

Noah Efron

Professor from Bar Ilan, Noah Efron (originally from Silver Springs MD but made aliya 40+ years ago), speak for about an hour, then did break out groups of 10 each. His specialty is “Israel and Science,” and he explained of the general thoughts of the formation structure and success of the IDF over the last 75 years was that Jews with their excellent science background and understanding should be able to create a defense force that takes advantage of that knowledge and can defend this small country despite our small population size. He went on to explain his October 7 experience and how it has framed the way he thinks about Zionism and the future of Israel.

Some highlights were that he first knew something was wrong at 10am that Saturday because his son called him from L.A., where is studying at USC, even though he knows that his dad is *shomer shabbat*. His son said his reserve unit is being called up, several have already died in the fighting in the first day, and he needs the credit card number to purchase a flight home. Dr. Efron then picked him up at the airport, brought him to his unit, and he has been in Gaza ever since. Six more of his unit have perished, but he is still alive. Noah says he hasn't slept in 107 days, since his son's return.



Noah went on to talk about how in the 24 hours after the attack began, the What's App groups he is on from various kibbutzim, many of which are on the border of Gaza in the south, were posting questions like “Where is the Army,” “Where is the Government.” He spoke about how Hamas was posting those horrific GoPro videos on social media for that day for anyone to see as well, including Noah – those were then somehow blocked by the Israeli government after that. He described how he dug many graves on October 10, and went to many, many shivas over and over again in the aftermath.

He discussed the hard-to-imagine reality that the terrorists brought many hostages back into Gaza through the SAME HOLES in the border fence through which they had crawled to breach their way into Israel 6 hours previously, and that he thought it was a military failure these were not identified and closed. He talked about how he doesn't necessarily see 10/7 itself as an existential threat to the country of Israel but thinks

about it as a challenge to the theory of Zionism as a whole – basically, are Jews safe anywhere in the world if they're not even safe in the country that they helped create for themselves. He even invoked the Kishinev Pogrom of Moldova about which Rabbi Sam did a sermon a few weeks ago, and said Netanyahu even invoked the same “city of Slaughter” as early as October 8.

I should mention that Dr. Effron made it very clear he was a “pinko/leftist,” and that many of his kids or friends’ kids are anti the Israel government in its current structure. He told a story about an acquaintance who was trying to get to his son in the south in the wake of Black Saturday, but was stopped by border patrol, basically saying here I am trying to help and you are stopping me and patrolling the borders from Israelis trying to save their children instead of using those forces to fight the terrorists who are currently in Israel killing our people. Noah had some other pretty intense assessments like “there IS no army (despite 300,000 enlisted), and there IS not government,” and that these institutions had let down the border kibbutzim that are supposed to be the first line of defense (the original theory was to try and, for example, put a blockade in front of the Egyptian army getting to TA).

After that, he played some audio and showed some photos of hostage families going to the border fence across from Khan Yunis to shout messages of support and love to their loved ones in captivity – truly heartbreaking. And this I remember; he said the true genius of the Hamas attacks is that what they have done is to call into question the very notion that Jews can someday live in peace amongst their neighbors. But then he pivoted into positivity for the last part of his talk, saying specifically that “something new and different has been spawned,” in which the citizens have risen up to help one another.

He cited a friend starting an organization (because in his opinion the government was inept) to figure out all the names of and keep track of the people who were unaccounted for, who we now know are hostages. He cited the incredible movement of people, individually and via non-government organizations (more on that in a minute) throughout Israel helping others who were displaced, and about the newfound creativity within the arts throughout the country. He called this whole concept the Zionism of generosity and said perhaps this is the new thing in which to believe. Radical solidarity and empathy for one another.

Noam Levran

Noam spoke for about an hour straight about his experiences as a survivor of the Nova Music Festival Massacre of October 7th. His was a harrowing ordeal the likes of which I have never heard a live-and-in-person human being recount and is an experience that none of us should ever have to undergo. Noam is a computer programmer, single dad of 3 teenagers, who lives in *Petach Tikva*. He is 45 years old, about 6’2” and is a handsome guy, typical type of regular person who could be any of our brothers or cousins, very well spoken despite English being his second language. He is an army veteran, having been a machine gunner in one of the Lebanon wars. His new partner / girlfriend Jenny bought for his birthday some tickets to the Nova music festival –

something he normally wouldn't attend because it is more for 18–30-year-olds, but he is a former DJ who loves music and figured it would be fun.

The festival was on two separate stages, was going to go all night long Friday through Saturday, and feature about 40 DJs from Brazil and Japan among other countries and be what he described as a “nature party” with dancing, drugs, singing, picnicking, and fun. Noam and Jenny got to the venue and saw a sign for *Kibbutz Kfar Aza*, and were a little surprised that it was that close to Gaza but figured, we are still in Israel, this is our country it should be safe. They parked their car at the bottom of the hill in a parking lot jam packed with thousands of cars practically on top of one another and walked up the windy path to the top of the hill where the festival was set up. They brought multiple chairs and food with them. He describes the beginning of the festival as euphoric, the best festival he has ever attended, 4-5,000 people. Even Jenny's brother randomly was there without either of them having mentioned it to one another. There was police and security present.

Then the sunrise came up, bombs were in the air, at first, they thought they were fireworks, but then they heard the iron dome, and they knew they were missiles. Still, he figured all would be OK in a few minutes - and suddenly the music stopped. His first thought which said is funny and ironic in retrospect was that maybe they could get their money back for the tickets. That's when panic started, and people started running. That's when they opened the gates. He still sees this scene as a strong image in his head. He visualized his car - in a field packed in w thousands of cars. Tighter than a mall parking lot. How was he ever going to get it out?



He remembers total Chaos and panic by the concertgoers. Since there was really no way to get his car out of the lot, he and Jenny just decided to just get into the car and shelter in place and hide inside. Noam said that he wasn't very "scared" or panicked because of his military experience. But he kept thinking thoughts like, "This was a place to take drugs. It's not a place for people to butcher you" At this point, Noam became Very choked up and said the entire experience was a trauma that is hard to explain. He said he and Jenny turned on music via blue tooth speakers while were hiding since they realized that the terrorists were not at or near the parking lot. He says he knows now, 4 months later, that some people were saved because they came to hear his music from 7-8am and ate food. That's when he and Jenny started to drive in the car in the hopes of head for and finding a Bomb Shelter.

At that moment, Jenny got a text msg from her brother explaining about how the terrorist breached the border fence, and then they heard more hooting. Still, they weren't totally sure or convinced as to what it was as it was hard to process or understand what was happening. - It was the party itself that was attacked. They hadn't quite yet realized that up to that point. Noam started to drive the car. He and Jenny parked at a little rest area / vista pull-over type of place on the side of road. That's when a bunch of people started running down the hill toward them, yelling "They're murdering us. Run away!" and they heard more shooting. They had a pretty big car (for Israel) and several people got inside of it. Some were shot and wounded. There was a lot of blood everywhere that got over everything inside, and he remembers seeing some make-shift bandages. He didn't feel or understand anything, was only thinking about Jenny and the others in the car. Not himself. Other concertgoers running around outside made him stop to get more injured inside. The car was totally packed – 15 people! The people inside were panicked shouting and packed tight. There was shooting and bombs outside, and people running all around the field.

