaul attempted by the government, who lost his daughter in the Nova music festival on October 7th.

During the last week, Israel’s universities managed to block a dangerous and populist bill supported by the Education Minister. The proposed law would have enabled the Knesset to bluntly intervene in the proper functioning of our academic institutions, forcing them to award degrees to students who have not completed adequate academic training. The country’s universities and colleges have been making an enormous effort to support students returning from the battlefields, finding ways to help them to catch up on missed studies while maintaining the requisite academic standards. Instead of joining this effort, the Minister and his associates preferred easy, reckless solutions. Do we really want to hand out degrees to engineers, teachers, programmers and scholars in the humanities and social sciences, who were exempted from one-third or one-half of their degree requirements? Is that really the best way to help reservists coming home from active service? The answer is, of course not; but the Minister does not really care about that. Instead of helping us, he tried – again, unsuccessfully – to compromise the training and future of those students, all in the interest of appeasing some imaginary coveted “political base.”

I should add that this is not the first time Yoav Kisch has created unnecessary and harmful smokescreens around the academic system. Last year he caused an unnecessary uproar by trying to take over the board of directors of the National Library in Jerusalem, so that it might serve as a source of cushy jobs for political cronies. Moreover, since taking office he has made relentless attempts to change the makeup of the Council for Higher Education by adding unqualified cronies who will impede the proper functioning of the governing body of Israeli academia.

A more galling kind of conduct can hardly be imagined: while the Israeli academic system as a whole is working tirelessly to maintain its international standing and cope with proliferating instances of ostracism and boycotting, along comes Israel's Minister of Education, the man entrusted with nurturing and safeguarding Israeli academia, and seeks deliberately and repeatedly to damage it. Instead of helping Israel's academic leaders fight, for example, the planned NIS 250,000,000 budget cuts in higher education, the Minister is dragging them into unimportant, unnecessary fights which take up their time and attention and prevent them from doing their jobs.

I would like to say clearly and loudly: We will not give up. We will not allow this damage to be done. Even in these difficult times, we will preserve Israeli academia as a domain of excellence in research. Moreover, to the chagrin of this government and despite all the difficulties and challenges standing in our way, we will continue to strive for full equality for all who pass through our gates. We will not allow the rights of any of the varied groups making up our magnificent mosaic to be infringed upon. Unlike our women-excluding government, we in academia will continue to pursue full and equal representation for women. We will also continue to stress that in academia everyone has rights – even at a time when insisting on this is so hard and far from obvious, and even if we ourselves sometimes find this notion challenging. Right-wingers and left-wingers, members of the LGBTQ community, Jews and Arabs – all are entitled to security and freedom of expression, and we will do everything in our power to protect these rights.

The fight for education is a fight for the future of the State of Israel, and for its ability to recover from the terrible tragedy it has suffered. As has happened in other areas of its activity, this dangerous government failed miserably in education even before October 7th, a failure that has become only more conspicuous and perilous in the wake of the Hamas attack. This is a government that, while chasing any hint of real or imagined publicity, is willing to burn down everything that others once labored so hard to build here, and thus to leave us all without a future.

For the future of all the inhabitants of this beautiful, anguished piece of land, we must replace this government now! We must choose a government that will pursue the common good; a government with a vision, one that will prefer honesty to fraud, and compassion to revenge. The government that this good nation deserves.

172

We Israeli Mothers Must Save Our Children From Our Leaders

Mika Almog | Israeli writer, columnist and activist

[First published at Haaretz English edition \(Link\)](#)

I took the family photos off the fridge to clean it this week and my gaze landed on a photo of me with my son. He's 16, now, studying for his matriculation exams and working out a lot, but in the photo he's just three - his arms wrapped around my neck as he plants a kiss on my cheek, my eyes closed, smiling blissfully. And a thought flashed in my mind. And it wasn't "He's so sweet" or "Time flies". It was: "I wonder if this picture will accompany the headline about him being killed in combat one day". After all, even the words I'm writing now, as "Operation Swords of Iron" (the name the Israeli army dubbed this war against Hamas) may someday be part of a moving feature about the fallen soldiers of the "Operation Golden Daggers" war in 2029. "How did she know?" The reporter will muse, "What maternal intuition revealed to her, years in advance, the impending tragedy?"

And some years will pass, and I'll have a grandson, and he'll be named after him. And if you thought the original article was moving - just imagine how poignant the story of the fall of my grandson in the 2041 "Operation Titanium Machetes" war will be. Hair raising. Because even my unborn grandson is prone to the same fate. Just ask Yael Alon, who comes to every demonstration with the gut-wrenching sign, "My father was killed in the 1973 Fiasco, my son was killed in the 2023 Fiasco". And I stood in front of the fridge, an Israeli mother, overwhelmed by anticipatory grief, I asked myself: how long will we continue to give birth to dead soldiers? And how is it that we're still enchanted by our leaders' false promise of "Total Victory", when anyone over 20 should already know there's no such thing in life as "Total", nothing's absolute, everything's a compromise? How are we still willing to support this childish fantasy, paid for in our children's blood?

And how is it that when told "Once and For All" for the 200th time, we still believe there's some crushing blow that can replace compromise, and this war will be that definitive blow? How is it that we still believe that lie, when the only "once and for all" Israeli reality provides, is that "once" we bury our loved ones in the ground, they stay there, "for all"? And then I understood. When I look ahead, my gaze is set on the future. But the current Israeli government, those profiting from this war, their gaze is not set on the future - it's fixed on eternity.

Whether it's about staying in power indefinitely, or about some distorted version of a kingdom of heaven in which the descendants of one of Abraham's sons have annihilated the descendants of the other. It's not the ideology that matters, it's the outlook. Because when your gaze is fixed

on eternity – we’re not even a pixel. We, as in us and our dead children, and our destined to-die children, those who made it out alive but death has been forever branded into their bodies and souls, the thousands of shattered bereaved families, the 200,000 refugees in their own homeland, and 134 kidnapped women and men whose lives are draining in Hamas captivity for 171 days and nights, and their tormented families - all of us, not even a pixel.

Sadly, there is an “Us” and a “Them”. But the dividing line doesn’t run between the Israeli and Palestinian people, nor between Jew and Arab, Right and Left, religion and secularism; not even between liberalism and conservatism. The real battle is between the aspiration for a viable future and the aspiration for the glory of eternity.

This is why our messianic-minded government has no plan for the day after: because the real plan is for the day after everything. What are 171 days of hell compared to eternal rule? And while eternity is by definition distant and unattainable, the future presents itself at any given moment. The future lies not only in the day after the war, but in the choices and actions we’ll make now. Right now. And yet, we keep waiting

for a tipping point, some inciting incident that’ll trigger us to flood the streets in mass protest.

We need more triggers? Really? What sign are we waiting for, when we have all the “signs” we need that now is the time to act as if our lives depended on it - because they do? We have all the triggers we need. What we don’t have is a plan. What’s happening here is insane. If someone had



told us a year ago that over 1,400 Israelis would be dead, that thousands of Palestinian civilians would be killed in a handful of months and even more facing hunger and even starvation, that 134 Israeli men and women would be held hostage in Gaza - and life in Israel would pretty much go on as usual - we wouldn't have bought it for a second. "No way!" we'd cry, "We'll shut down the country, we'll lie down on the roads!"

And there are lots of rationalizations, some justified, for the bizarre and unimaginable routine emerging in Israel - because we have to make a living, life must go on, and the economy, and we need to provide our kids with some illusion of normal life, and we have to breathe every now and then, because how much can you possibly take? So we've slowly returned to the malls and soccer stadiums, and our streets and cafe walls are hung with posters of the hostages, too many to remember all of their names and faces - and we see them less and less. They've blended into the scenery of our lives. And that's insane. October 7 proved we are living in a failed state. This is an unprecedented moment and our response should be equally unprecedented.

While the reawakening of Saturday nights' protests is of huge significance, the reality is that we may not have enough Saturdays left to risk. The hostages certainly don't. Now is the time to rally around the one place in Israel where the enormity of that reality is truly grasped, and has been, for some time: in a tent outside the Knesset, where Ya'akov Godo, whose son Tom was murdered on October 7, has been living for almost five months. And most days there are a few dozen people there, most of them born before the 1990s, who still remember an era far from perfect, but that offered alternative visions for the future. Those born after the Rabin assassination could be hard



Dana Reany

pressed to name a prime minister whose name is not Netanyahu; integrity as a criterion for public service isn't something they've known. And they've never witnessed so much as an attempt to seek a true, political, long-term, international solution to our existential problems.

In the background of my childhood and youth there was a peace process. Some were in favor of it, others against, it took one step forward and two steps back - but its very existence allowed us to see Israel not only through the prism of what it is, but also through the prism of what it can be. We let all that die. And we denied the next generation the ability to imagine a different reality.

The power is in our hands, to teach them to imagine again. But it's not a collective decision, it's a personal one. You don't get called; you choose to show up. You choose to demand that the mandate be given back to the people of Israel: the democracy-loving people of Israel, who stood up for one another in our darkest hour, who saved each other's lives while our government deserted us. Repeatedly. This messianic government is not worthy of the people of Israel. The worst part is, they know it, too. We have no shortage of reasons to rebel, but we are running out of time. Come visit Tom's dad's tent. It's easy to spot, there's a huge building right across the street, quite heavily guarded. You know who owns that huge building? Well, among others, Tom's dad. And me. And you. We do. Those inside? They're just leasing.

It's time to give them their eviction notice.



Dr. Mazen Abu Siam | Rahat city council member

175

Good evening to the people of the Negev, and a heartfelt embrace to the families of the hostages being held captive since October 7th. These devastated families have been demonstrating throughout the country for the last 176 days, and they carry unbearable pain. For them, the world has shattered and time stands still. For long hours on October 7th the state was absent, and they were abandoned to face a cruel enemy – some were massacred, others were taken hostage. Those who are demonstrating with us here today are displaced from their homes. The hostages' families are hounded and humiliated, and even worse – treated as hostile agents, aiding and abetting the Hamas – by certain members of the out-of-touch government.

For 176 long days 134 men, women and elderly are being held hostage, suffering hunger and fear. For them, every minute in captivity must feel like eternity. These include hostages from my community, whom I know personally – Youssef Ziyadne, Hamza Ziyadne, Farhan Al Qadi and Mohammed El Atrash. For 176 days, these civilians – who are not prisoners of war – who were snatched from their beds and workplaces, are being held hostage. Instead of becoming an issue of the highest national priority, their release has become a bargaining chip for the political survival of a dictator. The previous deal and ceasefire could have been extended by several days or weeks allowing most of the hostages to be released, but political considerations prevailed.

For 176 days, none of the political leaders have accepted responsibility, and they are still looking for someone to pin the blame on for this disaster and failure. For 176 days, the government is still failing to protect its citizens and is instead handing out guns, acknowledging its failure and in essence telling us to fend for ourselves. The Minister of National Security boasts that he has handed out 100,000 guns, de facto turning civilian into armed militias, while everyone knows these weapons will ultimately turn up in street fights, be used for domestic violence, and some of them will fuel the violence and crime in the Arab sector.

The disaster of October 7th has been brewing for many years. Netanyahu's governments over the last decade and a half neglected Israel's domestic concerns. The current government and its irresponsible messianic ministers launched the regime overhaul and incited the Palestinians by upsetting the status quo at Al Aksa mosque, leading the country to disaster. Prime Minister Netanyahu willfully ignored the necessity of resolving the Palestinian issue, hoping that signing the Abraham Accords would push it aside or make it disappear. The Abraham Accords should have been implemented from the river to the sea.

Israeli civil society suffered an immense blow on October 7th, one it will take many years, perhaps even a generation, to overcome – if at all. The war has long since lost its purpose, and has become

a war of attrition, failing to achieve its goals. At the outset, contradictory military goals were set out, whereas a diplomatic goal of ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was conspicuously missing. Ultimately, foreign powers, the UN's Security Council, or the US, will enforce a diplomatic goal. I say yes to fighting terror, but no to fighting uninvolved civilians. It is immoral and inhumane to starve an entire people, a 30-minute drive from Beer Sheva, as collective punishment. The eyes of the world are watching as children drown in the sea, trying to reach an airlifted meal. We will all pay the price for this, as will our children and grandchildren for generations to come, because we are leaving them with neighbors who have been severely damaged, and who will be raised on hatred and revenge. These sights are broadcast internationally, much more so than here in Israel, and thus support of Israel has plummeted and antisemitism is reaching unprecedented levels.

This war will not end because there is no diplomatic goal and there is no plan for the day after. This war will not end because the prime minister is not doing well in the polls, and this is what drives his every decision. This war will not end because of the necessity of the Swords of Iron 2 war, which is the war of the State and People of Israel against the Prime Minister and his government. The only way this war will end is when many hundreds of thousands will take to the streets and clearly announce to the government: You have failed your duty of protecting the citizens, you must return the mandate to the people!





2 April 2024

The Chimera

Prof. Alon Korngreen | The Gonda Brain Research Center, Bar Ilan University

In Greek mythology, the Chimera is a three-headed monster made up of a lion, a goat and a dragon, with one or more of the heads breathing fire. In genetics, a Chimera is an organism or tissue containing the genetic code of at least two different organisms. The Spring 2024 protest is also a Chimera; it is made up of three different protests, each with its own supposedly distinct genetic code. One of the Chimera's heads calls for elections now; the second cries out for the release of the hostages; the third demands the equal distribution of civic duty and the conscription of the Haredi (Jewish ultra-orthodox) population into military service. To avoid bickering, let's not try to decide which one is the lion, which is the goat and which is the dragon.

Three protests with three seemingly distinct genetic codes, trying to navigate one monstrous body. While the families of the hostages cry out in pain outside the Kirya (the Ministry of Defense and IDF headquarters in Tel Aviv), members of the Brothers in Arms reservists' movement hold protests in the Haredi centers of Bnei Brak and Meah Shearim in Jerusalem. At the same time, protesters demanding elections on nearby Kaplan Street listen politely to speeches before flowing onto the Begin Bridge near the Kirya, their "Elections Now!" signs mixing with those calling for a hostage deal. One night, the hostage families' rally ended in darkness when one of the Chimera heads turned out the lights and called on the crowd to join the protesters at Begin Bridge. True, the heads don't always coordinate well with each other. Sometimes one of them pulls the body in a certain direction, embarrassing or angering the other two. Nevertheless, the entire monster keeps moving forward, roaring and breathing fire.

And there stands the prime minister like a street bully, threatening two of the Chimera's heads that if they work together, early elections will shut down the country for eight months and delay a hostage deal. But he is unsuccessful in his efforts to breach the protest. The breach is entirely on his end. The members of his petty, tawdry coalition are looking for a way to keep channeling funds to the Haredi public without requiring the latter to contribute to society. Meanwhile, even the unimpressive opposition is also not trying very hard to solve the problem of Haredi exemption from military service. Maybe after the leader one day departs, they hope, they will be able to bridge the divide with the Haredi politicians using one form of bribery or another. Some parts of the Israeli public claim that large protests in support of a hostage deal will only make the deal more difficult to achieve. Others are angry at the protesters who demand elections, even calling them traitors (but forgetting that we live in a democracy, not a theocracy). The Haredis still do not understand why the Chimera, dressed in the Brothers in Arms' khaki shirts, has momentarily intruded on the reclusive quiet of the shtetl. Members of Knesset, in a show of unbelievable callousness, go on a two-month recess as they yell dismissively at the weeping Chimera head

holding up pictures of the hostages. The Chimera's third head, meanwhile, demanded elections in large protests for four months while the regime's mouthpieces hurled every possible insult at it, but the head did not bow down. The list is long, and everyone in it finds something to criticize in one of the Chimera's heads.

Indeed, it's remarkable that one body can contain the genetic code of three entities and still function. But, a closer look reveals that there isn't a significant difference between the genetic codes of the three protests. All three heads of the Chimera demand a change in the priorities of the State of Israel. The families of the kidnapped demand empathy instead of apathy; protesters demand elections that will remove extremists from power and allow for the building of a liberal society; reserve soldiers demand that all social strata enlist in the people's army and seek real equality of rights and duties in the country. All parts of the Chimera are built from the same genetic code that demands a human, egalitarian, and liberal order of priorities in the State of Israel. Therefore, the protest of Spring 2024 is not a three-headed monster at all. The protest of Spring 2024 is a combination of all the forces demanding reform in the State of Israel. And those who are afraid of monsters should sleep with the lights on.



Alon Korngreen

Shaul Levy | Naama Levy's grandfather

183

How can we start another week, six months later, with the bitter truth hitting us again, another tragic item on the news, another illustration of this government's incompetence – the murder in captivity and return to Israel of the body of Elad Katzir from Nir Oz.

I can no longer bring myself to say “good evening” or “have a good week”. Where are we? Is there any hope left? Who can we believe?

