



Faith in Darkness

A little over a week has gone by since the return of the last living hostages from Gaza. How many of the following stories have you heard about them? And how many others did I miss, stories that didn't make it onto this list?

Eitan Horn of Kibbutz Nir Oz, who returned from captivity, shared that it was specifically in Gaza that he fasted on Yom Kippur. He is 37 years old, and there — for the first time in his life — he observed the holy day properly.

Segev Kalfon recounted that when he saw all the Hamas men on stage in Gaza, all he wanted was to climb onto the stage and shout: “Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad.” Now he is home, able to say Shema Yisrael freely, with everyone around him.

Bar Kuperstein said that the song that strengthened him most, and that he sang to

himself over and over again, were: “Ve’afilu behastara shebetoch hahastara, bevadai gam sham nimtza Hashem Yitbarach.” Even in the darkest places, when you don’t feel God, when it seems He is hiding, He is still there, present with you. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov wrote those words 200 years ago. They took on new meaning in the Hamas tunnels.

Rom Braslavsky shared that the terrorists offered to convert him to Islam, promising him more food and better conditions if he agreed. But he kept telling them, over and over: “I am a strong Jew!” Now, facing the cameras, he said: “I want people to understand that they are Jews, that they should do more mitzvot. Hamas did this to me only because I am a Jew. A Jew must know that he comes from greatness, that he’s not like everyone else.”

Eliya Cohen, who returned from captivity several months ago, told how much he missed his tefillin. While held hostage by Hamas, he invented something both creative and moving: “Every morning I would go to one side of the room and imagine putting on my tefillin. I would go through the whole process, step by step, in my imagination. Sometimes, I could actually feel the tefillin on me.”

Omer Shem Tov said this week how much he misses the connection he felt with God while he was in captivity, the closeness, the sense that he was speaking and that God was with him, listening. He described trying to rediscover that elevated feeling.

All of these remarkable stories are, of



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course, about them — but in truth, they are about us as well. They reveal the depth of the Jewish soul, the power of faith, and the holiness of Jewish identity.

The entire Jewish world has just begun reading the Torah again from Bereishit—back to the very beginning. We are all part of this story, and each of us can reflect, reach their own conclusions, and choose a small step forward.

Because it's not only them. It's us. They remind us who we really are. ■

Sivan Rahav-Meir is a media personality and lecturer. Married to Yedidya, the mother of five. Lives in Jerusalem, and formerly served as the World Mizrahi Shlichah to North America. Sivan lectures in Israel and overseas about the media, Judaism, Zionism and new media. She was voted by Globes newspaper as most popular female media personality in Israel and by the Jerusalem Post as one of the 50 most influential Jews in the world.

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