Noam saw the apparently famous 232 road, which he knows goes one way West toward Gaza, and the other way East toward Israel, but he didn't know which direction he was facing, and which way was which. He and Jenny went left on a lark, following a Jeep. But they reached a gulch in the road, and he didn't know if he was going in right direction. He realizes in retrospect, with 15 people in car - good thing he took the chairs out. "Keep going they're going to shoot us" – everyone was yelling, but he had to turn around and drive through a field or the car would have gotten stuck in the gulch. At one point he remembers that the car went up on two wheels around some debris while he was driving in a circular part of the field, and then they made it back on to the road. This was the key moment. He saw smoke in the distance, so he went the other way. Didn't know if he should go left or right – this was what he called their "choice for life" – most people in the car were yelling to go right, but he and Jenny decided to go left, and it turned out that likely saved all of their lives (eventually). Overall Noam now knows and has connected 12 of the people he and Jenny saved. He doesn't know and hasn't connected with the other 3, and honestly isn't totally sure that they're definitely alive. Everyone got out of car at this point and started to run through the field where maybe could hide under bushes. That's when he saw his first body. Shot in the head and lying down at a weird angle. He recognized this girl and had met her earlier in night.

A bomb went off nearby – Noam’s body was shaking. His ears were ringing. Heat seared down his back – that’s how close the bomb was. He realized at this point that the few policemen who were at the festival saved many of the concertgoers lives with their bodies, giving them maybe a little more time to save themselves. Noam and the others lay under tree for few minutes. But then they heard people shouting to run again. He started running some more and that’s when he saw man more dead bodies all around them. He tried to go back to the car but got shot at.

Suddenly there was an orchard - like a dune – that they could see in the distance. Noam and Jenny and one other couple headed that way and lay down under the trees trying to hide (despite wearing a bright orange sweatshirt of all things). They froze in those positions – absolutely could not move – there was shooting and bullets all around them for 5 minutes. He could hear happy voices chanting “*Alla hu akhbar*” in Arabic and Noam knows now in retrospect that there were 150 terrorists in that area surrounding them. Then suddenly it got quiet, but they could hear the terrorists walking in the field because of the twigs and leaves crunching. It was clear they were looking for more people to kill.

Noam heard a weird buzzing sound like one of his kid’s video games. He realized it was a Drone seeking out concertgoers and trying to kill them. For the first time, Noam started thinking about who’s going to take care of his children. Started to think about his funeral. He said he “Felt like he was in the Holocaust’ - If you move, they will kill you. Heard Arabic all around them. It was clearly time for the terrorists to butcher, stab and kill people, and then, after what felt like an eternity, it got quiet again and it seemed the immediate threat had passed.

NOBODY came for 2 hours, then finally they heard the first helicopter. Then 40 minutes later they heard Hebrew being spoken all around them. But it was just a few cops and brave citizens who had come to try to help informally, not the army. Heard another very loud noise, maybe a bomb, wasn’t sure. Then, eventually 4-5 total hours went by. Then they saw another terrorist, then heard another bomb, and they realized they had to get up again and leave or else they’d be burned alive.

They saw a clearing and hid behind boxes of fruit. Then saw police and citizens, as well as a tent in which to go with a large group of people. Nobody really knew what was happening, but this seemed like a promising place. Twenty minutes later, a shielded police car came to drive them through 5 kilometers (3 miles) of total Hell on Earth. Hundreds of burned cars and people, including children, that was Endless. People were obviously dead, lying in shapes inconceivable and incompatible with human life. It was like something out of an apocalyptic movie. People shot in the head, everything.

After 45 minutes to an hour straight of telling this tale, Noam got very pensive and self-reflective. He spoke about how “This is why I’m here to tell the story.” That’s why he survived. His direct quote was “This will happen again if we don’t fight it. We have to work together. Not hate each other. We all have a common enemy.” He spoke about

how his message and his mantra now, while he tells his story sometimes twice a day to groups like ours who want to hear is about Spreading Love, being there for one another, and being a positive light in the world.

He is in post-traumatic therapy and says that this retelling is also part of his treatment. Jenny's in the US telling the story as well, but she's not going great. Her brother was murdered at the concert, and they didn't find out until a week later. After our group asked him a few questions for about 10-15 minutes, we all in succession got up and hugged Noam and spoke with him personally for a little bit. I told him I am going to go back home to tell his story, and that this won't be in vain. He walked us back to the bus and we headed back to the hotel in Tel Aviv, overwhelmed, disgusted, dumbfounded.

Adele Ramer

Reid Ramer, originally from NYC, who did Young Judea year course in 1973 with our new friend Joel who is on our trip this week but usually works as a law professor at UDC and lives in NE DC.

She made aliya after the Yom Kippur War and served in the army. She is a 75yo teacher and activist and works as a medical clown for sick kids in the hospital as well! Picture her as a typical Jewish grandmother, aside from the fact that she has masking tape over her heart with the number "116" written in a Sharpie, representing the number of days since the hostages were taken. She lives in a Kibbutz right on the border of Gaza, at which many Palestinians have worked for 20+ years and are friendly with the residents. Her husband totally unrelated committed suicide in September and is buried at the kibbutz. She short version of the story is that she survived the 10/7 attacks directly on her kibbutz by hiding in her safe room with her adult son, while a terrorist lurked outside and tried to break in.

At present, she is a displaced person, originally evacuated to Eilat and now lives in Be'er Sheva with the rest of the survivors from her kibbutz. This includes two of her children and 3 of her grandchildren who lived there and are also survivors. For many years already she has had the word "Resilience" tattooed on hand – it is her credo. Her opinion is that the World maybe has heard what happened to her and her neighbors on 10/7 but truly has not "seen" and understood the true horror. She has not curled up into a ball in the aftermath of her trauma, she has stayed active and involved in the community – she already had a regular Vlog viewed by up 12,000 people that she continues to video - there to bear witness.

On Shabbat morning 10/7, she had originally planned to wake up to see the sunrise and maybe pick some flowers, but thankfully she was tired, overslept, and opted not to, thereby staying indoors and ultimately not being as high a risk for the targeted and intentional killing of innocent civilians that was about to ensue. At 630am, despite being hearing-impaired, she heard the incoming rocket alerts. Within 10 seconds she ran into her bomb shelter, which also doubles as a guest room, in which her son, who was in town from TA, was sleeping.



She stated that the unusually heavy (meaning, more than the normal steady rocket-fire) barrage of rockets sent over from Gaza that morning by Hamas was to distract from the infiltrators who were cutting through and crossing over the border fence. Her kibbutz has an "Internal messaging system" (assume this is like a What's App), but, oddly, no information was coming across on these wavelengths, including nothing from the usual kibbutzniks who have inside information or are typically very on top of security issues.