Soon after October 7, we started shouting: Bring all the hostages back home now! But we very quickly realized that what we were actually shouting was “save them”. Their lives are in danger every single day. And now, exactly what we feared, has happened: Elad was murdered in captivity.

This number we are left with, 133, will it become 133 more graves, because the government of Israel has forsaken them?

Last Saturday I went – for the last time – to Hostage Square. It felt to me that we had “fallen in love” with the weekly gathering of the families and friends, everyone standing there with posters of the hostages. At the same time, on the other side of the street, on Kaplan, the protest organizations were demonstrating. Later on, the two groups came together at Begin Gate of the IDF headquarters base (the ‘Kiryat’). Civil protest is rising, and frustration and disgust with the prime minister and war cabinet's failure to save the hostages is surging. It is hard to believe that these are our leaders. They are not worthy of this title.

And yet, we need to stay focused. I'm speaking here today because the main purpose of the protest right now is to push up the elections. And even if a new date is set for the elections, in three months' time, or like Gantz says, on the first anniversary of the horrors of October 7, and public attention will be focused on the elections, we mustn't let go, even for one second, of our obligation to save the hostages. Please stay with us.

I feel so guilty toward my granddaughter Naama. And I am crying out: I have not betrayed you! For six months I've been pacing like a caged lion, not knowing what to do with myself and my anxiety. I've been asking myself, why have I not been able to get to you and rescue you. It drives me insane! And you are still there, wasting away, humiliated and losing hope in the Hamas dungeons, your body and soul being abused beyond human imagination. In moments of clarity you must be wondering – How could they have forsaken us so?

I can no longer say: We are doing absolutely everything to save you. Because we are not!

In the hostages' families' march from Hostage Square to Jerusalem, we the grandparents also stopped at the fence with Gaza. We went there with bags with our personal belongings, and begged for them to take us and release them. We failed, our pleading went unanswered. The

feeling that there is nothing I can do to help my granddaughter, who is suffering such terrible distress, drives me out of my mind.

I lost three brothers, two of them in Israel's wars, and I am all too familiar with the excruciating pain of losing loved ones.

In my hometown, I was asked to recite the "Yizkor" prayer at the ceremony on the Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terror Attacks. I told them that this prayer starts with "May the People of Israel remember its sons and daughters", but my granddaughter Naama is still alive! I cannot possibly recite a prayer in remembrance of our dead, a prayer that burns our hearts and souls, while she is alive. I refused.

The fact that 133 hostages, living and dead, are not back home yet after six months, is inconceivable.

Everyone in Israel is hurting with the families, everyone has someone he or she knows among the hostages, the 1,400 victims, the brave soldiers who were killed in action or the thousands who have been injured. A dark cloud hangs heavily above all of us, from the right and left wing alike, from religious and secular circles alike. Is the Prime Minister the only exception to this rule? Is he that heartless? that insensitive? And what about the two former chiefs of staff working with him, Gantz and Eisenkot? How come they are still silent?

I have lost faith in our leaders. I want you replaced! But first bring back the hostages, those who are still alive, and those who are already dead. This is your first and foremost duty. You abandoned them on October 7, 2023, and you are still abandoning them now, six months later.

Enough is enough! Get it together!

Naama Levy, our granddaughter, is a triathlete. She is strong, both physically and mentally. Does she still have the strength and resilience to hang on for a little longer? All races, triathlons included, have a finish line. Naama, our love, show us you can hang on a little longer, just enough to make it to the finish line. We are waiting there for you, to give you a winner's hug.



Tanya Zion-Waldoks



Tanya Zion-Waldoks



Eran Nissan | CEO of Mehazkim¹, Peace activist

My name is Eran Nissan and I am the CEO of the Mehazkim movement. I am a peace activist, and also a paramedic and ambulance driver by training.

This is my first time speaking in a protest since October 7th. I have turned down previous requests, but Beer Sheva has a special place in my heart, and in my personal history.

My master's degree in emergency and disaster management is from Tel Aviv University, but I completed my undergraduate studies right here. Beer Sheva is where I became a political activist. I met my wife, Shir, when we were both travelling in Thailand after our military service, but we started dating in our freshman year, and our first kiss happened right outside her grandmother's home, a few blocks from where we stand today. Not only Beer Sheva, but the entire Negev region has a special place in my heart – I proposed to Shir when we were hiking near Mitzpe Ramon.

However, Beer Sheva holds a special place in my heart not only due to happy memories. On October 7th, Shir and I were hiking near Sde Boker, to celebrate her birthday. We woke up to news of the Hamas invasion, to sirens, explosions, news alerts and videos. We immediately came here, to Shir's grandmother's home. The first siren caught us right here across the street, on Rager boulevard. When we arrived, we learned that Shir's cousin, who is an officer in a special unit and was spending the weekend at their grandmother's, had driven off in his own car with his pistol to fight Hamas terrorists. He encountered fighting near Moshav Yakhini, saved two Israeli women from being kidnapped, and was shot and injured in the battle.

He called to say that he was on his way to Soroka hospital. I told Shir, her grandmother and her aunt to stay at home, and went to the hospital to find her cousin. I reached the hospital just as the first wave of casualties flooded in. Because I am a paramedic, I always carry disposable gloves with me, just in case... So I put on my gloves in the hospital parking lot and started treating the injured and carrying them into the emergency room. I stayed at Soroka hospital through the afternoon that day, running back and forth between the ER and the ICU, between the front desk and the operating rooms – changing my gloves over and over, helping whomever I could. When I returned to Shir's grandmother's house, I was covered in other people's blood.

What I saw that day in Soroka will stay with me for life. Not only the trauma, not only the soldiers with gunshot wounds, the police officers from Sderot who were hit by shrapnel, the Bedouin children hit by explosion shockwaves, the survivors from the Nova music festival wearing fancy party clothes and glitter on their faces, who were scratched all over and covered in glass shards and blood.

¹ Mehazkim (in Hebrew: Strengthening or Empowering) is a progressive digital movement working to promote the values, ideas and solutions of the Israeli left.

Not only these horrible sights, but also the amazing staff of Soroka hospital. Doctors and nurses, Israeli residents of the Negev, of different religions and with different political views, who had lulled their children to sleep the previous evening in Hebrew, Russian, Arabic and Amharic, were all united by a single purpose – to save lives. While knowing that their homes, towns and families were under missile and terrorist attacks, they continued bandaging, operating and fighting for the lives of every single person who arrived at the hospital. On that cursed day many people lost their lives, but many were also saved thanks to the dedicated and professional care they received from the medical staff of Soroka.

When I stand here today telling you my story of October 7th, I am hopeful. Hope is not rose-tinted glasses we wear to feel better about ourselves. Hope is a candle in a dark room. The darker the room, the brighter the candle's light.

Hope for the return of the hostages, hope for peace and security, hope for responsible and inspiring leadership, hope for equality and democracy – all this hope that feeds our legitimate aspiration for a better life here in Israel – this hope rises in direct response to the darkness surrounding us.

Hope is also the fuel of political change. But hope is not enough, we also need power. So I want to talk about political power. What I do in my life, professionally, through the Mehazkim movement, is building political power through social media. In the political power-building world, known as “organizing”, there is a concept known as “a whirlwind moment”. Whirlwinds create immense political energy, and anyone who wants to promote change has to know how to capture this energy through political vessels, like political parties, civil movements or even WhatsApp groups or protest communities like the one gathered here tonight.

Whirlwind moments present us with a rare opportunity to renew and improve our reality. Whirlwind moments have two defining elements. The first element is extreme uncertainty. This means that we do not know what will happen from one day to the next. The second element is the spontaneous sprouting of numerous new initiatives. This means that the old familiar players are being replaced by new forces.

This last year has been a classic whirlwind moment. The attempted regime overhaul, and even more so the ongoing war since October 7th, have created extreme uncertainty. We don't know if Benny Gantz will resign from the government tomorrow because Netanyahu is delaying the hostage deal, or whether the Ultra-orthodox parties will leave the government because of a mandatory military enlistment law. Over the last year we have also seen the emergence of hundreds of protest movements – from the White Coats to the Black Gowns, from social workers and dieticians for democracy, all the way to civics teachers and beauticians for democracy.

We are in the midst of a whirlwind moment, and here in Beer Sheva it is a whirlwind of hope. City residents and students have joined forces and are standing united to fight for the future of

the Negev and of Israel. Far away from the water cannons used to disperse the protests in Kaplan street in Tel Aviv, and from the mounted police dispersing protesters in Balfour street in Jerusalem, our unique protest spirit could arise only here in Beer Sheva. Each and every one of us standing here has a part to play, and I am confident that the Beer Sheva protest will continue to grow. I urge you to join me in directing the current whirlwind to support and sustain a diverse, brave, democratic and steadfast southern alliance.

I would like to return to my point of departure tonight: Beer Sheva as a symbol, and specifically Soroka hospital as a symbol. On October 7th, the great divide between the citizens and the Netanyahu-Ben Gvir government was glaringly visible. Hundreds of WhatsApp groups that had been dedicated to protesting against the regime overhaul, pivoted within minutes to groups disseminating information, groups of drivers, volunteers, cooks, hosts, teachers, money donors and blood donors. Within minutes, reserve soldiers reported for duty, and medical personnel – paramedics, nurses and doctors – arrived at the hospital without being called, because they knew that they were needed.

The stark contrast between the spirit of volunteering, duty, hope and solidarity of the Israeli citizens, and the pyromaniac, irresponsible, clueless politicians has never been clearer. As I witnessed Arabs and Jews working side by side at Soroka hospital, the government freeloaders flooded social media with racist incitement against the Arab citizens of Israel, and doomsday prophecies of violent conflict.



כרמיאל

We can all learn from the example set by the medical staff of Soroka that day. The power of citizens working together, the value of fighting for life instead of fighting for land. The realization that when the fire rages around us, we do not have the privilege of remaining passive bystanders – we must grit our teeth and jump into the chaos and uncertainty.

Only if we mobilize will we succeed in building together the future we deserve. A future in which the government works to benefit all citizens equally. A future in which we have a strong state with stable institutions that assume responsibility for citizens' health, education and welfare. A state that strives to sign peace treaties, yes – peace, which will guarantee our security. A democratic state in which we all feel safe, know that we belong, and are treated equally.

Thank you Beer Sheva, and good luck to us all.





Rabbi Leah Shakdiel | Resident of the town of Yerucham in southern Israel
Educator and social activist

The key value on which we must base the state is the equality of all human beings. It was in the name of this value that we secured national freedom for the Jewish people; and it is this value that compels the Jewish people's state to uphold equality of rights for all.

Our ultimate test is the way we treat Arabs, including Palestinians. On the one hand we have the chauvinistic and ethnocentric Jewish Israel, which sees only the catastrophes of the Jews and aspires only for the victory of the Jews. On the other, there is the humanistic Jewish Israel, which sees our sovereignty in our land as the responsibility to achieve equality for all: for the Palestinian citizens of Israel, including the Bedouins; for the Palestinian residents of the West Bank; for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. From the river to the sea, freedom and equality for all.

As the holiday of Passover draws near, let me note that we are commanded to remember that we, too, were once foreigners dependent on the kindness of an alien regime, and afterwards slaves to that same regime. The liberation of the Israelites from Egypt is not just our own national story as Jews, but the foundation for all of humanity's dream of liberation from slavery, from the Black slaves in the United States to the oppressed natives of Latin America. This is our theology of liberation.

What's happening on the ground, however, is the absolute opposite. We have repeatedly cautioned that under the cover of the ongoing war, Jewish settlers dressed in IDF uniforms are carrying out ethnic cleansing of entire communities in Area C of the West Bank. Within the Green Line (the pre-1967 border), Arab citizens are being silenced and their freedom of speech and of political assembly decimated, while the demolition of homes in the unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev has escalated. In the Gaza Strip the indiscriminating destruction and killing continue, as does the starvation of an enormous population forbidden to return home. This is what our test shows. We shall not accept this reality, and will keep on fighting to change it.

Just as the Palestinian struggle for freedom in no way justifies the crimes of October 7th, so Israel's legitimate fight to defend itself and its citizens does not justify disproportional killing and destruction in the Gaza Strip or the starvation of its citizens.

We say: Yes to the release of the 133 hostages (including the four Bedouins among them), No to continuing the failed quest to eradicate Hamas. Yes to a ceasefire and a hostage deal, No to revenge. Yes to a political solution of peace and security for all, No to war and endless bloodshed.

Only commitment to the equality of all humans will guarantee a regime of equal citizenship on both sides of all borders. Only commitment to this value will guarantee political arrangements based on equal citizenship, including the equal participation of the ultra-orthodox (Haredi)

Jewish population in building Israeli society – not only by sharing in the duty of military service, but by making a democratic core curriculum part of the Haredi system of education, along with other required core subjects that will enable Haredi graduates to contribute equally to the economy and the tax base. Only the commitment to equality explains why it is crucial to maintain the independence of the legislature and the judiciary, whose job it is to restrict the executive, to keep it from sliding into the tyranny of absolute power and corruption. Only this commitment can ensure a stable, peace-seeking democratic regime.

We will succeed in tipping the scales and winning the elections only if we can grow the equality camp; only if all those worried about the present state of affairs, all the disgruntled who do nothing beyond complaining privately, will mobilize for an active civic struggle – not only in rallies of this kind on the streets, but everywhere, in the education system, in academia, in local government, in political parties and in the organizations of civil society.



Tanya Zion-Waldoks

Prof. Yair Sagy | Faculty of Law, University of Haifa



197

Good evening Krayot,

This is my second time speaking here. The first was at the height of the attempted regime overhaul. The government wanted to change the face of our country, to turn it into a sham democracy, without the beating heart of a real democratic regime, without checks and balances, without sufficient protection of our civil rights. They wanted to unravel the liberal character of the State of Israel. It was thanks to you, and only you, that we stopped them.

My name is Yair Sagy. I am a lecturer in the University of Haifa's Faculty of Law, the co-chairperson of the Israeli Law Professors' Forum for Democracy, and a member of Academics for Israeli Democracy.

I have come here to tell you that we have to stop them this time, too. This time it's even more important. This time we must demand: Elections now!

Why? Because it is even clearer to us now just how dangerous it is to leave the present coalition in charge. I want to remind you that we said all along that the regime overhaul was extremely dangerous not only because it would change the democratic character of the state, but because it was laying the groundwork for even more dangerous acts by the coalition. We said, I remind you, that the attempted regime coup was causing us to disintegrate from within.

What happened on that horrific Saturday of October 7th, and the government's management of the war in Gaza since then have proved how right we were. We have since learned just how deranged a path the coalition wants to lead us down, and how much worse things would have been had we not stopped the coup. Who knows if we would even have been allowed to protest. As things stand now, there is incitement against us and an effort to keep us from protesting, even though it is a fundamental democratic right.

We are in the hands of an incompetent, reckless coalition, in which incompetent ministers do us more and more damage with every passing day. Our ministers lack all discretion and good judgment; in the name of a messianic vision, they bring destruction to whatever they touch, even to our strategic alliance with the United States, whose absolute necessity for Israel was demonstrated again only this week.

It is not we, but they who have forgotten what it means to be Jews. After all, the blood of our brothers and sisters cries out to us from the tunnels beneath the ground!

What guides the coalition is not strategic considerations, but the insane idea of resettling Gaza, whatever the cost in soldiers and in hostages. They are promoting Armageddon.

The main culprit in all this, however, is the prime minister. He is the head, he is to blame. His behavior reveals that he has lost all sense of direction. As sometimes happens to pods of whales, he is leading us to be beached on the shore.

Because of him, Israel has hit a low point unprecedented in its history. We have become a pariah state; our credit rating is deteriorating; our friends are pulling away. Tens of thousands of Israelis, in the south and in the north, are refugees in their own land. Our own prime minister is heaping mayhem and destruction on us.

This coming Passover, therefore, will not be a happy one. This Passover we must all tell the story of the hostages as we sit down to the Seder meal while they remain in the pit. Each one of us must see himself as if he were a hostage in Gaza; each one of us must see herself as though she were displaced from her home and an exile in her own country.

But this Passover should also remind us how great and important is this struggle we are waging against the coalition; how dangerous is the rule of an arrogant, detached leader who inflicts the plague of the firstborn on his people; and how worthy it is to fight for freedom. This Passover will remind us that it is possible for slaves to be freed; that we survived King Pharaoh, and that we will survive this, too.

This Passover should remind us, moreover, that there is a humane rather than messianic Judaism; a Judaism that instructed us, after the Exodus from Egypt, to “love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt,” and defined the redemption of captives as a sacred duty (mitzvah).

This Passover will remind us that the fight for the soul and freedom of our society is a long one, but that it is the fight that defined us in the days of King Pharaoh, and it continues to define us now. As you celebrate Passover, say to yourselves: The people of freedom are not afraid of the long road ahead.

