



The War in Eretz Yisrael

Stories of miracles, and channeling our pain into positive places.

The Torah's Mission Statement

This week, everyone is walking around with red eyes and exhausted. People stayed up all night, watching videos of the horrific events that took place in Israel this week, leaving them unable to sleep for days.

Today, on Shabbat Bereishit, as we read the story of creation in the Torah, I want to shift the focus.

The creation begins with "And G-d said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

Why, the Rebbe asks, did G-d create light on the first day—when no one needed it yet? Adam and Eve were only created on the sixth day, and animals were brought to life on the same day as well. Birds were created on the fifth day, so perhaps they needed light. Even trees, grass, and flowers, which depend on light, were created only on the third day. Who needed light on the first day?

This was G-d's mission statement for creation. G-d wanted to teach us that every beginning should be filled with light, goodness, and positivity. (Likutei Sichos, Vol 10, p 7)

We see this pattern in the Torah itself: In the beginning of the book of Exodus, when the Torah talks about the exile and redemption from Egypt, the Torah speaks very briefly about the troubles of exile, barely dedicating one chapter to the topic, but focuses endlessly on the miracles and wonders of redemption. So, today, I'd like to share some stories of miracles; let's lift our spirits and make sure we don't fall into sadness and despair.

The Escaped Hostage

The first story is about a woman named Avital, who lives in one of the

kibbutzim near the Gaza border. She woke up at 6:30 in the morning to the sound of rockets flying over her house. She immediately went to the safe room, and soon began to hear the screams of terrorists and continuous gunfire. She sat there, feeling bewildered and alone, when her neighbor called to check on her, and decided to join her. They sat together in the safe room for seven hours until 1:30 in the afternoon.

Then, their worst nightmare materialized. The terrorists broke into the house. Avital and her neighbor hid in a closet, but the terrorists found them. They killed the neighbor immediately and pulled her out of the closet. They also brought over two children, a four-year-old and a four-month-old, children of a different neighbor (who is still missing). They dragged her and the children from house to house, amidst bloodied rooms and burnt vehicles, eventually reaching a breach in the kibbutz's border fence, and from there, on foot towards Gaza (Gaza is incredibly close to those kibbutzim).

She had to carry the infant, and one of the terrorists carried the four-year-old who had sustained a foot injury. They kept urging her to move faster. When they finally reached the entrance to Gaza, the terrorist put the child down, and walked away, and she realized that nobody was paying attention and she had the opportunity to escape. She turned around with the two children and started walking back to the kibbutz.

Walking back with an infant and a wounded child was no easy feat; the child understood the severity of the situation and made a considerable effort to walk, and at times, she carried him on her back. During their walk back, she passed more terrorists, but incredibly no one bothered them, and they returned to the kibbutz before sunset, after having been on the road for half a day. The children reunited with their father, and the injured child received the necessary medical attention. Thank G-d, they managed to survive the horrific day's events.

The Tzitzit Which Saved A Life

The second story I want to share with you is about a soldier on active duty. On the morning of Simchat Torah, he was in Kiryat Gat when he heard about the attack near the Gaza border and decided, on his own initiative, to return to his base. Still wearing civilian clothes and carrying his personal weapon, he got into his private car and drove south, but while en route, he learned that the terrorists had infiltrated one of the kibbutzim.

He immediately headed there instead. When he arrived, he spotted the terrorists and opened fire on them, and managed to eliminate five of them. At one point, he was hit in the leg by a bullet and began to bleed, so he crawled to the side of the road and lay there for about two hours, bleeding. When the IDF troops arrived, they couldn't identify him due to his civilian clothing, and they suspected he might be a wounded terrorist and wanted to shoot at him. He tried to shout to them that he was a Jew, but he was so weak that they couldn't hear him.

Then, a miracle happened. The soldiers decided to approach cautiously, and one of them noticed that he was wearing tzitzit. He shouted, "Don't shoot, he has tzitzit!" That discovery saved his life, and they rushed him to a medical facility where he made a full recovery.

When this story spread, thousands of soldiers requested that the army provide them with tzitzit. Hundreds of volunteers mobilized to tie Tzitzit strings onto the Army uniform undershirts for all the soldiers that requested.

The Dilemma

People find themselves in a dilemma in the face of the harsh reality that's unfolded. There's this underlying feeling of guilt, like they should put their regular lives on hold. I was approached by someone this week who plays MahJ every Thursday with her friends. She's grappling with a sense of guilt, wondering if it's right to continue this game while Israel is in the midst of a life-and-death struggle.

This type of question keeps resurfacing, taking various forms. One person even contemplated postponing their wedding, questioning how they could celebrate when the nation is mourning the loss of over 1,300 lives, thousands of wounded, and close to a hundred taken captive. How can anyone sit down for a feast at such a time?

These moral dilemmas are nothing new. The Jewish people have a long history of dealing with challenges and tragedies.

The Talmud shares the following account from the time when the Holy Temple was destroyed:

There was a group of Pharisees who decided to abstain from eating meat and drinking wine. Rabbi Yehoshua accosted them: "Why aren't you eating meat and drinking wine?"

“How could we eat meat, which used to be offered daily in the Temple? How can we drink wine, which was poured daily on the altar?” They responded.

Rabbi Yehoshua didn’t agree. “What about bread, which was offered on Shavuot? And what about water, which was poured on Sukkot? And what about grapes and figs which were brought in the Bikkurim?”

They didn’t know what to say.

“My children,” he told them, “Mourning too much is not good, but not mourning at all is also unacceptable. That’s why our sages said, if you build a house, leave a small portion unplastered, to commemorate the destruction. As the verse says, ‘If I will forget you, Jerusalem, I will forget your right hand.’” (Tosefta Sotah 15:5).

Rabbi Yehoshua teaches us that life must go on. In fact, it’s forbidden to bring life to a complete halt. It’s what the terrorists would want us to do. On the other hand, we must honor the memory of the fallen and acknowledge those who are wounded and the ones held captive. That’s why I suggested to the individual not to cancel the Mahj game but to bring along copies of a chapter from the Book of Psalms. Before the game begins, they could all recite the chapter together and put some coins in the Tzedaka box in honor of the captives and the wounded. This way, they continue to live while channeling their sorrow in a positive way.

This is exactly how we celebrate weddings—we symbolically remember the destruction of the Temple by breaking a glass, acknowledging our loss but redirecting it positively.

As we all said in the High Holiday prayers, “Repentance, prayer, and acts of kindness can avert the severe decree.” May it come to pass very soon.