Finally, her neighbors started posting message such as "We can hear shooting outside." Adele herself had never heard machine gun before, so she hadn't recognized it for what it was. She quickly closed and locked all her house's windows and doors and did a live broadcast to her 12,000 followers! That's about the time that she came to the realization that her safe room door doesn't lock from the inside! You can only pull down the handle and hold it in place, hoping that nobody stronger than you tries to turn the handle! She and her neighbors never even considered the fact that her kibbutz would ever be overrun by terrorists on foot, they mostly just thought of the shelters as a place to avoid being hit by rockets or shrapnel.

That's when more messages started coming across the messaging system from her neighbors, presumably from within their safe houses: "We hear people speaking Arabic outside of our houses... Now they're in our house... Now they're burning our house." One family had a 10-day old baby in their safe house, and they kept a window cracked so that the baby could breathe (Adele was relieved to report that entire family survived).

Something Adele said here didn't totally make sense to me, but I believe what she said was that her 3 granddaughters, ages 2,6,and 8, were sleeping in another house, so her son told them to go the shelter where they were and stay out of where Adele and her son were. At that moment, a terrorist got into the safe room where her and her son were hiding and her son shot and killed the terrorist right there on the spot, in the safe room. She was certain at this point that she and son were going to die. They said goodbye to one another.

Adele was in severe pelvic pain from holding in her impending "nature call" that had been building up and that she had been ignoring all this time! She quickly opened door and left the safe room to go to bathroom! She even peaked and saw the damage to the

exterior of her safe house, realizing at that moment that by sheer chance / dumb luck the terrorists had by now apparently abandoned the idea of trying to get into her house and had moved on to another location! She still doesn't know exactly how she and her son were spared.

She described that the first inkling of anyone coming to fight the terrorists and rescue the civilians was that a high-ranking commander and 2 others came in to help them from somewhere outside the kibbutz, but while they were able to kill a few terrorists, they ultimately died in battle. It was another 7 hours before any others from army came to assist... then she was extricated 11 hours later.

She knows that from the entire Kibbutz, a total of 5 people were killed, and 5 were kidnapped, with 3 people (all women) having been released. A man and his son are still in captivity. Adele talked a lot about how now her purpose in life is and always has been helping others, and now she is focusing on continuing her work, staying active, and putting love and support out into the world, much as Noam spoke about after his ordeal in the Nova massacre. Adele was simply a pure inspiration, a heroine, and an amazing ambassador for telling the story, especially because, although she is now and Israeli and has been for decades, she has such a similar background to so many of us on this mission being raised as an American Jew and having gone to Jewish camp, etc. After listening to Adele speak, my prevailing and overwhelming thought internally was "I can't believe I thought about NOT coming on this mission." I needed to see this. I needed to be able to discuss everything I saw back at home.

Miriam Schear

Our next speaker was (almost) as amazing and inspiring as Adele, but to be honest, Adele was a very tough act to follow. Miriam Schear, also an American Jew and YJ alumna, went to camp at Sprout and TY, YearCourse, everything. She has now worked in Tel Aviv at the sexual assault center for 30 years – it was formed 45 years ago. Their general motto and philosophy is "you are not alone." Typically, they perform 12,000 interventions with their staff and 250 volunteers annually. On 10/6 she was on vacation in Sinai and came home to TA at midnight for her son's bd, which is 10/7 – said usually she considers that date the best day of her life, but now it has totally been ruined. Of note, her daughter was in her one-year post-army year traveling in South America, but immediately came right back. Already, one of her daughter's friends died in the Nova massacre, and another has been killed in action in the army.

Once the rockets started, she went to her safe room, and was in and out many times that morning. She saw the alerts about terrorists in Sderot, and she felt as though there was a lot of confusion and frustration from everyone being affected. She reiterated what Noah Efron told us Monday morning, that the idea generally is that the people in the kibbutzim and towns on the border should only have to hold steady for 15 minutes in the wake of a terror attack, and then the IDF should be able to come in and save the day. She felt as though that day the whole country was in complete chaos, that the

Government was totally nonfunctional. [One supplement to this thought Andrew mentioned to me later was that many feel that the army was too focused on protecting the settlements in the West Bank and had left the south unprotected.] She reiterated what the Brothers in Arms representatives told us on Monday morning, which is that almost everything that has been done for the citizens of this country over the past 4 months has been by NGOs, 3rd parties / communities / citizens.

She and her staff at the rape crisis center moved into immediate action. First because of the tons of reports immediately in the aftermath of 10/7 about rape by terrorists. There was indisputable evidence - terrorists were filming it and celebrating it, with blood on the genitals. Miriam was just as horrified by the fact that civilians in Gaza were seen on camera joining in celebration. That's when Miriam made her key statement, "Don't talk about PTSD. We are not Post trauma. We are still IN trauma as a nation. We feel alone."

She is absolutely mortified that the outside world is saying the violence was justified because of the "occupation." She made it clear - she is COMPLETELY opposed to the occupation. But she also made this very clear - there is NO connection between 10/7 and occupation. It is NOT justified. She clearly and emphatically stated RAPE CAN NEVER BE A WEAPON OF WAR THERE IS NO WAY TO JUSTIFY IT.

She spoke about how this is all HERE. OUR country. This is all extremely personal and very intense. Her thoughts have turned to bearing witness and giving survivors control back, much as her group tends to do for woman in the face of rape.

Her group immediately realized they had to take action and focus on more than just rape crisis. They pivoted to taking calls from 10/7 survivors with all kinds of emotional and physical trauma. Unfortunately, they furloughed 6-7 people in the aftermath of the massacre, so she and her staff have been working 14-hour days. They have been training their staff on resilience counseling.

She spoke a lot about how she doesn't understand how world doesn't get it. Can't believe many in the American or diaspora Jewish community are against and critical of Israel. Can't believe these conspiracies about how AI created the terrorist videos, or the narratives regarding that ISRAEL deserved it. She also spoke about how she can't believe even with evidence people don't believe, including the UN women's rights group, calling the critics of Israel out for their naïveté and total hypocrisy / double standard. She also can't believe folks in the diaspora especially America are hiding their *mezzuzot* or other Judaica or ripping down hostage signs.

They have been also counseling the counselors, like the First responder therapists who have also been coming to her organizations for help. She and her colleagues let these people vent and listen to them. Miriam also spoke about how it is a huge challenge to counsel trauma survivors in general. Specifically, like of course 10/7 victims have been traumatized -- Now imagine what's that like for someone who already has trauma in their life like other forms of abuse. She spoke about how now she is seeing what she

termed as a hierarchy of pain and justice. She was asked about perhaps the new-found solidarity of Israeli society post 10/7 but said - not so much – in fact, she has even seen abuse of evacuees in hotels! (Oy). She in general thinks the country is falling apart in terms of infrastructure for support therapy etc. In fact, she is now trying to start 10 new support groups - huge new endeavors.