I congratulate you for persisting in this fight; there is no fight more important, and you are champions. Without you, we will never again be able to celebrate the holiday of freedom in full.

I will end by expressing my deep thanks to you and praying that the hostages, the soldiers, the injured, the displaced, and all the victims of that bloody Saturday will return home to us and heal soon. Don't stop fighting.



מלחמת חוץ ביות ברזל

החטפה צומחת שוב

יום הזיכרון לחילאי מטרות ישראל הששנ"ה
Memorial Day 2015

ישראל
Israel

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7.10

Extinguishing Light and Igniting Hope Ceremony

SHUNI

13 May 2024

Prologue

220

The following pages are dedicated to the profound and emotional “Extinguishing Light and Igniting Hope” ceremony, held at the Shuni Amphitheater during Israel’s most recent Independence Day. Organized by the Hostages Families’ Forum for Life, this ceremony was held in parallel with the official state torch-lighting event at Mount Herzl in Jerusalem. Still, it carries a unique and deeply resonant purpose.

For decades, the Independence Day torch-lighting ceremony at Mount Herzl has served as a powerful symbol of Israel’s achievements and resilience, marking the transition from Memorial Day for fallen soldiers and victims of terrorism to the celebrations of Israel’s independence. However, in the wake of the horrific tragedy that struck Israel on October 7th, this year’s ceremony at Shuni was different. On that fateful day, many Israeli citizens—men, women, children, and elderly alike—were violently abducted from their homes in a brutal surprise attack. Many remain in captivity to this day. In response to this national trauma, a new kind of ceremony was born that sought not only to remember but also to protest, grieve, and call for change.

Held at the Shuni Amphitheater before a large and solemn audience, the torch-extinguishing ceremony symbolized the collective pain and frustration over the government’s handling of the hostage crisis, both in the lead-up to and in the aftermath of October 7th. Family members of hostages, bereaved families, artists, and social activists took the stage to extinguish torches—each flame representing a different facet of the heartache and disappointment felt by so many. Yet, amidst the darkness, a single torch was lit: the torch of hope. It symbolized solidarity, the unwavering commitment to bring the captives home, and a glimmer of light at the end of a long, dark tunnel.

The speeches delivered during the ceremony, collected in this volume, reflect the raw emotions of the families, emotions shared by many across Israel and beyond. These speeches are a call for decisive action, for the government to prioritize the release of the kidnapped and missing. They also testify to the strength, wisdom, and sensitivity of those who have endured unimaginable loss. As a society, we are reminded of our collective responsibility to protect and support the most vulnerable among us and to work tirelessly for their safety and freedom.

These short speeches capture some of the most significant moments of the ceremony, providing a lasting platform for the words of the speakers. Nearly a year has passed since the hostages were taken, and the messages expressed on that day remain just as powerful and relevant. We hope these words inspire action, fostering a renewed sense of solidarity and a relentless pursuit of justice and compassion in Israeli society.

Extinguishing the Light of Disregard for Personal Safety

Galit Dan | mother of Noa Dan and daughter of Carmela Dan, who were murdered in Nir Oz, and three of whose family members were kidnapped

“I, Galit Dan, daughter of Carmela and Uri Dan of blessed memory, mother of Noa of blessed memory, and Tamar, may she be granted long life, was born in Kibbutz Nir Oz. I raised my daughters there over the last ten years.

With a broken and shattered heart, I extinguish this light due to the absolute, blunt and disastrous disregard of our personal safety. On October 6th, I sent my daughter to sleep at her grandmother’s house, fully trusting that she was safe in Nir Oz. On October 7th, I still believed that the fortified room was a protected and safe place for my family. We were trapped in Kisufim in fortified rooms for 22 hours without water, food or communication while terrorists shot and barricaded themselves in our home. At the same time, Hamas took over Nir Oz and murdered my Noa together with my mother inside the shelter. My faith, trust and sense of security in the world were murdered together with them.

It is my government that is responsible for this murder. It is the one that gave me and all the residents of the Gaza border settlements the illusion of security that exploded in our faces. We thought we were safe and protected by the army – we were wrong! How very wrong we were. It was a false sense of security! No one cared about us. Not when we cried for help from the shelters, not when we collected the bodies, not when we reported the kidnapped. Over 200 days soaked with blood and filled with suffering and pain, and still no one from the country’s leadership has contacted me. My daughter was murdered, my sister’s children were kidnapped together with their still-captured father. Our family has experienced and is still experiencing horror. Where was the army? Where was the government? Where are you?

Alongside the dreadful pain, I have another strong and brave daughter to raise here, in the State of Israel. I owe it to her and to myself to sow the seeds of hope for a better future. I pray from the depths of my heart and cry for the return of all the abducted women and men! Only their return will allow me, us, to begin the process of healing from this terrible trauma, mend our shattered confidence, and reignite hope and a sense of personal and national security.

Extinguishing the Light of Abandonment of the Border Settlements

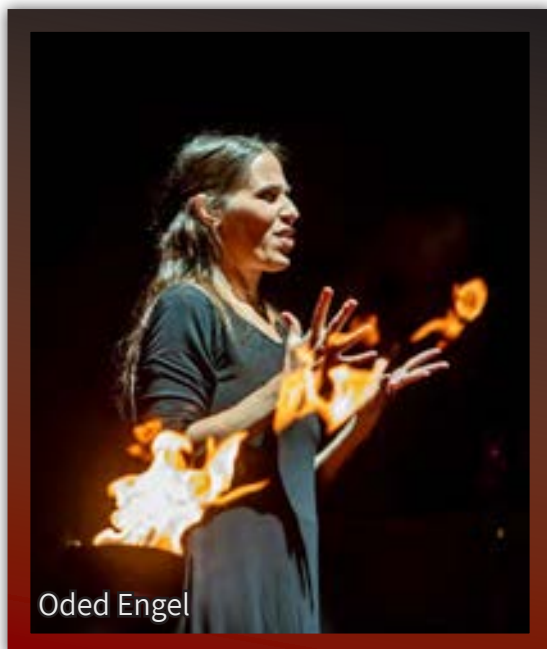
Lior and Amos Alon | Residents of Kibbutz Be’eri

“We, Lior and Amos Alon, residents of Be’eri and survivors of the massacre, extinguish the light of abandonment of the border settlements. Five miracles had to happen for us to stand here today. Five separate and independent miracles – if only one of them had not occurred, our fate would have been like that of our many friends and neighbors, so many. But we survived. We survived when dozens of terrorists entered. We survived when they tried to open the fortified room door again and again. We survived when they set fire to our house in an attempt to drive us out. Being here tonight is not easy for us, but the light of abandonment, which has taken the lives of so many and threatens the lives of those still in captivity, obligates us to extinguish it.

The sun that rose on the black morning to which we woke up on October 7th, illuminating the terrible catastrophe, has set forever. We cannot bring back the dead, but we can return the hostages! We cannot bring back the dead, but we can ensure that we do everything possible for the living, the survivors, the physically and mentally scarred.

For us, this means we will do everything in our power to ensure that those who led the country that day, will not continue to lead it. Because of their abandonment before the day of the disaster, because of their abandonment on the black Sabbath, and to our utmost shame because of their abandonment even after it, abandonment of us and the hostages, we extinguish this light. For a better future for us, a future where the protection of its citizens is at the top of the list of our leaders’ priorities and they are committed to it, we extinguish the fire of abandonment that consumes and suffocates us, we extinguish this light to awaken the State of Israel”.





Extinguishing the Light of Abandonment of the Land

Yasmin Porat | Survivor of the Nova Party and the tank incident in Be’eri

“I, Yasmin Porat, daughter of Yitzhak and Shari Abraham, mother of Roni, Noga and Alon, stand here tonight in sorrow and extinguish the light of abandonment of the land. My story is a story of men and women whose only sin was that they wanted to dance. About negligence. About the dreadful negligence that will be investigated and clarified, which led to the horrible deaths of many, who now bloom as anemones in the the Besor nature reserves. We danced at Nova. With the beginning of the invasion, and as soon as we understood what was happening, we started to flee. I remember thinking that here, we are very close to Be’eri and there we will be safe. We found shelter in the kibbutz. A kibbutz is a safe place, or so I believed. A yellow gate, a perimeter fence, a rapid response team ... a safe place. The next day proved without a shadow of a doubt that I was terribly mistaken. My sense of security, that I am safe anywhere in the State of Israel, that the border area will protect me, collapsed. Even in the home where we found refuge, the home of Adi and Hadas Dagan who took us in, I did not find safety, and when the terrorists gathered us at the home of Pessi Cohen, I understood that what had been will be no more.

I was a hostage at the mercy of ruthless murderers, and no one came to my rescue. And when they finally arrived, they brought no salvation. The terrorist who guarded me decided to surrender. I was his human shield and he was mine and thus, thanks to him, our lives were saved. The fate of the rest of the hostages was bitter. Thirteen men and women whose only sin was that they were in the kibbutz met their deaths in that incident, from which I was spared. The realization that an entire part of the country was abandoned that day, that there was no safe place to hide, struck me as it was happening and even more so looking back.

I extinguish this light for the sake of my children and parents, the war casualties and the residents of the border area, and to awaken the State of Israel.”



Extinguishing the Light of Arrogance

Eyal and Sharon Eshel | Parents of Roni Eshel, of blessed memory, who was murdered in the lookouts' war room

“ I, Eyal Eshel, father of Roni of blessed memory, who served as a lookout and was murdered on October 7th at Nahal Oz, and of Yael and Alon, may they live a long life, I extinguish this light of arrogance on the part of the political and military establishment.

Next to the flame here tonight, which I will soon extinguish, I see great darkness. A flame that sheds great light on the arrogance that has spread to the highest levels and caused, and continues to cause, among other things, the grief and pain that we share tonight. The arrogance of those who saw a perfect system, immune to criticism and certainly not in need of repair.

I stand here not only to remember those whose lives were cruelly cut short, but also to acknowledge failures – of the state, the senior military, the system.

Years of ignoring warning signs, the simmering conflict, signs of distress. We are here to say – no more!

No more criminal arrogance that will lead to loss of life, no more underestimating the capabilities of the enemy, and no more ignoring the pain and suffering of grieving families, of which they are so many. We are here to promise: we will not leave anyone behind. We are here to commit: together we will build a stronger system, a more attentive society, a society whose mutual commitment will not allow us to ignore each other. This light will be extinguished to symbolize the arrogance of the government and the senior military, whose path must also come to an end. If we do not change our ways, and do not learn from this disaster, we will never find hope again, even after the light has gone out.

Let this light be extinguished to awaken the State of Israel”.



Dana Reany

Extinguishing the Light of Abdication of Responsibility

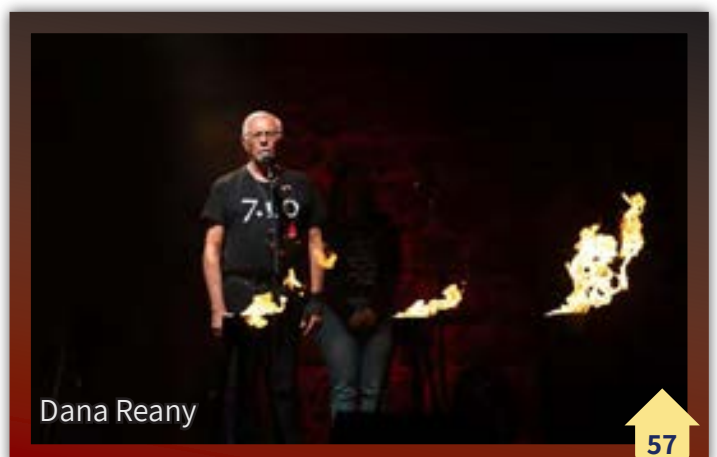
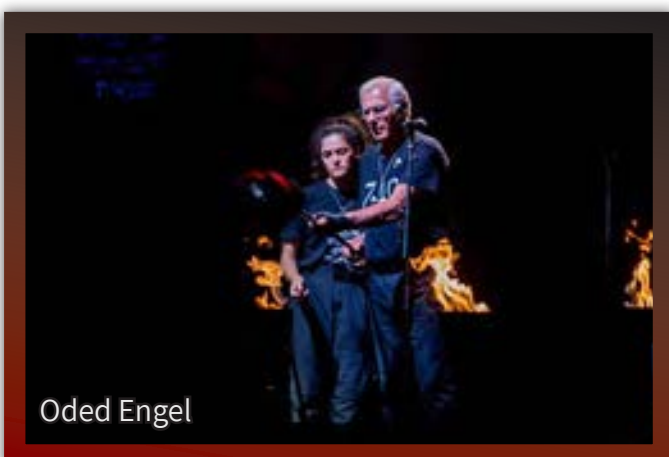
Brigadier General (Res.) David Agmon | Fought in the Gaza border settlements on October 7th

“I, David Agmon, born in Casablanca, Morocco, husband of Eva, may her memory be a blessing, and the father of Sergeant Adi, may her memory be a blessing, and of Shirah and Dana, may they live long lives, extinguish the light of the abdication of responsibility. I am a reserve colonel, 76 years old. I served for thirty years in special units and paratroopers, and twenty-eight years in the reserves. On October 7th, when the situation in the northern Negev became clear to me, and when I heard the anguished cries and calls for help coming from the area, I hurried south.

The scene I discovered was one of absolute chaos. Civilians armed only with handguns, poorly equipped rapid response teams, and a few combat units fought with bravery and self-sacrifice, with no command and control and no assistance. For three days, I participated in battles in the area. With the few forces that arrived, I assisted in rescuing and treating the wounded, releasing people under siege, and evacuating wounded and traumatized families.

I witnessed the horrors, the helplessness and the abandoned settlements. At the time of the invasion, there were no military forces in place to defend the settlements. Some had been sent on lesser missions in other sectors, and the few forces that remained fought inside the bases and did not operate according to their missions. The Gaza border region has been abandoned for many years. The Israeli government knowingly shirked its responsibility to protect its citizens, while assisting Hamas, reducing forces and combat capabilities, and displaying subpar performance. On that Shabbat, all these factors led to the deaths of many and the kidnapping of children, women and the elderly.

Since the thirtieth day after the massacre, I have been sitting in a protest tent in front of the Knesset, together with Yaakov Gudo, whose son Tom was killed in Kisufim, demanding that the Knesset release the captives and return the mandate to the people. I extinguish this light that symbolizes the abdication of responsibility to awaken the State of Israel”.



Extinguishing the Light of Abandoning Citizens to Their Fate

Tamir Reicher | Founder of the Hamal Hahiluz Vehatzala (Civilian Rescue and Salvation War Room) and initiator of the hostage ID tags

Li'at Kubrigo and Noa Zimberg Karasik | Two of the founders of the Hamal

“We, Tamir Reicher, Li'at Kubrigo, and Noa Zimberg Karsik, extinguish the light of abandoning citizens to their fate.

In the early hours of the black Sabbath, when thousands in the border settlements cried out for help and there was no one to hear – I sent messages throughout the country asking anyone who knew about unreachable or besieged individuals to contact me directly. And the messages flooded the line. Families under fire, wounded in their homes and in the field, terrified, turning to me asking whether they should surrender or fight. Messages from family members whose phones had been traced to the Gaza Strip, begging me to find their loved ones. More and more messages, names, pictures, locations. Without understanding the size of the disaster and the magnitude of our responsibility, we activated a war room for rescue and salvation. In absolute chaos, we directed rescues under the worse terror attack the country has ever known.

In the absence of an organized system to take control of the situation, we mapped the locations of the missing and wounded, directed forces in the field, handled hundreds of calls and pleas. And in the midst of it we understood – every message brings responsibility to save a life. And where, where is the state and why are civilians doing all this? Military and civilian forces used screenshots from Google maps to mark where the terrorists were gathered. In the towns and settlements, most of the rescuers were also civilians who risked their lives and were sometimes unarmed. Some directed combat helicopters using WhatsApp on their mobile phones.

The Civilian Rescue and Salvation War Room that we founded that day turned into the first “Civilian War Room” to start from nothing. It created an unprecedented system of aid and volunteering that has been operating widely ever since and offering every type of assistance possible. In the days and weeks following the attack, we realized that the absent authorities were replaced by civilians who unhesitatingly reported. The War Room responded to the wide-ranging needs that were exposed following the terrible disaster and made sure to fill the void left by the state's failure.

However, the state's role in rescuing the hostages is one that neither the War Room nor any citizen can replace. It is the duty of the state to uphold the most basic covenant between itself and its citizens, which is to safeguard their security and return them all to us here.

In order to quench the burning fire that threatens the covenant between us and the state, that is meant to protect us from abandonment, I, Tamir Reicher, I Li'at Kubrigo, I Noa Zimberg Karsik, extinguish this light to awaken the State of Israel.”

