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## Faith in Fire

Just one year ago, on Yom HaZikaron, we stood on Har Herzl, hearts heavy, honoring those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for our people and our Land. It was a moment suspended between grief and gratitude - the kind that defines what it means to live here. And then, as if the weight of the day itself wasn't enough, fires began raging across the hills of Jerusalem.

By the time we made it home, ready to host friends - Binyamin's friends, neighbors, and loved ones who had planned to gather, to share stories, to remember together - the roads were closing. One by one, messages came in: "We're stuck." "We can't get through." Entire routes were blocked by flames. The hills burned, the skies darkened, and the air itself carried a sense of devastation.

I remember feeling shattered. How could this be? How could Hashem allow His beautiful Land to burn - trees reduced to ash, homes destroyed? It felt like a drawn-out Tisha b'Av, two days of mourning layered on top of each other because Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations were cancelled everywhere. A day we - personally and nationally - had been so desperate to embrace and celebrate was taken from us.

I tried to comfort myself with the only thought I could hold onto: it is sticks and stones, homes and trees - not His people.

Fast forward one year.

Now, we find ourselves in a place we never imagined - feeling not only gratitude, but even joy, when it is "only homes" and not people who are destroyed. (Compared to the anticipated mass destruction and devastation)

Forty days of war with Iran that began on Shabbat Zachor and concluded on the seventh day of Pesach. Forty days. A number associated with spiritual formation and transformation. Forty days in which we witnessed miracles and salvation in ways that are almost impossible to articulate. Missiles fell between buildings. Rockets struck structures yet failed to detonate. Towers remained standing when they should have collapsed. Ballistic missiles landed in "open areas" mere meters from residences. And time and again, people walked away - shaken, yes - but for the most part, with only minor injuries.

Our Air Force pilots flew missions that defy logic - four hours each way, deep into enemy territory - and returned home safely. Again and again.

And we know this is only a fraction of the story. Only a glimpse of the successful missions and the greater miracles that took place behind the scenes. No Hollywood movie could capture our reality - it would be dismissed as completely unrealistic. I have even been told that many of the army's accomplishments were simply impossible. Except - they happened.

It feels as though we have lived an entire cycle of Jewish history and holidays within these forty days.

We have lived the "v'nahafoch hu" of Purim - the complete overturning of fate. Even in

moments where Hashem's name feels hidden, His presence has been unmistakable. Enemies who sought our destruction were dismantled with breathtaking precision, while the world watched the strength, resilience, and strategic upper hand of our nation.

We have felt the miracles and redemption of Pesach - pursued by missiles, drones, and threats from all sides, with nowhere to turn but upward. And just as we sing in Az Yashir, we have watched our enemies fall again and again, swallowed before they could reach us.

There has been a spiritual awakening across the nation. A return toward Torah, toward mitzvot, toward something deeper. Like Shavuot, there is a renewed acceptance - not through coercion, but through recognition, inspiration, and clarity.

And we are living Sukkot in real time. The ענני הכבוד that once surrounded us in the desert now take the form of Iron Dome, Arrow systems, the IAF, and countless layers of protection we have come to take for granted. We speak about these systems as if they are purely technological, but deep down, we know: This is Hashem's protection manifesting through human hands.

And then there is Chanukah. We have been living the story of the Chashmonaim - a small nation standing against overwhelming "mighty" powers. But even that comparison falls short, because we are not facing one front, but many. And still, we defeated and stand.

Yes, there is a cost.

We have lost precious lives. Families have been shattered. Hospitals continue to care for the wounded. And the effects of these forty days have seeped into every home: children out of school for weeks, rising fear and anxiety, financial strain, overextended parents, and fathers once again called up to fight in

Lebanon and beyond.

The exhaustion is real. The pain is deep.

But we are here. Alive. Connected. Proud. Growing stronger.

And perhaps most profoundly - we can almost taste it. The excitement, the anticipation of a greater redemption that feels closer than ever before. As if we are standing at the edge of something immense, something historic, something incredibly holy.

This is life in Israel.

This is what I want to celebrate this Yom Ha'atzmaut: Living in a Land where the connection between a people and their Land, between a nation and their Creator is so undeniable. ארץ אשר ה' אלוֹקֵיךָ דוֹרֵשׁ אוֹתָהּ, תִּמְדַּע עֵינֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּהּ.

I will never have enough words to thank Hashem for the privilege of living in ארץ הקודש. Not just living - but living now, in this moment in history. To call this country my home. To know that my house is not just where I live, but part of something infinitely larger.

And yes, I admit - I am running out of patience. I long for the complete picture and I want it now! For the בית in Yerushalayim radiating with Hashem's Presence. For the day when the story is whole.

But until then,

אחכה לו. בכל שניה שיבוא

Because here, in this land, our story is still being written and we are living it in real time. And in this Land, the pain and the miracles are not contradictory- they are chapters of the same unfolding Geulah. ■

The **Airleys** have built **Beit Binyamin**, a retreat center in Tzfat for those directly affected by the war. Soldiers, Zaka members, security forces, bereaved families and widows can come for respite, relaxation and rejuvenation. For more information and to donate, visit [Beitbinyamin.org](http://Beitbinyamin.org)