I would have loved to stay to ask this question (but I had to meet my high school friend who made aliya Rob Shein for dinner at Nono): What can American Jews, specifically women, specifically medical professionals, do to help her organization with items such as virtual counseling, for rape or all other 10/7 trauma, etc. Adina said she would try to pass on that question to Miriam and tell us how to donate to her group.

Rami Carmel

Rami Carmel oversees the musical programming at Camp Tel Yehuda. He was a paratrooper in the army, as is his son now. His daughter is a major in the army as well. He is the Digital Director of a new program in Israel called the Ambassadors' Club Team (ACI), for which he has recruited 5000 "cadets" to try to perform education via "*Hasbara*" / public relations as ambassadors for Israel throughout the world. Their idea is to bring the news of the war internationally to various countries directly from Israelis. As many of us already know, Rami acknowledged that Israel has not been focused on or good at PR historically.

He specifically wants to target current Israel 11th and 12th graders as an elite "unit" of students to help with this project. He emphasized that "we never tell them what to say - just how to speak about it." Specifically, what that means is that he wants these kids to share their daily reality in a raw and honest way, without "fake news" getting in the way. He also wants to engage other interested groups around the world to participate in this project. He ended his presentation with the thought that, post-10/7 Israelis need to leave all their internal disagreements aside and start thinking of a new path together in the future.

Dr. Omri Sender

Omri was one of the lawyers who defended Israel at the International Court of Justice of the UN: here is the link to his presentation:

<https://youtu.be/tJAZQLbYSDE?si=G5rHBdTI4mmuYQIC>

He is a former Young Judaeon (worked as a counselor in Washington DC), as were the others on the panel, has a Ph.D. in law, has 5 kids and lives in TA, working at a small law firm. He spoke to us for about 10 minutes and was absolutely fascinating. He said the period of 10/7-11/15 was a total blur, and that there are still some stories and information to which the public does not have access yet. He said that it feels like we are on the brink of WWII which we are all trying to prevent.

Omri has witnessed a huge international campaign to delegitimize Israel and accuse it of the highest crimes imaginable, all to destroy what Israel actually stands for. He reiterated what we all feel, which is that the accusation of Israel as causing Genocide is particularly offensive to Jews, and totally inaccurate given all that the Israeli army is doing to try and prevent civilian deaths. He spoke a lot about how the Palestinians sought advice from lawyers to change their accusations years ago, when calling Israel's presence in the territories "occupation" didn't get enough popular / world opinion on their side, at that time switching to the terminology of "apartheid." He said now that they are pivoting to "genocide." He says the goal is obviously to undermine the notion that Jews can have their own state and defend themselves.

He spoke about a Catch-22 in the territories, given that Israel is prevented from applying its own laws in the West Bank because that would be considered "annexation," which is technically illegal under international law. Yet they are required to apply certain rules when dealing with the Palestinians because they are considered a protected class. I'm not sure I totally understood the last point but will try to get some clarification. Omri was steadfast in his belief that it is very clear that over the investigation and monitoring over the next 2 years Israel will be completely exonerated of any genocide charges.



Omri was quick to point out that the UN international security council has yet to condemn the atrocities of 10/7! (I did not know that), yet Israel must belong to the council and work with this community of nations – but it is increasingly difficult. He discussed the accusations by Iran more thoroughly, stating that it is clear they are backed by Iran, that the threshold the SA needed to get approval for interim relief measures was very low and easy to achieve, but they did not achieve the main goal of having the court call for a ceasefire.

He said that all the relief workers in Gaza know that the UN relief efforts are totally corrupt, but they are too afraid of Hamas to admit it. They know that Hamas takes the relief supplies for their own benefit but blame Israel instead.

Andy Berger

Next, we heard from a former Judaeon, Andrew “Andy” Berger, who is from Miami and just made Aliya, arriving in Israel on October 18th. That was a predetermined date based on the timing of his application (6-9 months of intense paperwork), and he decided to proceed even after the war was initiated. He said, “if I changed my plans, then the terrorists win!” He is a former businessman (sounds like he owned and operated an extermination company and is recently divorced. He is about 10 years older than me, having done YearCourse in 1980. Andy mentioned that, after moving to Israel, he spent his first month volunteering delivering food to people in need, then got hired by an auto parts company driving supplies all over the country.

Andy discussed how 95% of mechanics in Israel are Arab citizens of Israel, and that he has gotten to know many of them very well and made several friends. He spoke about how his “eyes have been opened” to the fact that Arab, non-Jewish citizens of Israel were also deeply hurt by the terror attacks of 10/7, and that many of them have deep pride in their country, displaying Israeli flags as well as signs demanding the release of the hostages on their homes and businesses. He said to one Arab co-worker recently “*Boker Tov*” (good morning), and the gentleman responded “*Boker Dvash*” (have a sweet morning). He said this friend also encouraged Andy to stop and smell the roses and enjoy the day. He said, “after October 7th, everyone has a skin in the game” and that the notion that everyone here is connected to one another is a real thing, not just a tag line.

Aaron Lightner

The final voice in our panel was the impassioned and transparently honest and emotional Aaron Lightner, an American from Westchester County who is about 72 years old. He made Aliya in 1973, previously worked in the Mossad, as well as being a sergeant in the army, and serving in the reserves in Lebanon. He temporarily went back to the US to train and work as a portfolio manager but came back to Israel and has lived in Ra’anana since 1995. He serves on the TY board, has played in a band, and done volunteering with teenagers from broken homes. He has children in the army, including a son who is currently a paratrooper - he showed us all a photo of him when we sat down to dinner together after the panel was completed. His son was in Gaza 8 weeks ago, but did not have his phone, so Aaron only got rare photos and texts indirectly about his status from other people in the area. His son served in Khan Yunis for 2 months, and just got temporarily relieved from service, turned in his weapon, and is “just” a civilian for now. Aaron got very choked up, understandably, about the trauma his family has gone through worrying about his son for the past 4 months.

Aaron spoke about how he thinks the IDF has an edge in that our front-line combatants in the military include very intelligent young men and women - that they are not weeded out and sent to the supervisory ranks. He spoke about his friends and acquaintances who are Western-educated savvy Palestinians who know that Hamas is corrupt and discussed the importance of community outreach to allow these Palestinians to continue

their businesses, and perhaps facilitate or be involved with under-the-radar meetings between warring factions. Andy mentioned that as early as October 11th he began receiving messages from his Palestinian friends and acquaintances stating things like “we know Iran is behind all of this,” we know that innocent Israeli citizens are paying the price, and just generally checking in with Aaron to make sure he is OK - saying that they “pray for an end to this” and ending with Shalom / Salaam.