Extinguishing the Light of the Displaced

Michal Lahav | Evicted from her home in the North for the past 7 months

“I, Michal Lahav, daughter of Tamar and Yehoshua Lahav, evicted with my family from Kibbutz Snir on the northern border, extinguish the light of the displaced.

Hundreds of thousands of residents of the north and south, entire families have been uprooted from their homes for over seven months, living in uncertainty, not knowing when they will return home.

The state, which failed to defend us, its citizens, on October 7th, and which used us as a human defense line, is now abandoning us. The government has no plan in place; in its absence, we, the evacuees, have become exiles in our own land, moving between crowded hotel rooms and rented apartments, with no control over our lives. Uprooted from workplaces, from hospitals, from various treatments, unable to plan a day ahead.

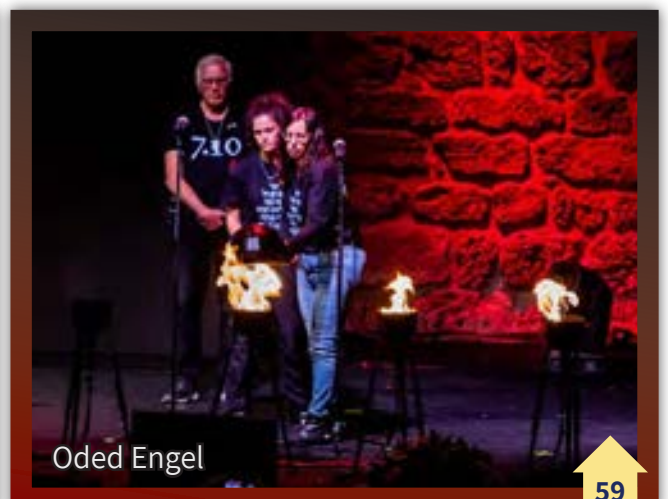
Our children are left without a functioning educational system, our dead are buried in darkness, accompanied by the rapid response teams and without dignified rites. The lives of thousands of families are packed in bursting suitcases, and we move between crowded hotel rooms and rented apartments. Our empty houses are bombed, many of us have already found other homes and will not return to the north or south.

Our children serving in the army come home on leave from the war, often after long weeks away. But there is no home, no quiet corner, and they must try to find serenity and strengthen themselves for their return to the front lines – in strange hotel rooms, with no privacy.

Our lives are conducted in uncertainty, our future is shrouded in fog with no foreseeable end. The fire that still threatens our lives, and that uprooted us from our homes – it is up to the state to extinguish it. The flame that threatens us as a society, where evacuees and exiles become routine – I will extinguish. I extinguish this light to awaken the State of Israel.”



Oded Engel



Oded Engel



Extinguishing the Light of the Weariness of Reserve Soldiers' Families

Doron and Shir Shabbtai | Social worker, lawyer, residents of Sderot

“We, Shir and Doron, residents of Sderot, parents to Negev and Nissan, extinguish the light of the weariness of reserve soldiers' families.

On Simchat Torah, we hid in a small safe room with another six members of our family. Sixteen hours of terrified listening to the sounds of the slaughter outside and the battle at the nearby police station. Hours of leaning against the door handle of the safe room. Of pacifying a hungry baby because there was no baby food. Of prayers. The next day, Doron was called to reserve duty, and we were uprooted from our home and moved to the other end of the country. For almost 190 days, we barely spoke. When there were visits, they were short. When there weren't, we feared the worst. From a family who shared equal and supportive parenthood, I became a single parent. I had to cope alone with two toddlers upon whom the sky had fallen, as it had on me.

Many reservists' families spend the war with great difficulty, in great fear and uncertainty, but the enlistment is obvious. We fulfill and embrace our moral and social obligation to enter “under the stretcher”. But what are we carrying on this stretcher? The state, on its part, did not fulfill its obligation to us. The State of Israel, which relies on reserve service, must stand alongside reservists and their families. It is clear that if Doron is called again to reserve duty, he will report without hesitation. But the state, which takes us for granted and has failed in its support of us, must do its part as well. Allocating appropriate resources and expanding the pool of reservists are imperative. We believe in the Zionist vision, in the importance of the reserve system, and in our society's abilities, but it is up to the state and its leadership to fulfill their share of the contract. Reserve families are an asset to be safeguarded at all costs, and the state has no right to abandon them. Us.

We extinguish this light to awaken the State of Israel”.



Oded Engel



Dana Reany

Extinguishing the Light of the Abandonment of Women's Personal Safety

Ravid Menashe | Founder of the Center for Recognition of Women's Injuries in War

"I, Ravid Menashe, the daughter of Niva and Shmuel Wohlman, the granddaughter of Hannah Wohlman nee Zaida of blessed memory, a Holocaust survivor and heroine; a social activist for women's rights and eradication of violence against women, and a partner in the establishment of "Building an Alternative", an organization for recognition of women's injuries in war, extinguish this light that symbolizes the neglect of women's personal safety in Israel by the government on both a routine and emergency basis. October 7th was a day filled with violence and sexual violence that we had never experienced before. The harsh documentation, alongside the testimonies that began to arrive, left no room for doubt – after all, the bodies of women have a weapon of war since the dawn of time. We understood that it was urgent to release these testimonials. We quickly saw, however, how the Israeli government appropriates the deliberate harm to women as a basis for legitimizing the war, while silencing, normalizing and sabotaging the negotiations for release of the abducted men and women as they blatantly ignore what they are undergoing in captivity. How will this government, which for years has blocked resources, reduced budgets, and stifled initiatives related to the protection of women, protect them now when they are being held by murderers?!

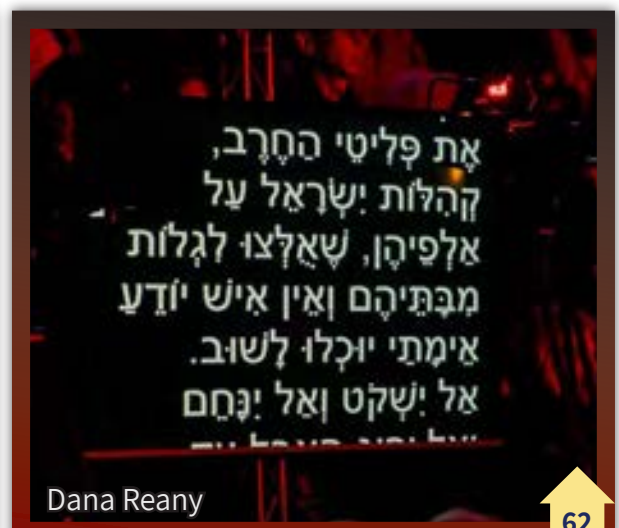
The bodies of women are not a national asset!

Pain, fear and shame make it difficult for us as a society to clearly see what we already know for sure is happening. End the exclusion of women from the decision-making sphere, end the casting of doubt on the contribution of women to the fight, and end indifference to the suffering of the women in captivity.

I extinguish this light, and with it the criminal obtuseness, to awaken the State of Israel".



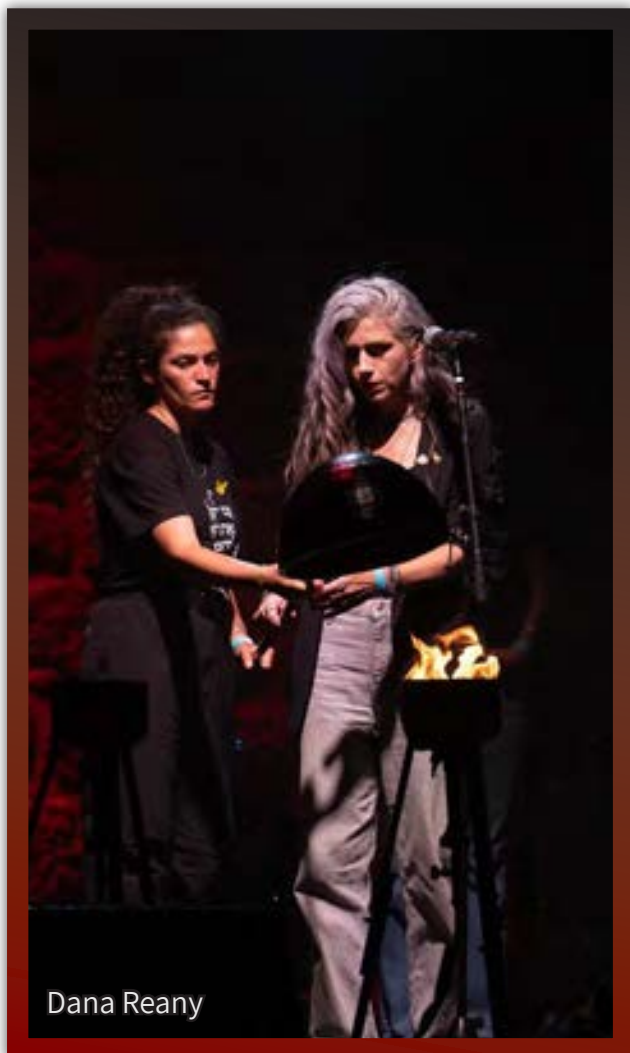
Oded Engel



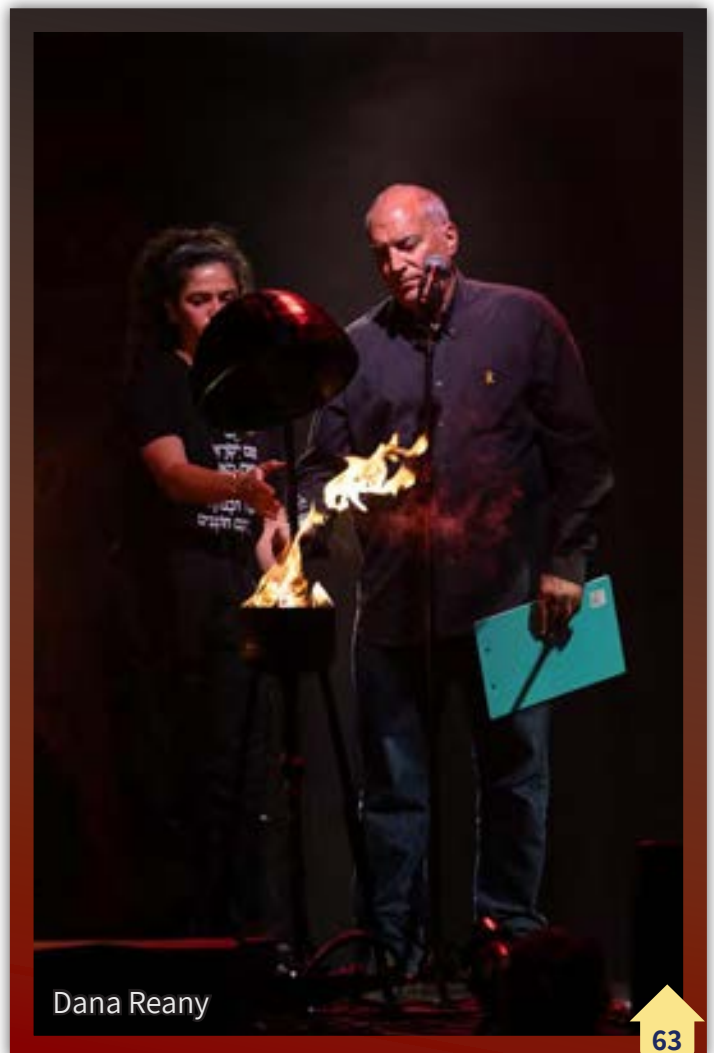
Dana Reany



Dana Reany



Dana Reany



Dana Reany

Extinguishing the Light of the Neglect of Mental Health

Dr. Dafna Shafet | Psychiatrist in the Public Health System

“I, Dr. Dafna Shafet, daughter of Miriam and Yosef Shafet, niece of Sergeant Michael Stern of blessed memory, a psychiatrist in the public health system, extinguish this light to protest the neglect of mental health. The 7th of October brought about a tremendous surge of people who need and deserve mental support – survivors of the border settlements and the Nova festival, bereaved families of the murdered, the fallen soldiers, and the abducted – and in fact, all of us. Despite years of neglect, the mental health system functioned well. It was inspiring to see how mental health teams, along with civil society, mobilized to provide treatment throughout the country. Blessed be the worthy and heroic torch lighters who are being honored in the parallel ceremony at Mount Herzl. But healing from trauma requires, first and foremost, that the trauma end, and as long as the hostages are in captivity – there will be no healing. Healing requires a safe environment, and as long as bombs continue to fall and tens of thousands are uprooted from their homes – there will be no healing. Healing requires a cohesive and supportive community, and as long as the leadership divides us and even incites against the families of the abducted whom it abandoned – there will be no healing. Healing requires listening and respect, and as long as the citizen faces indifference and bullying – there will be no healing.

The actions of the authorities wound our souls. Depression, anxiety – this is what our lives look like right now. But I am here today because I refuse to despair and I insist on fighting for my country. As someone who has been treating Holocaust survivors for years, I know – I don't believe, I know – that even after the greatest disaster, there is life, there is hope, and there is renewal. I extinguish this light in protest of the neglect of mental health, but what has been extinguished will rise again. I extinguish this light to awaken the State of Israel”.



Extinguishing the Light of the Cheapening of Life

Yael Alon | Bereaved mother and daughter

“I, Yael Alon, daughter of Yitzhak Bar Shada (Klarfeld) of blessed memory, and the mother of Dor of blessed memory, Rinat and Noam, extinguish the light of the cheapening of life. I was seven years old when my father Yitzhak fell in the Yom Kippur War. For fifty years, I lived in the shadow of that failure, the failure that was supposed to channel the capabilities of a country like ours towards a better path and build us as a society, responsible for one another, and trusting each other as well as the military and political leadership. We thought the lesson had been learned.

On October 7th, I understood that we’ve learned nothing. On October 9th, my beloved son fell in battle in Kibbutz Kfar Aza.

I stand before you today, a testimony to the sorrowful fact that we have failed again. The death of Dor and of so many others, men and women, male and female soldiers, shows in the harshest way possible that our lives and the lives of our children are not as sacred as they should be.

My son fell in a battle imposed on us by the greatest failure since the establishment of the state. Now it is clear – the country cannot continue on this path.

The leadership cannot continue to act as if our lives and the lives of our children are not sacred. We cannot tolerate this continued cheapening of human life. Tonight, I extinguish the fire that consumes the most basic values of the state, and with it, I extinguish the commitment of the leadership to its citizens, the commitment to sanctify their lives, not their deaths, and to protect them at all costs.

I extinguish this light to awaken the State of Israel”.



Extinguishing the Light of Abandonment of the Hostages

Meirav Svirsky | The sister of Itai Svirsky, who was murdered in Hamas captivity

Carmit Palti Katsir | The sister of Elad Katsir who was murdered in Hamas captivity

“My name is Meirav Svirsky, daughter of Orit and Rafi Svirsky who were murdered in Be’eri on October 7th. The sister of Itai, who was abducted from our mother’s home and murdered after 99 days of torment.

My name is Carmit Palti Katsir, daughter of Rami Katsir who was murdered in Nir Oz in October, and of Hanna Katsir who was abducted and released. The sister of Elad Katsir who was abducted and murdered. His body was returned to Israel.

It is not a great honor to be here. We did not do anything to earn all the new titles we received this year. We did not choose them; reality imposed them upon us. We are the families of the murdered, we are the families of the hostages, we are the families of the abducted who were murdered in captivity. Our family members were abandoned to die in their safe rooms on October 7th. They endured hours of horror in which no one came to save them, while we were in contact from afar, absolutely helpless, witnesses to atrocities that destroyed and continue to destroy our world. Our family members were abducted cruelly and violently to Gaza. There they experienced terror, dread, fear of death, hunger and pain. Long days that ended with them being left to die. From the very beginning we realized there would be no victory for us. We lost so much. But perhaps the return of our loved ones can give us some hope.

And so, one ray of hope came with the release of my mother (Hanna Katsir, the mother of Carmit Palti Katsir. Ed.), but this light quickly faded with the decision to return to battle rather than continuing the negotiations for release of the rest of the hostages.

We continued the battle, the fight, we made our voices heard everywhere, and warned that the worst might happen as a result of the military pressure. But the decision-makers did not listen to us, and indeed, the worst happened.

Itai and Elad were murdered in Hamas captivity, and thus were abandoned a second time by the Israeli government. A government, and its leader, who repeatedly prioritized fighting and devastation over saving lives, over the lives of Elad and Itai.

It is so painful when political decisions directly harm the lives of our families. It is so painful to be captives of our own government which itself is captive to extremists. It is so painful that in the name of unity, we are essentially told to be silent. And in the name of unity, we are supposed to soften the struggle for our loved ones. We were abandoned, the country was abandoned, and all

the values we were raised on were abandoned. And in the midst of all this, we are the mothers of young children, trying to raise them to be good human beings. And in order to do that, we need to create hope, and to hold onto it so that we can continue to fight for a better future. This future will only be possible when all one hundred and thirty-two abductees return. The living – to rehabilitation, and the dead – to proper burial. Only then will the healing of our families and of everything that was destroyed begin. We, Carmit Palti Katzir and Meirav Svirsky, broken-heartedly extinguish this light of abandonment of the hostages. We call upon everyone to end this chapter of abandonment and begin the chapter of repair, starting with the return of all one hundred and thirty-two abductees. We extinguish this light to awaken the State of Israel”.



The Light of Hope

Einav Zangauker | mother of Matan Zangauker, abducted to Gaza

“I am Einav Zangauker, the mother of Matan, who has been held hostage in Gaza for 220 days and nights, the mother of Natalie and Shani. Tonight, I speak on behalf of our entire people. We must all wake up!

My dear Matan, if you can hear me, I will not stop fighting for your return. With me is your loving family and a large community. Yesterday, I dreamt of you, and I woke up to the nightmare I’ve been living for seven months. What nightmare are you undergoing? You and 131 other citizens, some without mothers to fight for them.

We have a people but our country has been abducted. We have amazing people, but no government to guide us. We will be the pillar of fire that leads the camp. We will be the ones to repair the world! We who understand that what matters most is life! Human life! The lives of all of us!

Mutual responsibility means the same shared determination to fulfill the commandment to redeem the captives and bring you home, Matan. You and the other one hundred and thirty-one hostages.

I light this light of mutual responsibility and hope for the rescue of the hostages, and the rescue of the country. Now!



BRING THEM HOME



225

HAIFA

18 May 2024

Dr. Yolanda Yavor | Department of Jewish History, Tel Aviv University

This week marked the Israeli Independence Day. We commemorated it with pain, sorrow, tears and rage. Right before it, as always, we marked the Remembrance Day for casualties of war and terror. But while we grieved with our unbearable personal and national pain, those responsible for the worst catastrophe to befall the Jewish people since the Holocaust, continued to do every single thing in their power to make us forget. To make us forget 132 hostages, withering in the Hamas tunnels in Gaza for more than seven months! To make us forget the 1500 victims slaughtered in the massacre in the south of Israel, who were tortured, raped, mutilated and killed, and whose blood screams from the earth. To make us forget the tens of thousands displaced people, refugees in their own country, from the bloody and deserted northern and southern Israel. To forget the government's continued abandonment and scorn for the living, the dead, and for us all! They are trying to make us forget that they – a band of fascist criminals who captured our country – are responsible for our devastation.

Instead of taking responsibility, they shirk it. Instead of trying to make amends, they continue sowing destruction. Instead of appeasing and uniting us, they continue to tear us apart, to incite brother against sister, to dismantle the state from within, to rip it apart. While we grieve, hurt and worry, they take advantage of this catastrophe to impose a dark and dangerous messianic dictatorship on Israel.

There will be no pardon for these cruel and deliberate crimes against humaneness!

This week we commemorated the saddest Independence Day in our history and I ask you:

Do you feel independent?

Do you feel national pride?

Do you feel free in your country?

So, what are we waiting for???

Our slogan was “democracy or rebellion”, remember? So I ask you today: Are we living in a democracy? Do you believe this government cares in the slightest about the hostages and the refugees? What are we waiting for? Why do we not set the streets on fire? Why are we not blockading the roads? Why are we not striking, and bringing the whole country to a stand-still?

There is a hard truth to face: Whether we like it or not, we are in the midst of our second war of independence. This war is not being waged in Gaza. It is being fought here and now: In Haifa, on the Ayalon highway, in Caesarea, in Eilat and in Jerusalem. It is taking place on every street, in every town square across the country. This is our generation's war of independence. We must free

ourselves from the messianic group of criminals that has taken us hostage, headed by the biggest traitor in the history of the Jewish people. We have nothing to lose, because we have already lost on October 7th. If we do not take decisive action now we will lose much much more, we will lose absolutely everything!

We did not choose this war, it was forced upon us. Our government launched a war of attrition against us, the people, since the days of the first demonstrations against the judicial overhaul, and more so since October 7th. The government has set out to discourage us, using well known totalitarian tactics. The government reneges on its promises, playing sinister mind games to break our spirit and lead us to psychological and economic despair. The government does not aim to defeat us in battle, but rather to grind us down so that we succumb to this despair. We cannot let this happen!

It is not enough to hold fast, not to break down. No! We must transmute our pain and sorrow into a great wave of rage! Not revenge for the blood of a young child as commemorated in the famous poem by Haim Nachman Bialik, but a fight for the future independence of thousands of young children, for the liberation of the hostages, for the welfare of future generations. We must take the initiative and launch our counterattack, and stop merely responding. We must regain our powers of invention, creativity, cunning and leadership! This is our only chance of winning!

My call goes out to all of us – take to the streets to fight for our home, for our future, for our hope, for our freedom! We will not stop, we will not surrender, we will fight by any means necessary, down to our fingernails.



Alon Korngreen



Prof. David Harel | President of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities

Remarks at the ALLEA General Assembly

Dear friends,

Please bear with me for a few minutes. What I have to say is related to two of the topics of the breakout session, but it is relevant to this meeting in a more general way. In addition, I am here until Friday, so anyone who wishes to sit down and talk, whether in support of what I will be saying, or against, I am available. I would like to turn our attention to the situation in Israel and Gaza, and the war in our region.

The two basic facts are crystal-clear:

- (1) Hamas carried out the most horrifying inhumane massacre in Southern Israel on October 7.
- (2) A terrible war is being waged in the Gaza strip ever since.

Over 1200 Israelis were murdered on October 7, many suffering unthinkable atrocities in the process. As of today, 128 hostages remain in the hands of Hamas, the vast majority of which, you should know, are no longer alive. Tens of thousands of Gazans have been killed in a horrible war of revenge and retaliation launched by Israel in the aftermath of October 7, the true magnitude and ruin of which is regrettably all but absent from our local news coverage in Israel. But the truly devastating fact is that, for over seven months now, no clear, reasonable and achievable goals for the war have been decided upon by our government; so that no end of it is currently in sight!

No plan for withdrawing from Gaza and stopping the continuously mounting number of casualties; no workable ideas for who should take responsibility there afterwards; and no plan for the return of the dying hostages. Nothing! One of the depressing results of this is the fact that Israel has managed to virtually eradicate the genuine and deep show of shock, empathy and friendship that the world at large exhibited towards us in the immediate aftermath of October 7, including from many of you sitting here today, several of whom I know personally. Sadly, this is fast becoming replaced by fury and rage, protests and violent riots on campuses, political isolation and many disturbing signs of painful boycotts.

The deeply troubling campus protest activities, mainly in the USA, are, of course, directly relevant to science and academia. They attract extensive, and often biased, news coverage, capturing the public's attention big time; and they are a critical part of what is triggering scientific and academic boycotts. All this results in the

flames growing ever higher. Now, what are the protesters calling for? What claims are they making, and how should Israelis respond to them? I would like to suggest the following clear

differentiation between three very different narratives, all of which can be heard on the streets and the lawns – usually very loudly too. This division is definitely over-simplified, perhaps even naively simplistic, but I think

it helps make the point:

Narrative no. 1: “Antisemitism” – in a nutshell: the Jews must go away (to put the demand mildly).

Narrative no. 2: “Anti-Israelism” – the State of Israel must go away (this is put very mildly too).

Narrative no. 3: “Anti-what-Israel-is-doing” – Israel’s current government must go away.

As to the first two of these, I deeply believe that we must fight against Antisemitism and Anti-Israelism with all our might, something that I would hope meets with full agreement here, and indeed should garner the support of any free-minded individual. However, as far as the third narrative goes – Anti-what-Israel-is-doing; that is, making our current government go away – a very large portion of Israel’s population (and, I must add, an even larger portion of Israeli academia) is committed to fighting for this. I have personally been doing so, thoroughly, and along multiple avenues, for a long, long time, striving for an end to the occupation, for full equality and civil rights to all, and ultimately for an ever-lasting peace with our neighbors. Unfortunately, despite being a computer scientist, I do not have a simple algorithm for bringing about the so-urgently-needed end to the war in Gaza, hopefully followed by a steady improvement of the situation therein. Yet I firmly and deeply believe, with all my heart, that fighting effectively for the third of the above narratives is an

absolutely crucial first step.

What has all of this got to do with our subject matter – science? Well, in a world where politics and ideology often threaten to overshadow scientific progress, the sciences and the humanities serve as bridges over the troubled waters of disputes,

disagreements, contradicting opinions and seemingly incomparable Goals. The founding of CERN in the wake of World War II was a great example of science being above political and state-based differences. It is now the time, ladies and gentlemen, to return with new fervor to this approach, based on the premise that the pursuit of knowledge is grounded in shared universal values of academic freedom, intensive collaboration, and the freedom of thought and expression. Academic boycotts are a direct attack on these values, impeding the ability of scientists to work together on solving global challenges, and hindering the advancement of science and culture, and the international exchange of knowledge. Indeed, actions taken against Israeli scientists and institutions are increasing alarmingly, on a weekly basis, and have already resulted in significant disruptions. They include canceling cooperative research projects, mutual visits and joint conferences. There is also talk about possibly barring our participation in EU research programs, such as Horizon and ERC. Such steps will ultimately harm us all.

Thus, I would thus like to humbly, but firmly, urge you, heads of our fellow European academies – and via you also universities and research institutions in your respective countries – to unequivocally reject the use of academic boycotts as a tool to deal with geopolitical issues. I would also like to appeal to academic institutions worldwide to stand firm against manifestations of antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiments that often masquerade as political criticism. It is essential to maintain an academic environment free of discrimination and prejudice, ensuring that all members of the academic community can contribute to scientific research and education without fear of bias or boycott. As President of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, I plead with you to help us to continue to do what we do best – front line research in all branches of the sciences and humanities, in close collaboration with our colleagues abroad – and without threats of boycotts or calls for us to disappear hovering over our heads... Finally, as a private citizen, I pledge – with my many friends and colleagues in Israeli academia and outside of it – to do everything in our power to bring about a long-due and crucial change in Israeli leadership, and with it an end to the horrible situation in our area, leading to lasting peace and a better future for all of humankind.

Thank you for listening, and for your support.



Danor Aharon

צילום: דנור אהרון




Dr. Yoav Groweiss | Psychologist and protest activist

231 days ago, the earth shook. An enormous sinkhole roared open beneath the State of Israel; in an instant, our entire world collapsed into it and all of our lives crashed against a harsh reality. The truth, however, is that none of this happened suddenly. The truth is that giant sinkholes have been forming beneath the surface for many years, in all areas of life. For years, deep undercurrents have dissolved the ground beneath our feet, causing it to give way, layer by layer.

For years, all of the state's institutions have undergone a steady process of corruption and dismantling. The government ministries, the civil service, the safeguards against corruption, the military, the police, the media, the health and education systems – none of them has remained immune. For years they have been undergoing a hostile takeover by a regime that despises knowledge, expertise and experience. A regime that sanctifies ignorance and blind loyalty; whose top priorities, as one of its ministers famously said, are money, power and respect. A shameless regime that seeks unlimited power, a regime committed not to the citizens, but to itself only. And 231 days ago, on one horrible morning, it all came crashing down. All of it. But the foundations had rotted a long time ago. On October 7th, the giant sinkholes merely became visible to all. We must not mislead ourselves into thinking otherwise.

It was not a failed military conception that led us to October 7th, but rather an illusion: the illusion that we still had a functioning state. The illusion that a functioning society is possible when the different sectors of society live in parallel universes. When the truth of one-half of the public is the lies of the other half. The illusion that we can continue to live with this internal schism. With the corruption. With the rise of messianic Jewish forces. The illusion that democracy can exist in a society that sanctifies Jewish supremacy. The illusion that democracy can be preserved after decades of occupation. The illusion that what we have here is a conflict that can be “managed.” The illusion that just because we can kill together on the battlefield, we can also live together as civilians. The illusion that the Biblical Israel can coexist with the Biblical Judea. The illusion that shared symbols, shared rituals and a shared history can continue to bridge over the abyss of opposed values that has opened up between us: the abyss between those who sanctify life, and those who sanctify sacrifice; between those who sanctify life in the land, and those who sanctify the land itself. The abyss between those who want to be part of the family of nations, and those who believe in “a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.”

The illusion that we can overcome such a momentous difference in our respective dreams for the future. We deluded ourselves that there was still a basic covenant between the people and the state, a covenant promising that when we needed it, the state would be there for us. Would protect us. We deluded ourselves that some things could never happen to us in a state of our own. That the state would never forsake us. That we were worth more to it alive than dead. We deluded

ourselves that at the moment of truth, a depraved and uninhibited leadership would show responsibility and prefer the good of the nation over its own good. And we still delude ourselves that in our current political system, there are enough people of courage and vision to put Israel on a new track towards rehabilitation, healing and recovery.

Our great disaster is that not even October 7th was sufficient to shatter the illusion. At least not for enough people. It has led some of them to cling to the illusion more powerfully than ever before. Much of the public still believes that elections can wait until after the war. That it's just a matter of replacing the prime minister. Just a matter of speaking differently – more politely, in a less partisan way. Anyone seeing the situation clearly realizes that we cannot continue this way. That this is an abnormal situation, and that if we keep accepting it – we are doomed. But too many are afraid of the consequences of such recognition, because they cannot imagine an alternative to how things currently are.

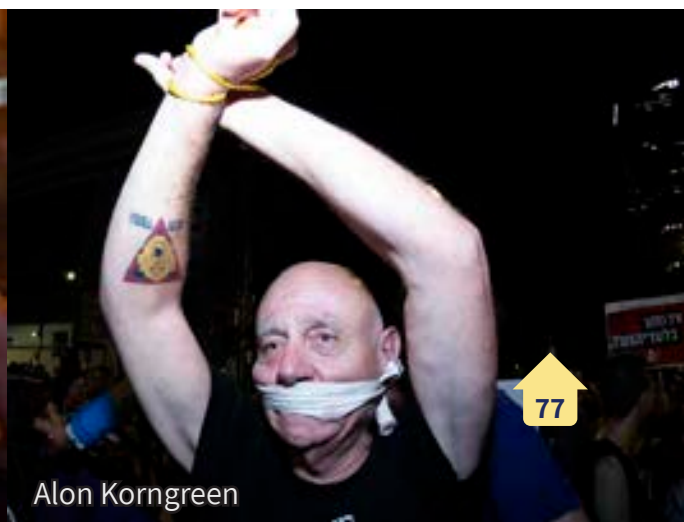
And with no alternative, people continue to hold on to the illusion of a functioning society. With no alternative, they choose to hyper-normalize an abnormal reality. They prefer “the devil we know.” With no alternative, many continue to delude themselves that the state we once knew is still here, refusing to accept that the pain they are feeling is a phantom pain for something that once existed, but is now gone.

To keep the illusion from shattering, they deploy bipartisanship and unity speech as a magical solution to all our woes. They cling to the false belief of “influencing things from within” – which is nothing more than an attempt to hold a splintering society together with safety pins; scaffolding that, we are told, is crucial for preventing the complete collapse of the building – a building that clearly poses mortal danger if allowed to remain standing.

Our protest is not just a call for elections or for the return of the hostages. It is a fight to restore faith in our own ability to fix and to heal. In our ability to re-lay solid foundations and solid ground beneath our feet. It is a struggle for our sanity, for the very possibility of holding on to hope. But if we are to have any chance, we must let go of the dangerous illusion that led us to October 7th. We must offer an alternative that recognizes the true reality. We must tell ourselves a new story, a brave story. A new dream, whose pioneer generation we will be worthy of being. Only then will our rebirth become possible.



Rani Graff



Alon Korngreen



Dr. Tanya Zion Waldoks | Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Religious feminist, resident of Beer Sheva, protest photographer

A sea of words spills out on these streets every Saturday night. A sea of tears. And yet, the blood keeps spilling. Apparently, our words do not force the tyrant to take responsibility and admit that “he is the head, therefore he is guilty.” Our cries of “shame, shame” do not arouse the conscience of the corrupt. Our demand to bring home “Everyone! Now!” does not make the messianic fanatics repent. And most painful of all – our words apparently have not yet succeeded in awakening the majority of the Israeli public from its slumber of denial – to “get off the balcony” even though “the entire country is collapsing”.