Aaron emphasized what so many of the people whom we have heard speak have said, that “we are united now” here in Israel. That the country was in “a bad place” pre-10/7 with the protests over judicial reform and all the political strife, and that sometimes it takes tragedies such as the one with which they are dealing now to help the history of the country evolve and progress. Aaron did cite the Jew-hatred teachings found in schools in Gaza by the IDF over the past 4 months, the reports of Palestinians who previously worked on Israeli kibbutzes who gave critical intelligence to Hamas leaders, and he thinks he underestimated the degree to which many Palestinians in Gaza hated us, and the percentage of them who felt that way. Aaron also spoke about how he feels that it is too soon to openly discuss blaming the government of Israel for allowing the atrocities to have occurred (even if they are responsible), and that specifically this is disrespectful to the soldiers who are currently in battle.

Orna and Eldad Adar

We woke up at the crack of dawn on Thursday February 2, and went immediately to a cemetery in Modi'in, a community about halfway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and met Orna and Eldad Adar, the parents of Gili Adar. She was a 24yo army veteran, scout at Young Judaea camps in the US, even one of Vivian's daughter Natalie's counselors at TY in the summer of 2022.



Gili was a beautiful blond girl with a bright smile and, from the photos, all around her grave, a bright and effusive personality. She was one of the 403 people who were murdered at the Nova music festival the morning of October 7th, having been found just outside of a bar at the concert, behind which 20 other kids tried to hide but were also gunned down. She was described by her parents as one of those people who spoke to

everyone, wasn't judgmental, found value in all kinds of people. They read testimonials from some of her campers that attested to this. She traveled all over the world, especially a lengthy stay in South America, where she made very close friends almost immediately.

Her gravestone is inscribed, in Hebrew, "Our Gili: A girl of Sunshine. A girl of Light. We will remember her in our heart. She was a friend between all worlds. Your beauty is clear," and below that, it lists her birth and death dates and says, "She was only 24 years old." Adina sang a psalm and then we were the minyan while Orna and Eldad said kaddish. Behind the grave.

There was a giant poster with all the faces of all the kids who were killed at the festival, from which it was easy to pick out Gili given her blond hair and wide smile. Her parents gave us each a little gift bag by which to remember her, including a sticker with her picture as well as a small candle. We slowly and somberly started to leave the cemetery, hugging Gili's parents and promising to tell her story back in America to anyone who would listen.

Timor

Timor is a police officer who lives in Sderot and works in Ashkelon, and his duties are usually routine clerical duties sitting at a desk. As he told us in broken English, at 7am the morning of 10/7, he heard rockets, and within 5 minutes his commander called him to come into the station on his day off.

Timor said he had never seen a terrorist enter Sderot before. As he drove toward his station, he took the road that was less likely to be targeted by snipers. While driving, he realized that there were no animals on the side of the road, which is very odd for that area, and then encountered a car in the middle of the road facing the wrong direction. He initially thought maybe it had crashed, but when he looked inside the car, it was empty and abandoned. Out of the corner of his eye he saw 7-8 people dressed in IDF green uniforms, but when he saw that they were armed with automatic kaishnikovs, he realized that something was off, and they were likely terrorists. He checked his pistol – remember he is just a desk jockey - all he had were 14 bullets.

Within seconds, he was in a gun fight. The battle was very brief, he was injured but he didn't know exactly where. He tried to get into his car but saw another car behind him and thought that it may represent an ambush. It turns out it was another plain clothes police officer, to whom Timor explained the situation in which they now found themselves.

One of the terrorists got into a white Toyota truck and started to drive toward them, shouting, and shooting at them out the window. The other police officer was shot and injured and could no longer fight, then getting in Timor's passenger seat. Timor shot back at the terrorist and actually killed him! There was suddenly more gun fire from

behind them, so Timor leaned out the window, and shot his 4 remaining rounds backward out of the car.

When Timor put the car in gear to try to drive out of there, that's when he was shot three times in his right arm, immobilizing it, and making it extremely difficult to use the stick shift. He had to somehow drive left-handed now, all the while using his teeth to tighten a makeshift tourniquet he created out of his belt. His main thoughts turned to getting the *other* police officer to the hospital! He got the car up to 120-150kph and headed toward Ashkelon to first warn his colleagues at the police station that he believed a terrorist ambush was on the way to attack them.

No joke he got pulled over for speeding 2km from the station! Timor threw himself out of the car and onto the road and explained to the officer what had just happened. An ambulance came within 10 minutes, and he was taken to a hospital in Be'er Sheva. I should note here that he said the other police officer also survived! For his shattered bone in his arm, Timor has had a total of 3 surgeries at 2 hospitals over the past 4 months, including a bone graft from his hip. His arm is doing better, he can move it now, but he walks with a cane for support and balance. His main longer-term issue is pain control, but now after 2 months of inpatient rehab he is now doing outpatient rehab.

What an incredible inspiration he was – picturing his story in real time was like watching an American shoot-em-up action movie, but this was not funny or cool or with a neat soundtrack. Just the realization of the trauma and terror he experienced, his calm under pressure, his incredible luck to be able to survive and not lose his arm, what a marvel.



Shimon

We then heard from a 32yo male ER nurse named Shimon, whose wife is also an ER nurse. They have 2 young children. On the morning of 10/7, his wife was working an overnight shift, and he was at his in-laws' house with his kids. Once the news came out, he spoke to his wife, who was asked to stay at work and do a double-shift, and he

stayed home with the kids. After about 2 hours Shimon received 2 phone calls, one from work asking him if he would be available to come in for duty if they need him, and basically the exact same call from his reserve army unit's commander, asking him the same thing, given that he is a combat medic. He was going into battle.

His unit's supply area initially was raided, and everything was taken by terrorists, so they had to replenish their supply of vests and guns. Once resupplied and in action, he and his unit went through many Israeli neighborhoods bordering Gaza, collecting bodies. Eventually, they made their way to the border kibbutz *Kfar Aza*, which was totally devastated. He helped give treatment to injured soldiers and hundreds of civilians, and then to get the worst of the casualties a helicopter to get them into a trauma center in a major city.

Shimon spoke about how hard it has been to lose several patients over the past few months, but also spoke of the camaraderie in his unit, including some fleeting moments of levity, smiling, and small bursts of joy. He was released from serving 3 weeks ago but now is back to his job in the ER, trying to mete out treatment to everyone who needs it. He did comment that some of his patients are injured Palestinian civilians (including one pregnant woman who recently gave birth), which can be difficult emotionally, but it's their job so they do it even if it's hard. He feels very uncertain in general at work – his body is here but his mind is not – and he keeps asking his supervisor if he is doing certain routine things properly, which is very unlike him. He just started an antidepressant a few weeks ago and hopes that it starts helping him soon.

He reiterated that “all the stories you are hearing are true.” He bore witness. There were bodies everywhere in those neighborhoods, horrible injuries and cadavers burnt to a crisp. For some of those who were killed, they had to scoop up and strain out the ashes to try to find some human body parts with which to perform DNA analysis. Israel has 23 forensic dentists looking to try to identify certain bodies from their dental records, but unfortunately many of the bodies have the teeth all blown out of the jaws.

Girshon Baskin

Girshon Baskin, an incredibly powerful and passionate speaker – picture a robust man with a thick head of white hair and white beard, who is so passionate that his face turns red, and he generates a little spittle when he gets going. He is the Middle East Director of the “International Communities Organization” (ICO), a UK-based NGO focused on working with communities who have had failed peace processes. He has spent 45 years (wow) liaising between Israelis and Palestinians via secret direct back channels. He is the author of *The Negotiator: Freeing Gilad Schalit from Hamas*. One quote from him that stood out to me from his 20-minute spiel he gave us was “If anyone comes to me, if there's a human life that needs to be saved, I will do anything possible.”

For multiple reasons he has been negotiating with Hamas for 17 years, ever since 2005 when his wife's 1st cousin was kidnapped by Hamas. He said that he met an undisclosed individual from Hamas at a conference for the World Bank in Cairo, who

proposed that they create a dialogue. "Girsh," as he is known, found four countries willing to sponsor the talks, but the Hamas leadership in Syria vetoed it. Despite that, he met with the "PM" of Hamas and senior advisors including an economics professor. They invited Girsh to a conference in Istanbul with Palestinians and Israelis.

Baskin was contacted within a week after Gilad Shalit was kidnapped by Hamas in 2006 and was able to arrange a phone conversation between a Hamas leader and Shalit's father. He helped arrange a "proof of life" deliverable to the family 2.5 months after the abduction. It took 5 years and 4 months, but in 2011 he helped negotiate the agreement that allowed Shalit to be released, in exchange for 1,027 prisoners. (Interestingly, as many people know that current Hamas leader Sinwar was a prisoner who was released as part of that swap, Sinwar was not considered a danger to Israel at the time of his release, as he had been serving 22 years for crimes against fellow Palestinians who were deemed to be collaborating with Israel.) Among the prisoners who were released were 300 people who were convicted murderers, including the person who killed his wife's cousin.

Girsh stated that 2 things surprised him about 10/7: The total failure of the government to protect itself, and the Ease with which Hamas crossed the border, as well as the amount of Intelligence they had. He could not believe that 3,000 terrorists crossed the border fence and feels as though this never would have happened if only one army brigade unit had been stationed there. He was surprised at Hamas having the ability to disarm electronic detection systems with simple drones. Baskin said that since then, he has been deeply involved unofficially with discussions with Israel and Hamas via Egypt and Qatar, but nobody on either side has asked him yet to play an official role. He stated, "Hamas already won the war" on 10/7 by demonstrating how weak Israel was.

I'm going to type these next few paragraphs with the caveat that Girsh is self-admittedly very far to the left politically and has some extreme views, and I think it's important to hear what he has to say because he is so smart, connected, and experienced. For example, he mentioned that Arafat declared Palestine to be a state in the late 70s, and that 139 of 193 member states of the UN recognize the state, even if it's not officially a member state itself, and even if the Western world including the US and Israel do not recognize it.

Girsh said that the failure of 10/7 was not only the items stated above, but also the breakdown of the basic conception that was here before 2009 and the rise of Bibi: That Israelis were led to believe that we can occupy another people for 57 years and think we can live in Peace with them. That we can "lock" people into Gaza and expect to have quiet. He blamed this on Netanyahu refusing to recognize that "the Zionist Solution is the two-state solution," and that Netanyahu convinced the people of Israel that we can manage and ignore this, making him the "worst leader in history of the Jewish people. He holds the responsibility. He is finished and he will take the blame." Baskin specifically mentioned that in the 5 recent rounds of elections in Israel "nobody mentioned the Palestinians." This year, before 10/7, Girsh thought that a 2-state solution was off the table. Now he thinks it's back on. He said that the only way to

defeat Hamas is to create a second state. He said there are 7 million Jews and 7 million Arabs between “the river and the sea.... That’s not changing.” They need to know they can LIVE for Palestine. They don’t have to DIE for it. Right now, that is their religion—becoming a martyr guarantees getting into heaven. " Hamas is smart." Recruit the children of families killed and sell them revenge.

For him, this is not just something in the news. He said that he has Israeli "friends that were killed 10/7. One friend had 8 family members kidnapped, other friend had 4 family members killed." Another Israeli, a good friend of his was killed, a woman and former Judaeen named Vivian silver. He also said that knows thousands of Palestinians on a personal level. That, on 10/11 he sent messages to over 100 people in Gaza to tell them he is thinking about them and concerned for their welfare. One woman he tried to message has a 13-month-old baby, but just left abusive husband, in part because Girsh convinced her to leave. He hasn’t heard from her at all but was able to send her \$500 through an intermediary.

Girsh referenced a piece he wrote called "The day after tomorrow," using IRA/Belfast as a metaphor. He called this Israel’s "Belfast moment." He said that people in a conflict can say, "no more," despite hundreds of years of conflict—it is possible. They can say we can remember the past but still look forward. He said that Hillary Clinton used to say that Israelis and Palestinians need to “want it [peace] more than us,” but now the situation is about more than just those two parties, it’s about regional and world security. He said that the international community needs to force us out of "Negative Trust." He thinks this is actually a good starting point after his years of negotiator as 45 years. Both sides have broken numerous supposed peace agreements in the past. We can’t wait 30 more years for this. He has known most of leaders on both sides and “boy, do we deserve better.” He said we have hit rock bottom on both sides. Thinks the solution may be in young Palestinian woman, that they are 2/3 of students in educational institutions, and they want to assert their autonomy as a people. He thinks this is happening throughout the Arab world and that they need to enter politics. He also mentioned that this is happening in Israel as well, but that the current Knesset has the lowest number of women in its chamber that it has had in a long time.

Girsh spoke so much more about the situation, but without getting into yet (too many) more details, I will mention that he thinks cease-fire negotiations need to be MULTILATERAL not bilateral. He thinks Palestinians require deep internal reform and elections for an interim government. He specified that he thinks the World community needs to prevent armed struggle from erupting again once this is created. Girsh made it clear that he thinks that Anyone who enters Gaza in the post-war era will be considered an occupier, unless invited in by Palestinians. He even said that he is encouraged by some of the actions of Israel and the US. He personally knows Palestinians who accept that there can be no militia in a future state or on an election ballot. This quote was poignant: "Whether Hamas has support after the war will depend on how long Israel stays in Gaza."

In response to a great question from our group about which leaders on either side he thinks are reasonable and can help broker a lasting peace, he mentioned Israeli politician Gadi Eisenkot, who he deems as intelligent and moral. On the Palestinian side, he mentioned Nasser al-Qudwa, Yasser Arafat's nephew who is an international law scholar who is married to a French woman and has lived in Nice. He mentioned that al-Qudwa has worked in Gaza for the past two years, is anti-Hamas, anti-violence, and supports a two-state solution. Finally, and much more controversially he mentioned Marwan Barghouti who has been in solitary confinement in an Israeli prison for 22 years but is the "#1 most popular" political figure among Palestinians. Girsh in fact has already run correspondence between him and the head of Shin Bet, Israel's version of the FBI. Girsh may have already proved to be prescient within less than a day, as there was a story in the Times of Israel on Friday morning about how Hamas wants the release of Barghouti as part of any negotiations.