So what do we do? Do we give up? No, “we will not give up until Israel is a better place!” Our Sages taught: ‘Say little and do much’ – and in the coming weeks we will need to take more action, even action that may take us a little out of our comfort zone (but stay within the law). Our words also need to be clearer and bolder. We will need to talk to those for whom taking to the streets lies beyond their comfort zone, to mobilize everyone who has fallen asleep around us. Because we can no longer keep silent anywhere, at any moment, even when we are told ‘enough is enough, we don’t talk politics around here.’ Our feminist mothers taught us that ‘the personal is political.’ Well, in today’s Israel, everything is political, and everything is personal. And if we don’t recognize that today, then tomorrow we will no longer recognize the country we live in.

In today’s Israel, it is taboo to speak of ‘the day after’. We must not imagine a different future – a future without war. It is forbidden to speak out against a war that the government continues to sanctify even in the absence of any long-term geopolitical strategy. We are expected to silently die in that war. And it is permitted, for that war, to have our finest sons, daughters, parents, and grandparents - kidnapped civilians and captive soldiers - killed in the tunnels.

We are not allowed to plan what the economy, law, society, education, politics and security will look like. We are not allowed to rebuild what was destroyed, or bring refugees home, or enable crumbling families to heal, or a disintegrating society to recover. Heaven forbid we should utter a word about peace, or normalization. Because the abnormal is being normalized.

While we avoid talking about the day after, others are promoting a vision of a messianic, conquering and vindictive future, of a people dwelling alone, living forever by the sword. While we wait for the day after to arrive, the prime minister makes sure to take no decisions, to poison and divide. To intensify the sense of emergency and crisis and convince us that this was, is and forever will be our reality. It’s not temporary, it’s “the matzav” (the state of affairs).

This “state of affairs” is dangerous. This government is undermining all of Israel’s international alliances and the alliance of solidarity between us. It is breaking down hope and sapping what is

left of our strength. And as long as we only shout against the corrupt, and the irresponsible, and the messianic, only respond to “them”, it is still they who will determine the agenda and the limits of freedom of speech.

Not anymore. ‘The day after’ is today, tonight, here. Righteousness shall come forth from the South.

Our words must set out a moral and ideological vision in a loud and clear voice:

There is no mitzvah to occupy Rafah now, there is a mitzvah to redeem the hostages NOW. In a culture of “choosing life”, there is no price tag on human life.

There is no mitzvah to take revenge, starve, and destroy, to celebrate spilling the blood of Gaza’s children who are burning in tents. There is a saying ‘In the fall of your enemies, do not rejoice.’ There are multiple mitzvahs such as ‘love thy neighbor as thyself’, and ‘do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor’, and ‘saving lives’, and ‘pursue justice’, and ‘seek and pursue peace’.

We must – we simply must – insist on imagining the day after!

We are not the people of ‘anti’ and not the people of revenge.

We are many and diverse, and we are ‘pro’!

We are loyal to the Declaration of Independence.

We believe in “equal rights for all communities”.



We believe in equally sharing the burden [of conscription], in gender equality, equality in education, and civil equality regardless of religion, race, or sex!

We believe in the rule of law! We believe in virtue and professionalism!

We believe in an Israeli spirit that knows that “if they don’t return, we won’t recover”.

We believe in a shared living space for Jews and Arabs and that only diplomatic solutions stop wars.

We believe that there must not be a disparity between the quality of life in the periphery and the center of Israel.

We believe in a Judaism that insists on human dignity, on the sanctity of human life. In the return of the Jewish people to their homeland to establish a society that pursues justice and peace.

We believe that we need a broad social contract that represents all parts of society and to finally draft a constitution!

If we do not present a clear ideological vision today, then even if we succeed and elections are held now, we will get another government of death and corruption.

And even if you do not believe exactly what I believe, that’s okay! It’s even great. Because in a true democracy there is room for a plurality of opinions, for disagreements and diversity within the framework of the law. And we believe in “Democracy for all!”

So imagine ‘the Day After’ out loud!

And “don’t say the day will come, you bring the day”.

Od lo avda tikvatenu, Our hope is not yet lost.





Alon Korngreen



Oded Engel



Dana Reany



Rani Graff

תל אביב

נשים דורשות
משקל גלגל
מסוקה נכשית
דורשות



Prof. Hanna Lerner | School of Political Science, Government and International Affairs,
Tel Aviv University

Good evening. A sad evening. We are in the midst of terrible times. Our country is being attacked on several fronts. More than 1,500 have been killed. Thousands and thousands have been injured. Many tens of thousands have been displaced from their homes in northern and southern Israel. And in the midst of the direst crisis in the history of Israel, our parliament, the Knesset, spent this past week on political maneuvers geared towards retaining its power. For the past twenty years, my research and teaching have focused on democratic institutions, law and politics, and on how societies around the world write their constitutions. Our current government was legitimately and democratically elected. That much is true. But since being sworn in, it has been working tirelessly to transform the nature of the Israeli regime. Last year this was done by legislative amendments to Basic Laws. Yariv Levin called this a “judicial reform”, but it was very soon revealed to be an attempt at regime overhaul.

The heroic public protest that we all joined succeeded in stopping this – an outstanding achievement on a global scale. Unfortunately, our job is not yet done. Despite October 7th, despite the bitter war, the current coalition is continuing its quest to change the democratic rules of the game in Israel, this time through the enactment of regular laws and administrative regulations, and by appointing unfit candidates to senior government positions.



I belong to a research team that is closely monitoring and documenting the coalition's anti-democratic legislative efforts. Even before October 7th, the coalition pushed no fewer than 225 anti-democratic bills and, to our dismay, has not given up these efforts after October 7th. During the winter session of the Knesset, the coalition sponsored another 50 anti-democratic bills. In the first two weeks of its current session, the Knesset sponsored 5 more anti-democratic bills. A total of 280 anti-democratic bills – an overwhelming number! These bills are not for show alone, 6 of them have already been passed into law. For example, legislation that allows the IDF and the Israeli Security Agency (Shabak) to access personal computers; legislation that authorizes the Minister of Defense to declare an individual a terrorist; and legislation that grants the Director General of the Ministry of Education the power to fire teachers without a hearing. Even during the ongoing war, while public attention is focused on the imminent threats to our country, on our conscripted family members, on our grief and loss, on the terror of the hostages, the coalition continues to promote anti-democratic legislation:

Since October 7th, 35 bills restricting freedom of religion and curtailing human rights of women, LGBTQ and minorities have been brought before the Knesset. As a recent example, a bill giving the Minister of National Security the power to declare a group of individuals a crime syndicate, and issue warrants to seize their property. This group could be me or you.

Seven bills curtailing judicial independence, and 5 additional bills targeting proper public administration and changing election regulations. For example, political appointments to the committee screening candidates for positions in government companies.



Three bills limiting freedom of speech in academia, culture and art. For example, a bill severely restricting university faculty members' freedom of speech by mandating immediate termination of professors whose words or actions are deemed unsavory by the Israeli Council for Higher Education.

A bill for the takeover of public broadcasting and free media, for example by subjugating decisions of the Second Israeli Broadcasting Authority to the parliamentary Economic Committee.

This is just the tip of the iceberg! Fifty five such bills have been presented to the Knesset only since October 7th. All this is in addition to the law exempting the ultra-orthodox from military service, that passed its first reading this week. The full list of bills (in Hebrew) is available on the website of Political Scientists for Israeli Democracy – check it out!

However, legislation is not the only avenue for undermining democracy. Democracy can be dismantled through a thousand minor blows, by administrative decisions of the most extreme Israeli government ever. For example, under the cover of war, the police is being blatantly politicized. The police commissioner himself warned against such efforts in a letter to the Attorney General just two weeks ago, detailing a long list of cases in which the Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben Gvir, intervened in professional police decisions, against court orders.

These are merely a handful of examples, making up a bigger picture. Make no mistake: the determination that Israeli democracy is being undermined is not a right-wing or left-wing political stand, nor a theoretical guess. It is a scientific assessment. Democracy is measurable. There are research institutions worldwide specializing in monitoring and comparing democratic regimes.



According to the V-Dem index, the most important international democracy index (used also by credit rating agencies), over the last year Israel has been demoted from a “liberal democracy” to an “electoral democracy”, namely a deficient democracy. Israeli democracy is fragile and vulnerable. It does not take any special expertise to grasp the immense power that can be amassed by a random majority that manages to win a little over one half the seats in parliament. It is high time we fixed this!

Like many others, I am very much concerned, but I am far from despairing. On the contrary. I would like to conclude with two optimistic remarks. First, we must all remember that demonstrations can be effective in democracies. Our protest last year that succeeded in halting the dangerous changes to Basic Laws is a case in point! Second, over the last few years my colleagues at Tel Aviv University have conducted several studies investigating deep-held convictions of the Israeli public, and have found that a large majority of Israeli citizens are democratic – they understand the basic values of democracy and support democratic principles. So I am optimistic. The citizens understand that in a democratic state elections are the only way to replace the government. They also understand that in a democratic state, elected representative are supposed to work in the best interests of the citizens, rather than their own interests, or for re-election prospects. The obvious conclusion is – Elections Now!

Our fight for democracy is part and parcel of our fight for security. Like the fight for security, the fight for democracy is long and exhausting. But we have no alternative, we must keep going. This, too, is our mission these days.





Prof. Ronny Geva | Bar Ilan University

Academics for a Democratic Israel, Givat Ram (leading the march to the Knesset when the gag and rabbi bills were submitted to the Knesset for preliminary readings)

251, 252, 253, 254, 255.

255 days since the October 7 massacre. For 255 days we have been with them in the tunnels in the heart of Gaza, with the IDF observers who saw and reported, with Liri, Karina, Agam, Daniella, and Naama, with the students in the APCs, with the grandmothers in the civilian operations room, locating tents for the artillery company firing in the rain, in the bombed Galilee, in the therapy room with the babies whose mothers have undergone a breakdown, with the bereaved and the burned houses, with those living month-after-month in a hotel room, with the scorched orchards, with the beautiful faces on the newspaper pages. This is how we wake up in the morning; this is how we go to sleep; this is how we are all recruited every day, every hour, every heartbeat—

And the state is nowhere to be seen!! Has anyone seen the state anywhere? State—where are you?!

Hello, I am Ronny Geva. In normal times, I am a mother, partner, grandmother, professor of psychology, and researcher at the Brain Research Center at Bar-Ilan University, researching, lecturing, and teaching an entire generation of students.

The truth is, I am just an ordinary person. Who am I? What can little me do? How is it even possible to make a difference when everything is so complicated and against us? I am here today because there is no choice; for far too long, there has been no choice. The ground beneath my feet is shaking, and the foundations of Israel as a democratic and Jewish state are crumbling before my eyes.

Israel must change.

I am here because, already in the first hours of the kidnapping, no one in the government realized that we also had a hostage situation on our hands that required handling. I am here because, already since the first weeks, no one in the government worked to use the international coalition as a springboard to a diplomatic plan. I am here because for months, there is no plan! There are hesitations, considerations, and sometimes missions, but there is no goal, no actionable goal.

Heads of state, my leaders? Where are you? The Prime Minister boasts, “I didn’t know,” “No one pulled my coat tail”. And you, my leaders, until when will you continue to back a leadership that, at best, “doesn’t know,” “can’t,” “is afraid to disband and takes care of itself,” and is busy appointing rabbis while trampling Jewish values. Until when? Until when will you, my leaders, hide away in your chambers and accept failure because ‘things are complicated’, while the

abyss is growing and deepening right before our eyes?

We must recalculate our route. Israel must change.

We are here today because we know reality can and must be different. We refuse to continue blindly following an irresponsible government! The people demand a responsible government! Leadership's failure, its unrestrained behavior, lack of commitment to the entire people, and lack of willingness to face reality, lead us to rise up and take to the streets, to social media, to the squares and bridges, at every junction and neighborhood, here and overseas, and say loudly to anyone willing to listen— We are the People—and We are Not our Government!

We are the people who want to fight, and will fight, until things are better here. We are the people who get up and act every day, every hour, every heartbeat so that Israel will have a chance for freedom, creation, building a better future for our children, a chance for peace, a chance for us to stand among the nations of the free world, a country that does not act like its enemies but upholds its existential backbone of values and justice—a country that will be independent and flourishing thanks to its fight for democratic values, a nation aspiring for life. Yes, we want life!

A state that deems the values of Judaism as a source of inspiration for giving an equal place to women, non-Israelis, the elderly, and the young. A state that welcomes others and is committed to nurturing its citizens, regardless of religion, nationality, race, sex, gender, political stance, or occupation. A state whose actions are guided by the greatest commandment of all—the commandment of rescuing the hostages, the naked, and the thirsty.

I am here today—because if I do not fight for the State of Israel as it was founded, and as it needs to be—I will not be me.



Alon Korngreen



Alon Korngreen

Yes—today we are deep, deep in the mud—often to the point of struggling for air, but the fact that we are here repeatedly confirms that we will not stop even when they try to legislate gag laws, even when they try to wage a war without any diplomatic horizon, even when they loot the treasury, even when they try to fire professional public servants working according to the law for the benefit of the citizens, even when they smile smugly in front of the fresh graves of our sons.

We are here because we rose up. We are here because we are the institutions responsible for the young generation and the leaders of the next generation. We have risen because we are the academia—the home of the study of medicine, engineering, biology, economics, psychology, science, culture, and the humanities—without which our nation will not stand.

We have risen up because we are the academia, the repository of in-depth knowledge about nations that have failed throughout history, and nations that have successfully emerged from crisis and flourished—we have the knowledge, and from it, we draw the commitment to professionalism, humility, and determination to fight for the foundations of rehabilitation, healing, and growth, and to strengthen them before it is too late.

Things can be different. Israel can change. We rose in the face of the calamity, and we are here: the protest organization of Academics for Democracy. With us are the protest organizations: The White Coats, No Mental Health without Democracy, the Education protest organization, The Day After, the Shared Home, Social Workers for Democracy, the high-tech protest organization, and concerned citizens.

We are here! And we will fight for leadership with integrity that will stand for election and gain the people's trust.

We rise up because we are in a crucial war for our identity as free people committed to the state, to the people—to the entire nation. We are here because, in this war, we must win.

Elections now!



Alon Korngreen



Alon Korngreen



Eran Etzion | Former Senior Diplomat and Deputy Head of the National Security Council

Good evening to the people of Rehovot,

It's been eight and a half months of war, and if, to our utter misfortune, it keeps being up to Netanyahu, we will keep counting the days, counting the hostages, counting the dead, and counting the physically and mentally wounded. And we will be counting them all. We will continue to count all of them, and we will continue not to count for Netanyahu, who will continue to drag out the spurious war he has been waging at our expense, with our blood and our money. A war that robs us of our present and forfeits our future. A war to secure his administration.

For Netanyahu, we don't count. What counts for him are only his days in power, the 64 votes he has in the Knesset, and the deals he's concocting: To pass a law for the evasion of military service by the ultra-orthodox, to complete the regime coup, to finally eliminate the free media. This week, another former ally of Netanyahu published an essay expressing his contrition. Eyal Megged, who had previously praised him, called him "the archenemy" and "the greatest threat to the State of Israel". But there neither is nor will be absolution for Megged and the many people on account of whom we have found ourselves where we are. The enablers without whom Netanyahu would have been in prison long ago. There neither is nor will be absolution for the government ministers and the Members of Knesset of this bloodstained coalition. There is no absolution for the wheeler-dealers who have happily laid themselves down as bridges between wealth and state power. And there is no absolution for the mouthpieces and collaborators of the administration in Channel 14, Israel HaYom and all the media outlets, with the exception of HaAretz newspaper.

We, the democratic-liberal Israelis, are fighting against three cults:

The cult of money-power-prestige that both feeds off of and feeds Bibism;

The messianic-nationalistic cult that has grown in the occupied territories and has taken root – albeit not in our hearts – but rather on the Government Campus, in the Ministry of Finance and in the Ministry of Defense; and

The ultra-orthodox cult, that has built itself an autonomy of evasion, idleness, ignorance and arrogance, all with our money and sponsorship.

These three cults threaten to change the very nature of Israel from a first-world country, the Startup Nation, a member of the OECD, an open democratic society, a legitimate and sought-after member of the international community; to a rogue, underdeveloped and fundamentalistic pariah state, a society that regresses back to the codes of violent primitive tribalism, of "an eye for an eye", of "a people that dwelleth alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations", with a "God-willing economy", with a "Judean Brotherhood" that will be indistinguishable from the Muslim Brotherhood.

For years, no few veterans of our national defense agencies have been forewarning that the internal threat is becoming graver than the external threat. “We will be able to deal with Iran”, we said, and with Hezbollah, and Hamas and the Islamic Jihad are certainly threats that can be contained. But for the three cults that are eating us up from the inside, our defense agencies have no answer. The regime coup saw our darkest predictions begin to come true. October the 7th was a sequel to that, and the bogus war that Netanyahu has been leading since then has made matters worse and exacerbated the risks. Our external enemies identified an opportunity, as they still do, and we must change course, immediately, in order to pull our country out of the pit dug for it by Netanyahu and his associates, stabilize the Gaza and Lebanese fronts, and prevent a regional war and a complete systemic collapse.