David Lehr

Next on the panel we heard from David Lehr, the Immediate Past President of the Executive Committee of the "Arava institute" –a think tank started at and based in Kibbutz Ketura—that is focused on Environmental Diplomacy. He worked as the executive director for 20 years, starting in 1996. David is a very impressive gentleman who currently serves as the President and board chair YJ Global along with Adina obviously, and with our trip-mate Michael Sherman. He has a 28yo daughter and 2 little grandchildren in TA. He said bottom line about Girsh's spiel, "Yeah, what he said"... basically that he echoes many of Girsh's thoughts but is less "adventuresome" in his ideas.

The general idea of environmental diplomacy is just this – the environment is in crisis, and climate change can't wait for cross border (political) negotiation and agreement—if

anything, the peace process has been going in reverse for the last 8 years. He brings together Israelis with multiple Arab parties in the area, including Jordanians as well as Palestinians. My understanding from David's presentation is that he has created what he terms a "Do Tank" (I didn't catch the name of this institution) to implement the thoughts that Arava assembles. One example he gave was what sounds like an environmental studies program on Applied Environmental Diplomacy that is based on a cadre of 1/3 international students, 1/3 Palestinians, and 1/3 Jordanian. They are studying climate change, environment economics, agriculture, and conservation via classes, education, and research.

David feels as though this education can build cross border relationships, which can then lead to help in developing a foundation for a sustainable two state solution. He said that one of the eventual goals of this process is for the Palestinians to not be dependent on Israel for electricity/energy, water, other utilities, etc. He specified that he envisions them working in cooperation with Israel as equals. He said that right now, Palestinians in Gaza have about 8 to 16 hours of electricity per day on good days. He bemoaned Israel bombing and destroying a solar panel field in Gaza.

David described the water shortage and food insecurity in Gaza that we have heard about in the US, specifically noting the following problem. In Israel, we have desalinization plants, and aggressive wastewater retreatment and reuse/recycling. Yet, in Gaza, they only retreat 30% of their water, and do not reuse any of it. He spoke about how (obviously) bad this is for climate change. He discussed one of the Palestinians who partners with him on this, Dr. Tariq Abu Hamed, a Palestinian citizen of Israel and recognized leader in environmental diplomacy and education.

Lehr said that since 10/7 his life has been turned upside down, and that the effect is pervasive and all-encompassing. He described that some of his coworkers were called up into the Israeli army, that he knows one Palestinian who told him that "70 people in just his one family" was killed. Like Girsh, David knows a tremendous number of Palestinians in the region and spoke passionately about displaced families in Gaza who have been moving around from place to place, about some West Bank Palestinians who he knows who have had family in Gaza who are under attack.

Despite this, David emphasized that they are "all still trying to work together." He stated his thought that more equality and access to basic resources in Gaza will eventually help create a 2nd state. His direct quote was that we "need to look ahead to the day after" there is some kind of political solution, and how are is the International Community going to ensure that 2 million Gazans without resources get infrastructure.

David outlined as vision which I have been reading and thinking about a lot, which is that the International Community will need "Marshall Plan"-type situation with massive amounts of money. He admits that it will take many years for this to have an impact. But he asked a question that is on all our minds right now: "How do we prevent Hamas War 2.0?" David proposed a coalition to come into Gaza w Palestinian colleagues to come

up with interim solutions that can be used for agricultural advancements, specifically solar fields, and water treatment.

The last few items David mentioned included the general idea we have been hearing from Israelis all week, that “we need to have a positive outcome from this disaster.” He said that he has a lot of anger: at his government, at Hamas, and at the Palestinian citizens who celebrated in the streets after the massacre. Bottom line, though, he said, there are 14 million people on this swatch of land, half of whom are Israeli Jews.

This is echoing in my brain repeatedly: David said, “**In Israel, now, EVERY SINGLE DAY IS OCTOBER 7.**” (That’s how I am starting to feel on this trip!). David said that what different for people like him is that he knows these people on the other side. He stated emphatically, “If we don’t collaborate [with the Palestinians] 10/7 will happen again.” He blames Netanyahu in large part for fostering the current “us vs them” situation.

David emphasized that he sees “both side” as a wide range of stories, opinions, and attitudes—“That’s why we need to meet people and create relationships. We need to see one another as human beings.”

In answering the question of who currently in leadership in the region can help bring a two-state solution, he underscored that there is some hope within Israel. Like many with whom we have spoken, David thinks the roots of future leadership may be in the pre-10/7 judicial reform protest movement. He emphasized that family forums and private citizens can get more and are getting more work done than politicians, as we continue to hear. He said something quite thought-provoking, which is that the next generation of leaders may not currently be in traditional politics. David thinks there will be massive protests along the same lines as before 10/7 after the current army fighters come back from Gaza. He admitted that the future leadership from the Palestinian side is quite murky and thinks that they need more support from the international community in developing them.

Gil Troy

We then heard from McGill professor Gil Troy, yet another American Jew, Young Judaea alumnus, and Harvard graduate, who made alia many years ago. He brings more of a center-right perspective—in fact, Frank likes to read his op-ed columns in the Jerusalem Post. He’s written a couple of books including “Why am I a Zionist,” “The Zionist Idea,” and “Never Alone,” the latter with Natan Sharansky. Gil is super effusive and engaging, likes to talk with his hands, has a great sense of humor, and commands attention from the whole room when he speaks.

Gil said his biggest “problem” on October 6th was planning his son Yoni’s wedding. Then, of course, everything changed on 10/7, and Yoni was called up to service in the army. They were very fortunate in that the humanitarian pause with hostage release deal happened to fall on the planned day of Yoni’s wedding, so they were able to

proceed with the activities! He described it as very odd and bittersweet that Yoni's friends were all there in full military garb, including their guns, terming the dancing at the wedding "Heavy Metal Dancing." He also told us that two of his three other children also just got engaged

After that introduction Gil said the first thing he thought when he heard a group of American Young Judaeans were coming to Israel this week was, "WHAT ARE YOU, NUTS!? Didn't you hear we are in a war?" That got a huge laugh. Then he thanked us and said one of the most poignant things I heard all week: This is what our people do. We run toward the problem, we don't run away. That is a Jewish idea, that is a Zionist idea. It runs counter to the more self-centered values of the West, and bonds us together as Jews. Gil said, "You stopped your lives and you came here. That is very powerful. There is pain on both sides right now, Israelis and Americans."