Here are the three things that cannot be allowed to happen, and the three things that we must make happen:

We cannot let Netanyahu’s administration pursue a Third Lebanon War. You have no mandate! You have proved that you are incapable of running a war. We will not let you drag us into further catastrophe!



Alon Korngreen

We cannot let Netanyahu's administration proceed with the bogus war in Gaza. You have no mandate!

We cannot let Netanyahu's administration devastate the Palestinian Authority and set Judea and Samaria ablaze. The Palestinian Authority must undergo a deep reform, in the context of a new political-defensive framework, which the next government will establish.

And these are the three things that we have to do, with all our might –

It is imperative that we bring down this government and hold national elections. Right now. Before the Knesset session ends and long before we mark the first anniversary of the 7th of October.

It is imperative that we stop the war in Gaza, make a hostage deal, and start building an alternative administration to Hamas in Gaza, together with the U.S., Egypt, Jordan, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

It is imperative that we rebuild Israeli democracy, our national institutions, our national values; that we formulate a new national security approach and a relevant all-Israeli vision. The next government will be required to make historic decisions on all fronts – the political, security, constitutional, social and economic fronts. Every single person who has come here to demonstrate in the past 18 months, and everyone who has come to the dozens of other demonstration spots – we all play a part in the salvation of our democracy, and we all have the duty to keep acting despite the multiple difficulties. They have wrecked and destroyed, yet we shall restore, repair and rebuild for the better. We will not give up.





Alon Korngreen

Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten | Department of Jewish History and Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University



265

“Raising your Voice in Times of Evil: An Israeli Academic Perspective

The prophet Amos said: “Therefore the prudent (maskil) keep silent at that time” (Amos 5:13). The Mishna in Tractate Avot states that, in evil times, “a fence to wisdom is silence” (Avot 3:13). Put differently, this is a Jewish version of the saying “silence is golden”. The assumption behind this advice is that given time, the world will right its own wrongs, for “the world is judged with goodness” (Avot 3:15).

This past year and a half has made it clear that even those who believed that critics should not sound their voices while the cannons are firing, can no longer stay silent. The more difficult it is to remain silent, the more the government tries to silence us. This terrible government, elected democratically, is striving to create a regime of silence in which only its brutal, violent, greedy and law-breaking voice can be heard. It is as if the ministers believe that if they yell loud enough and hush everyone around them, what they say will become true and the reality will rearrange itself to reflect their words. They are hoping we will forget that a government that is supposed to protect its citizens, is in fact abandoning and forsaking people who were kidnapped from their homes, leaving them to die in tunnels in Gaza at the hands of cruel captors. They want to confuse us so that we will not understand that they are sending soldiers to their death as part of a war without clear objectives and with no plans for the day after. They do not want us to object to the fact that scores of people have been evacuated from their homes, in the south and north of Israel, and that there is no timeline for their return home. They are hiding the fact that an avoidable war on the northern border is looming.

This government has no plan besides ongoing war and never-ending strife. The ministers and members of parliament, elected by the Israeli public, scatter slogans and irresponsible statements, while ensuring through law enforcement and anti-democratic legislation that those who do not agree with them will not be able to voice their opinions. They do this in order to retain their seats in parliament, without any consideration of the public they were elected to serve.

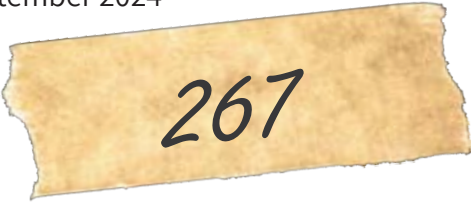
We stand here today, on campus, to say: “Enough!”. Although the university environment is far from perfect, and we too have much room for improvement, freedom of speech and a willingness to hear others’ opinions are the foundation of this institution. The government knows this and this is why it is trying to pass a new law limiting freedom of speech in academia. Our voice is an important voice that must be heard at this time, for we represent the public at large – secular, religious and ultra-orthodox Jews, as well as Muslims, Christians and members of other religions, Israelis, Palestinians and others, all study here together. Our mission is in opposition to that which the government is promoting.

Academic research and teaching are founded on the freedom to express ideas, to disagree and to debate. This is how new ideas are created and paradigms shift. As scholars and educators, we know that in places where freedom of thought is limited, so is creativity. This is the spirit in which we train our students. When critical thinking is silenced, there is no research. We also know that when we seek to solve a problem in our studies, and the ideas we have do not pan out, we seek alternative routes and challenge our assumptions. Israel has been at war for almost nine months, and this government continues to repeat time and again, even returning to the same places (in Gaza), without pursuing any new lines of thought. The government is entrenched in its ways and in its hollow catch phrases, and the results are evident.

Members of the government who contradict themselves on a daily, almost hourly, basis, and incite their “base” to serve their own political goals, are refusing to investigate their own failures. They seem to have forgotten that the people killed by the Hamas cannot be brought back to life, and those killed on October 7th or on the front, will not be revived from the dead. If we cannot find a way to bring back all the hostages, to reach a ceasefire agreement, and yes, to end this war and find a solution that will provide safety and prosperity for Israel and for our Palestinian neighbors, we will not create a sustainable environment in which to live. It does not matter how many times the government representatives declare a “total victory”. There will be no triumph before the last hostage is home; we will not succeed until we treat every human being with respect and ensure the basic rights of every man and woman.

This is why we can no longer stand on the sidelines as an institution. We cannot be silent and we must raise our voices and make them heard. Members of the government, you have failed! Two hundred and sixty-five days have passed since October 7th. Amid all the racket, the clamor of war and the constant background noise made by members of Knesset who are looking out for themselves far more than they care about the citizens of this country, we say “Enough!” We say this by disrupting the public order in this demonstration today. If the “Netanyahu agreement” to free the hostages is not adopted, if elections are not called immediately, this will become a full-fledged strike. No more “business as usual”! We will not get used to this horrific situation and we will not let you silence us with regulations. In this evil time, the maskilim (academic community) should not be silent, they should take initiative! We will protest, object, make our voices heard so that the new silencing law will be rejected and elections will be called. Above all, we will keep protesting until the hostages return home, a solution is found for all those who have been evacuated from their homes and all those who were hurt during this war will be able to heal from their injuries. We will work to ensure that we, and our neighbors, have a better future.

We will not give up; we will make our reality better.



Yossi Kucik | Former Director General of the Prime Minister’s Office
Co-leader of the campaign for a free and democratic Israel

Good evening dear friends of the Haifa Protest movement!

I have a surprise for you – I’m optimistic! I believe that before the end of this year, 2024, we will succeed in moving up the elections, which will allow us to replace the current terrible government with a liberal democratic government that will focus on rebuilding Israel’s ruins for the benefit of all its citizens. The last 18 months have been the most difficult for the State of Israel since its founding, and the hardest for the Jewish people since the Holocaust. Under the leadership of Netanyahu we have experienced the devastating combination of an attempted regime overhaul, the unfathomable catastrophe of October 7th, the dismantling of civil service, the abandonment of the hostages and are still experiencing blatant incompetence in diplomatic and military leadership. All of these have led Israel to a state of existential threat.

No wonder then that we have become a pariah state. Unbelievably, the State of Israel is now equated in the eyes of the world with Apartheid South Africa. If this isn’t enough, let us consider how the civil administration of Israel shamefully collapsed on October 7th, leaving Israeli citizens to fend for themselves – again. At our greatest hour of need – nothing, zero, nada. I served as the Director General of the Prime Minister’s Office, the highest office in the Israeli civil service. I know the skills that are needed in order to fill this role effectively and successfully, especially in a time



Paulina Patimer

of crisis. What can we expect when the current Director General is Yossi Shelley?!

To be honest, the Israeli civil service has been unravelling for a long time now, and not by error or incompetence but by design. How is this accomplished? First you target the gatekeepers. We have seen vicious attacks on the Supreme Court. Numerous attempts are made to eliminate the Attorney General, one of the smartest, bravest women in our history. They are trying to replace professional legal advisors to government ministries with yes-men. Itamar Ben Gvir was appointed Minister of National Security! The Israeli police has become increasingly violent and partisan. Bezalel Smotrich was appointed Minister in the Ministry of Defense, in charge of horrific terror attacks perpetrated by settlers in the West Bank. A weak Civil Service Commissioner was appointed, and as we speak they are attempting to replace him with another puppet. The State Comptroller is spineless. Ineffectual nobodies are appointed as directors general of government ministries – Caligula’s horses! The director of the Government Companies Authority was fired. There is not one, not one!, woman director general of a government ministry. They cut the legs out from under senior officials in the Ministry of Finance.

Do not be deceived – they have not stopped for a second. Their ultimate goal is to seize control of the media. What could be more despicable and infuriating than appointing Yulia Shmuelov-Berkowitz as CEO of Channel 13’s news desk? All this is done under the auspices of Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, so no wonder that in our hour of need we were faced with government management that is weak, incompetent, cowardly and politically submissive. Nothing and nobody! A big fat zero! Miri Regev, Dudi Amsalem, Shlomo Karhi – need we say more?

We have had enough of your corruption! Israel is facing critical, Ben-Gurion-scale decisions! We



need only listen to Gadi Eisenkot, Yuval Diskin, Tamir Pardo, and David Grossman to realize that we are standing on the precipice. This is why we must have elections now! Elections that will seal our fate: Will our state be democratic, liberal and free, whose citizens work and are committed to the greater good, or will we become a messianic, sinister, unproductive and racist dictatorship?

So why am I optimistic? Because we have seen the immense power of our protest. I am optimistic because we did it once, and we can do it again. On January 4th, 2023, Yariv Levin announced the first step of the regime overhaul. We immediately set up our headquarters, raised the Israeli flag, raised funds and set out to defend our democracy in a non-violent protest that will go down in history. Millions of us took to the streets, from Dan to Eilat. Leftwing, rightwing, religious, secular, Sephardi, Ashkenazi, young and old. Our achievements were huge! Our determination, persistence and daring stopped a government with a solid 64-seat majority in parliament from lynching the Israeli democracy. Our protest has – so far – prevented the regime overhaul, safeguarded the Supreme Court, cancelled the override clause, and stopped the corrupt rabbinical jobs legislation. In the same way, our protest has the power to bring the elections forward. Just this week the Supreme Court – in a historical decision – blocked a law that would allow the Ultra-Orthodox to shirk their military duty. It is unfathomable that the government considered passing such a law at this crucial point in time. With every day that passes since October 7th, our shock is transforming into anger, our sorrow – into rage. Our protest grows weekly:

150,000 demonstrators in Jerusalem

170,000 demonstrators in Kaplan St. in Tel Aviv

Tens of thousands across the country!

A majority of the public wants elections now! A majority of the public wants to bring our hostages home. Military action will not bring them back. A majority of the public wants a fair allocation of the burden of military service, and I call on Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant to immediately issue 12,000 draft notices to evasive Ultra-Orthodox youth! A majority of the public wants Israel to return to the fold of the enlightened world. A majority of the public wants to see an honest leader, who is not under criminal indictment, a brave leader, who does not subjugate the fate of Israel to Smotrich and Ben Gvir in order to escape his criminal trial. And so:

Our protest will grow larger and stronger!!

Our fury will be unleashed!!

July is a crucial month for our future!

On July 7th, we will take to the streets one million strong! We will harass government ministers and members of parliament.

On July 7th, we will strike and bring the country to a standstill – including businesses, academia, hospitals, high-tech and local government, and the elections will be brought forward. I call on Arnon Ben David to stand with us!

Only one million marchers will bring us elections!

And then: We will elect a liberal democratic government, and restore all that has gone wrong. We will end the war. We will bolster the legal system. We will strengthen the civil service. We will appoint an outstanding Civil Service Commissioner, we will make sure that 50% of director generals of government ministries are women, we will pass the law for equitable military service, rebuild our economy, reaffirm our international standing, work for a two-state solution, and above all – bring our hostages home now!!

This may sound difficult, maybe even impossible! Today I tell you – it is more than possible! We did it once, we can do it again. Why? Because we have no other choice. Haifa protest, let's go! Let us gather our strength, and take to the streets once again to secure a better future for Israel. It is in our hands!!



Sally Abed | Haifa City Council Member for Rov Ha'ir (أغلبية البلد) and social activist

Good evening, Haifa people's protest!

We are in a very dark period. Nine months of so much destruction and killing. An unimaginable scale of human loss and the feeling of living on the edge of a groundless abyss. A moral, political, social, economic abyss. There is nothing more difficult, but also more important, than overcoming these feelings every single week, to get out of the house to say not only what we don't want, but also what we do, and hold on to it, to what we do want. So thank you to everyone who holds on to it here – and all over the country.

The word security, أمن وأمان, has become synonymous with the necessity of brutal and violent military control over millions of people – of occupation and siege. For decades, this word has been marketed to Jews and Israelis as a necessary reality for everything that is done to us, but what we live in is not security, but at best survival. The possibility of living with liberty, dignity, equality, welfare – is by now such a distant reality, that we have almost lost the ability to imagine it. In the name of the illusion of security a bloody war is waged, which has already exacted and still exacts an inhuman, unimaginable and unjustifiable price from the civilian population in Gaza as well as from Israelis who continue to die or live in fear every day it goes on. Moreover, the war has not only failed to bring the hostages back home alive, but rather puts their lives at risk and reduces the chances of bringing them back. This war is a continuation of the abandonment of tens of thousands of evacuees from the north and the south, and creates for all of us constant insecurity and fear of an all-out regional war of unprecedented scale. The war not only violates our sense of security, it is also tearing us apart as a society, and causing a deep economic and social crisis, from which I fear we will not be able to recover for years.

For us, for the vast majority of people living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, war is a disaster, it is a punishment. It is a nightmare for whose end we are waiting and from which we can wake up to a new day of life and peace. But they? The government? They are not interested in life or peace, they have completely different plans. When most of us are abandoned, they annex land, build settlements, hold conferences and talk about establishing new settlements in Gush Katif – in the Gaza Strip and in southern Lebanon, soldiers are sent to defend settlers who set fire to Palestinian homes in the West Bank, or block aid convoys to Gaza, or threaten Arab business owners in Jerusalem and continue their crazy messianic vision. Here in Haifa, they send the police to arrest Arab demonstrators with horrific violence, just 10 minutes away from here, in order to promote this vision: A vision in which Palestinians are oppressed and enslaved, a vision in which Jews live in eternal fear of terror and revenge, and a vision in which both peoples together are doomed to live by the sword.

This is the moment, this is the time, to build an alternative. To organize around our vision. Not just to resist, but rather to redefine what security is, what equality is, and what democracy is. To reclaim ownership of our future and society. The time has come for us to proudly say that the word security should be synonymous with well-being, with sanctification of life and true freedom for all who live on this land, for prosperity and for a good and shared future. What I am asking for is not easy. To lead a vision is to hold hope, faith, and our collective capacity to achieve change.

I invite you to start doing it here in Haifa. Let's start with our beloved city. Let's not only imagine, but let's organize and work together with the abundance we have – and there is an abundance – of residents, elected officials and local government, civil society and different communities for a shared, safe, egalitarian, green and prosperous Haifa. One that not only opposes reality and demands a change of government, a hostage deal, and an end to the war – but one that actively builds the society we want to see.

Holding a vision that seems so far removed from reality is not naïve. To hold on to hope, and to have faith in our collective ability to bring about change is the most radical thing that can be done at this historical juncture. However bloody, distorted and ugly this hope may seem, and however politically-impossible this collective we imagine – of Arabs and Jews, secular and religious, geosocial periphery and center, from all communities, from all places, a new majority – we must imagine it, to build it.

It will require a lot of work, including resistance against the extremist forces and against the government of death that is leading us deeper into the abyss, but it will also require a lot of positive, proactive work, of doing, of learning and relearning, of growth, of building new institutions that help us define the new We – a broad We – a We made up of the majority of people, who have an interest and desire for a good life, for peace, and for national, personal, social and economic security. And forgive my audacity for daring to dream a little further – but my vision for all of us also includes affordable housing and decent employment, efficient public transport, clean air, a functioning health system, and excellent education for children. My vision is for a society in which we do not suffer from murders, illegal weapons, violence and organized crime, and a violent and political police force even here in Haifa.

We are here, at the people's protest. We are here to fight for the soul of this society, and for the future of the two peoples living here – and I, as a Palestinian-Israeli Arab, am here to fight for this together with you. I will end by demanding, again and again: A deal now. Change of government and elections, now! For the return of the hostages, for the residents of Gaza, for the evacuees, for the future of all of us.



Prof. Yossi Levi Belz | The Lior Tsfaty Center for Suicide & Mental Pain Studies, Faculty of Social & Community Sciences, Rupin Academic Center

From crisis to mending

Our beloved country, Israel, is under attack – from the outside as well as from within. Against the external attack we have a strong military. Against the attack from within – we repeatedly call on the strongest of all armies – the army of the mighty hearts of protest, of people who love the country so much as to put themselves out there, time and again, to fight for it, to fight for our hostages who are still held captive in Gaza. And this army, just like the IDF, is invincible. This army of hearts cannot be deceived.

We do see. We see your attempt to divide, Mr. Prime Minister, we see the all-around failure you bring upon us, we see the attempt to lie, we see the attempt to ruin every little bit of reason, of truth, or morality, of values. The psychological term for this is moral injury resulting from betrayal, it is the experience of leaders failing to meet the basic moral standards, failing to act according to reasonable moral norms. It has a massive impact on all citizens. And a change is needed. My beloved friends, the journey towards changing our country is not an easy one. The journey to restore Israel as a sane, just, loving and compassionate country is not simple. The journey to bring back the hostages is not short. But taking this path is our mission.

What provisions do we need for such a journey?

Having met absolute evil, seeing the evident option of humans falling to monstrous places, we might all yearn for revenge. Revenge against the damn Hamas murderers, revenge against any destroyer of our country. Avengers usually want perpetrators to suffer the pain the avengers experienced. “I will give you a taste of your own medicine”. However, there is reason behind the words of the philosopher Confucius, who said: “Before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves”. Revenge, hatred, anger, my friends – are not the way. Our way is different. Our way is to mend. We need to search deep into ourselves and find the values that drive us towards mending. Our values outline our action. And they are so important. We should, and can, do the exact opposite of the acts performed daily by this failing Prime Minister.

Where he brings division, we will bring connection. Where he brings hate, we will bring love. Where he brings a desire for destruction, we will bring reconstruction. Where he brings abandonment and moral loss, we will bring a universe of solidarity, inter-connectedness and peace. It is important to start every day with two practices, which are related to connectedness and mending. First – it is important to remind ourselves over and over again that we are not alone on this journey. That there are hundreds of thousands of beating hearts that just like us are not willing to give up – on bringing our hostages back home, on a more sane and decent

country. Stop for a moment and look around: the bravest of all warriors are here – and they cannot be defeated. Second – like many leaders throughout the generations – it is for us to see the possibility, the chance, to see and envision Israel in two or five or ten years from now – beautiful, sensitive, empathetic, compassionate, on the mend. Envisioning all of that, we recognize the reason we walk this road, the reason we demonstrate on Saturday nights and weekdays alike. Close your eyes for a moment – and imagine Israeli society overcoming this crisis, bringing home the hostages, establishing here a moral and hopeful state. Close your eyes and imagine it in detail – because this image, this vision, the ability to actually feel the mending – is what will mobilize people to action.

This is leadership – to act in order to change reality. For the sake of our beloved Israel, for the sake of our brothers in captivity, the soldiers on the frontlines, the police force on this junction now; for the sake of our fine children – who deserve an army of mighty hearts like ours. Who deserve a better future. It is crucial that we think about and experience not only what we want to stop, but also what we want to create. Not only where we want to walk away from, but also where we want to go! Dear friends, it is so painful to think every day about our brothers and sisters held hostage in Gaza. It is painful to see the abandonment, the betrayal of values, the appalling corruption. But we can overpower all that, because we are together and we can genuinely imagine, envision the mending and take action towards its actualization. Never underestimate the power of our mighty-hearts army, our love for the State of Israel, our readiness to do whatever it takes to bring our hostages home from Gaza. We are here. Each and every person using his or her compass of values is a leader of this mending, each and every one of us is a leader who can get up every morning and say to himself:

“I have a dream”.

Say to himself: “I can imagine the potential mending”.

We will not stop until the mending is here.

Until the hostages are back home. Until we have another leadership. Until you walk away.

Until the Israeli society is healed.

Potential change stems from the ability to see the potential, imagine it, walk towards it, even when it seems difficult and far. This is the hope, the antidote to the moral injury we experience.

There – the antidote is working already.



Prof. Merav Roth | Department of Counselling and Human Development,
Faculty of Education, University of Haifa

Our national anthem, HaTikvah ('the Hope'), starts by speaking of heart and spirit. Not land. Not economics. Not even peace. As long as the spirit yearns, we have hope.

I am a psychoanalyst. I represent the organization "No Democracy – No Mental Health". Yes, "political mental health" is an actual thing. It highly resembles the individual's mental health: It opposes oppression and favors pluralism of opinion, it opposes racism and favors equality, it opposes coercion and favors freedom of choice, and it strikes a balance between its impulses and its values.

Political pathology is characterized by despair. By gasping for air. By foregoing the values that lend meaning to our life in favor of arrogant and violent oppression. Political mental health is characterized by the ability to dream. By the ability to breathe. By the moral and ideological horizon that it strives to reach.

This week saw the 120th anniversary of the death of the man who envisioned our state - Theodor Herzl. In an address he gave in 1899, he said: "Were I not so afraid of being called a utopist and a man of delusion, I would outline the future structure of our country for you ... with a longing for justice ... for spiritual elation ... that no man has ever seen". Incidentally, contrary to popular belief, he never said "if you will it – it is not a dream", but rather wrote in his journal, after the First Zionist Congress, that if only he had the courage, this was what he would have said. Ultimately, this unuttered sentence survived long after everything that had been said – because there is no reality-forming force quite like the ability to first dream that reality. That same year, by the way, Freud finished writing his book, "The Interpretation of Dreams", the harbinger that marked the nascence of psychoanalysis. Both of these visionaries lived near one another in Vienna. What they shared was not only their surroundings or genius, but also, and foremost, the audacity to dream big and understand that reality cannot be changed without dreams.

Since the 7th of October, we have been living not in a dream, but in the worst of nightmares, which is to be stuck in a nightmare without being able to wake up and escape it. This is where the hostage families are. This is where the evacuees are, homeless for nearly ten months. This is where the combat soldiers' families are, sick with worry. This is where the murder victims' families are, unable to accept that their loved ones will never come back. And most of all, this is where the hostages themselves are – living in a dystopian horror film which, unfathomably, has been going on for nearly ten months.

One day after the evacuation, I moved to the Dead Sea with the residents of Kibbutz Be'eri, stayed for two weeks to help set up the therapy program there, and have been supporting them since

then. At the same time, together with my colleagues, I started the FLM civil program for long-term cost-free therapy for the victims of October 7th, which helps hundreds of families of murdered victims, families of hostages and the released hostages themselves. I see them in my clinic, and I see the members of Kibbutz Be'eri in our joint meetings, and I can guarantee two contradictory things: 1. They are engulfed in super-human pain and suffering and collapse anew every single day. 2. Their mental strength is phenomenal, and they choose afresh, every single day, to get back on their feet and fight – fight for the hostages for whom they are waiting. Fight for their sanity for the sake of their children, their families, their communities. I have pretended that I was giving them strength, when in fact they were giving me strength. They teach me every single day that the strength of the human spirit knows no bounds.

If they can, then so can I. If they can, then so can we. We can keep despair at bay, and not give up, and fight for political mental health in our beloved and wounded country. We had a country that had known many disputes but was sane, that was replete with mistakes, but spoke the truth, that was ideologically split, but respected the democratic ideal under which different opinions are not betrayal, but rather welcome ideological pluralism. I want an Israeli mosaic! I want to live within an array of opinions and convictions – both at the Knesset and in Israeli society! Uniformity exists in, and only in, dictatorships.

And dictatorships have something else as well – deliberate action to discourage dissenters. If you are discouraged, it is not only because of the situation. You are discouraged also because undemocratic governments dedicate immense resources to dishearten their dissenters. They call them traitors! They arrest them! They attack them with hoses and water cannons! They demonstrate smugness in a congressional address even when they are responsible for the greatest national catastrophe since the Holocaust!!! They do all of that, among other things, so that we despair. And in order for that not to happen, we need to be aware of it, just as a battered woman must first realize that she is subjected to psychological terror that aims to deprive her of hope and her sense of agency.

History proves that people who fought and did not give up changed regimes and systems that seemed as immovable as the planets above us. Discrimination against black people in the U.S. had appeared to be a law of nature, but Martin Luther King started marching to Montgomery and that law changed. Marching with him was Rabbi and Philosopher Heschel, and when he returned to his hotel room he wrote: “Today, I prayed with my feet”. And they were not the only ones to pray with their feet. Mahatma Gandhi freed his people, against all odds, from occupation and oppression. Playwright Theodor Herzl did not call himself a visionary but rather a delusionist, yet it is thanks to him that we are here. So no one will ever convince me that the horrific reality this government has placed us in cannot be changed. We will not despair.

When a patient lays down on the sofa in my clinic and tells me: Everything is bad. I have given up. I tell him: That's not true, because you have come here. This means that you still believe in

good. This means that you still believe that you have the power to change the course of events. That you are an author of your own story, and not merely a victim of it. And I say to you as well: If you are here, it is a wonderful psychological indication. It shows that you have not lost your political mental health. That you have not lost hope. When we wake up from this nightmare – and we shall wake up from this nightmare – we will all feel immense satisfaction, because we will know that instead of giving up, we insisted on taking the story of the State of Israel back into our own hands and writing it, like the longing that Theodor Herzl described for us: A longing for justice, for human, spiritual, moral, and of course also practical, elation for our country.

And until that time comes, we shall continue to pray with our feet. We shall march, and march, and march until we get to our humble destination – a sane, decent, life-affirming Israel.

May the deal to bring the hostages back finally be signed and they come home already, so that we can breathe again.

Thank you very much.





אם אתה לא איתנו
אז אתה נגדנו

BRING HIM HOME NOW!
MORTGAGE AND RENTAL FAMILIES FORUM

סימאר
הי איתנו
מתן

Benny Barbash | An Israeli screenwriter, director, and author

A Moment of Silence

When invited to speak, I'm often asked to keep the speech short and focused, no longer than four or five minutes, because the audience loses patience. I'm also asked not to elaborate on how bad the situation is because everyone who comes to the protest already knows how bad it is. They see how bad it is. They hear how bad it is. They feel how bad it is. They breathe the bad situation that burns their lungs and soul and shatters their heart. My speech, so the organizers urge me, should mobilize for action and kindle hope. It should be rousing so the audience can interject with cries such as "Shame!"

As I sat down to prepare the speech, I thought that maybe this time, instead of speaking, I would remain silent...

I would remain silent because words can no longer contain the magnitude of the horror. I would declare a moment of silence in memory of the shame that died of shame and ask the audience to stop shouting "Shame!" at those heartless people who have no shame whatsoever. They are not even ashamed of the "mishap" they had on October 7th. They are not ashamed of the rape of women, the murder of children, and the padding of terrorists' pockets with cash.

This is the first silence.

And another moment of silence in memory of the truth that has vanished from our lives.



And a moment of silence in memory of integrity and purity of heart, which have dissipated and can no longer be found.

And a moment of silence in memory of the sanctity of human life, which has become so cheap that we have become necrophiles, worshippers of death, marveling at grand operations in which young people, whose whole future is yet to come, risk their lives to retrieve the remains of decomposing bodies, while at the same time, the army continues its fighting, endangering any hostages who are still alive, whose bodies we may also retrieve from the inferno as the war goes on and they die too.

Another moment of silence in memory of social solidarity, which was murdered by the husband of the Prime Minister's wife. The one with the pajamas posing as a world-fixer from within a flying monument, whose stench rises to the heavens even before takeoff.

A moment of silence in memory of democracy, which is taking its last breath. If you keep still for a moment, you can hear its death rattle and the moans of Simcha Rothman and Yariv Levin as they rape its corpse.

A moment of silence in memory of the regions this government has abandoned and neglected in the south and the north. In memory of green fields that have burned down, productive orchards and greenhouses that were destroyed, and communities ravaged: Metula, Kiryat Shmona, Shlomi, Manara, and Margalioth. And a month, or a lifetime, of silence in memory of the victims of the Nova festival and the Gaza envelope communities. The children suffocating in the smoke rising from



Alon Korngreen

the flames, and the women being raped. And the hostages who are dying as the Prime Minister takes off in the tattered “Wing of Zion” plane to spread the plague of his lies and evil deeds across the globe.

Silence. That’s what we need. And not just for one minute. We need months of silence to train our ears to listen to the faint heartbeat of a dying nation. To the whispered prayers of the hostages and their families, whose world stopped on October 7th. And the needy, the beaten, the mourners, the wounded, the disabled, the displaced from their homes, and the refugees in their own land.

Silence. Turn off all the televisions in the country, silence eager reporters, hush hollow commentators, and muzzle corrupt politicians. And once and for all, shut Benjamin Netanyahu’s mouth. Stop the flood of lies pouring from his mouth and poisoning our world. He is the man who, for twenty years, has strengthened Hamas and padded it with tens of millions of dollars. He is the man who led the judicial coup that bled the Israeli nation dry and weakened its resilience. He is the man who continues to lead us in a war that has broken away from its origins and where it leads – nobody knows. He is the man kept in power by our soldiers’ death. He bears full and absolute responsibility for the October catastrophe. The wheat may grow again—but if we do not rid ourselves of Netanyahu, no one will be left to harvest it.



Dafna Yosha

And now, I shall talk about hope.

Hope is not just a melancholic song that we turned into an anthem.

Hope is not something you wait for.

Hope is not something you pray will come.

Hope, even if it is not yet lost, will not spontaneously emerge.

Hope does not knock on the door.

Hope – to quote from Deuteronomy – is brought by trials, signs, wonders, and war, with a mighty hand and an arm stretched forth and terrifying manifestations of power.

בְּאֵתָת וּבְמוֹפְתִים, וּבְמַלְחָמָה וּבְיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזִרְעֵ נְטוּיָה, וּבְמוֹרָאִים גְּדֹלִים

We work for hope.

We sacrifice for hope.

We courageously fight to realize hope.

We are hope.

All those who turn up over and over again for the protests, on the bridges, in convoys, and in traffic blockades. They are the sparks of hope, and if all the skeptics, cynics, and fence-sitters join us, the sparks will unite in a great flame. A bright light will shine over this glorious land, and together, we will rebuild it from the ashes.



Epilogue

On the night of Saturday, August 31st, a dark wave of sorrow spread across Israel. As people returned from their weekly protests, the unbearable news began to circulate: the unthinkable had happened. By the following day, the names became etched into our collective memory: Ori Danino (25), Carmel Gat (40), Hersh Goldberg-Polin (23), Alexander Lobanov (32), Almog Sarusi (27), and Eden Yerushalmi (24). Six lives—four men and two women—were cut short, their bodies retrieved from a tunnel in Gaza after being brutally executed by Hamas just days earlier.

Grief turned to fury. In a powerful eruption of emotion, hundreds of thousands flooded the streets, their anger uncontainable. By Monday, Israel's largest workers' union (the "Histadrut") called a rare general strike, interrupting the country's rhythm. Days later, the protests showed no sign of slowing. Academics have joined the demonstrations in droves, standing firm despite violent police response. And while no one absolves Hamas of their heinous crime, the protests are aimed primarily at the Israeli government itself.

The murder of these six hostages represents a watershed moment for the nation. Prime Minister Netanyahu and his supporters argue that withdrawing troops from the Gaza-Egypt border, even to secure a hostage deal, would leave Israel vulnerable to future massacres like that of October 7th. In contrast, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant believes that reaching a ceasefire now is critical for Israel's safety. Most Israelis, however, no longer trust Netanyahu. They see his refusal to act—and his entire strategy in Gaza—as driven not by national interest but by his personal interest of



political self-preservation.

This schism is about far more than leadership. The protesters are fighting for the very heart of Israel—a country built on the values of life, solidarity, and principles that stand in stark opposition to the atrocities committed by Hamas.

“This wasn’t supposed to happen, not like this,” mourned Eshel Gat, father of Carmel Gat. “We fought to end this story differently, with hope. The people are with us—the incredible people who filled the streets yesterday, shouting: ‘Enough! End this now!’”

In a poignant eulogy for her son, Rachel Goldberg-Polin spoke of hope amid unimaginable sorrow: “I pray that your death will be a turning point in this nightmare. Knowing you were with Carmel, Ori, Eden, Almog, and Alex brings me some comfort. Each of them was special in their own way, and I believe that it was this shared strength that kept you alive through the unthinkable for as long as you were able.”

Throughout its history, Israel has survived external threats and internal divisions, bolstered by values of freedom, humanity, and a deep commitment to knowledge—values that have long been upheld by Israeli academia. These values reverberate in every speech and story within these pages, and they are the core of Israel’s identity. For these values, we will remain on the streets until we bring them home. We will not rest until the values of life, solidarity, and democracy are restored, ensuring a safer and more united Israel for generations to come.



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מי אנחנו?

אם הם שם!