Gil discussed the now-well-known phrase that has emerged in post-10/7 Israel, "*beyachad nenatzeach*" / "Together we will win." He said he works with a delegation of educators, and that he heard from one of them that there are "problems" with the word "victory" (I can only assume he meant political correctness here). But then Gil said, with my son in the army, don't I have the right to demand total victory? He also spoke of this phrase in the sense that there is so much more unity in Israel now than there was in the 9 months preceding 10/7 with the anti-judicial reform protests.

Gil talked about how American Jews are the luckiest Jews in all of world history, but that now as a Jew on a college campus in the US you risk being shamed and ostracized. Same for Israeli soldiers, who are no longer getting praise for their work in the IDF, and instead being made to feel the opposite. He spoke about how hard it is to navigate that pain, and that some of it is being brought about by our own Jewish community. He spoke about the betrayal of #metoo-activists / feminists, how they have been mostly silent in the wake of 10/7, and that this was a "triple betrayal" (vs. Jews, vs. liberalism, and vs. women themselves). Gil said that the way we can turn that negative into a positive is to nurture a positive Jewish identity, "Also to build and dream – we don't stand down, we rise up!"

Gil got into some of his personal experiences on 10/7. He noted that he sheltered in the house of the leader of his prayer minyan that particular Saturday. The main thought was running through his mind at that time was, "This makes you realize – what are you willing to die for, and what are you willing to live for?" He mentioned his son's friend Ben who apparently went missing that day, it turns out he was actually in the battlefield in Gaza with a medical kit, going in and out of the territory, trying to help people. Both Ben and his father died that day, and Gil said going to the funeral made him feel like he was going back to Holocaust times.

Gil spoke about how he sees the future of Zionism in the collaboration between groups like Brothers in Arms and others on the right – that they used to be at odds with one another via What's App Text messages about judicial reform – and now they are working together to help displaced persons. He said, right now, we need to do what is

necessary to win the war – even what we have done on this trip toward that goal, picking the crops, bringing supplies to the soldiers, etc. He sees the future as a Zionist Peace, whose agenda is that bigotry is wrong, whether it comes from the right or the left.

He sees the future of Zionism as three-pronged. First, Social Justice Zionism – he doesn't think Jews should be blocked at this liberal intersection; Second, Political Zionism – rebuilding the south and the north, including the hundreds of houses that have been destroyed, and bring Bedouins and Druze into the fold as well; Third, Identity Zionist – the credo of “you are never alone.” He was very clear, as was almost everyone we heard from all week – Bibi is done. Gil called for Bibi to resign immediately after 10/7, and again in an op-ed piece the day before he spoke to us in the J. Post. But he also cautioned against false equivalency between Hamas and Israel – because Israel has a civilized society but Hamas does not.

Gil said there absolutely should be a cease fire – from Hamas, and the Houthis, Hezbollah, plus the release of all of the hostages before Israel should then consider a cease fire itself. He said that “If you're really pro-peace, then sometimes you have to fight a war,” and that the Americans are learning that right now with their recent interactions with Iran. He thinks that the Abraham accords with Morocco, UAE, and the Saudis showed the world that positive things can happen to “create MORE peace,” and “shrink the cancer,” and create more love, ties and respect among neighbors. He ended his presentation by saying, “Where else would you rather be!?”

Officer Ramo Hozayil

On Friday morning, we met with two Bedouin Israeli citizens at a Bedouin community center in the city of Rahat. The first was a very impressive Police Officer since 2019, Ramo Hozayil. He works in Be'er Sheva, and is a very slight half-Bedouin / half-Swiss gentleman with a humble demeanor and a bright smile, whose family has lived here in Israel for 30 years. He previously served in the Swiss army, and originally worked as a computer technician. This was the FIRST time he had told his remarkable 10/7 survival story in public.

The week of October 7, he accepted an opportunity to moonlight as part of the security force at the Nova music festival in order to make a cool 1000 shekels. He's more of an investigator than a security officer in his regular job, but he was convinced by an acquaintance to take the gig, knowing that the festival likely needed non-Jews to sign up because the festival was being held on Shabbat and a holiday. He noted that his wife wasn't happy about it.

He woke up at 4am on that day in order to get to the change of shift by 7am on Saturday morning. When he got dressed, he put his hand on his gun and he got what he could only describe as a “strange feeling,” so he brought a 3rd magazine of ammunition with him – more than the typical two that someone would bring to an event like this.

Right when he got to the command station to start the shift, thousands of rockets were visible in the air, and the security guards told everyone to leave the party. He describes at that point there was lots of shooting, and he remembers seeing one woman who was shot almost immediately. He grabbed his gun, and he and 12 other officers who were with him started shooting at terrorists – at one point he remembers that the paramedics came to take the injured woman away. He lent that 3rd magazine of his to a friend.

At that moment, he felt and saw a rocket came 2 meters above them. He knew this was very, very bad. As Noam described to us on Tuesday, Ramo also told us that he saw that the cars in the parking lot were all blocked in, so many concert goers as well as he used cars as a line of defense. He said “this was clearly Hamas / Nuqba [very highly trained militants].” At that point a pickup truck driving slowly shot 1000s of rounds at the concert goers – he and his colleagues shot back but he said, “What can you do? - We knew we didn’t have a chance.” He lamented, “many of my friends were killed that day.”

Ramo then sent the teenagers away – told them to “run east! We are surrounded in 3 directions.” There were shots coming from everywhere, including from the nearby woods. He sent some other officers with the teenagers, and he stayed put to hold down the fort, but when hope was seemingly lost, he then began to run to the open field, jump, and hide in a potato plant trench - he thought for sure he was dead at this point. Ten seconds later, an RPG missile hit the ground right near him, and he then knew for certain that this attack is definitely Hamas.

At that moment, Ramo saw yet another a girl shot in the head, and then a colleague shot more than 40 times at once, to the point that it looked like he was dancing in place. Ten minutes later, he had no choice but to run, going in a zig zag pattern while he was being shot at. Teenagers were looking to him for orders – there were no other police officers left. He told the teens to follow him.

Like a gift from God above, Ramo happened upon a Black Nissan Juke (small sedan). Its doors were open, engine was on, and it was full of gas! 10 kids got in car while he drove it - others wanted in but there was no room. He promised the others that he will come back for them, yelling at them to go hide in a dry creek. Ramo drove like crazy for 5 minutes, then found what looked like a safe place. It was a farm with tractors. He told the kids to get out of the car and hide in the green house on the farm. He MADE THREE TRIPS like this, under fire the whole time! One boy stayed w him - this made Ramo feel stronger and more focused. Another man got into a 2nd functional car and started doing these mini rescue missions as well. Ramo also mentioned this complicating factor – many of the concertgoers were still high on drugs and had a hard time understanding what was happening and following directions.

By this point, almost 4 hours had passed, and it was now 11am. He remembers that at one point a sniper missed him by 2cm. He saw another police officer finally – the two of them protected about 200 teenagers. They told the teenagers go further east to a village called Patische. The then saw another Bedouin security guard whom he knew. They

managed to laugh together a bit, and this gentleman told Ramo, “I’m not a warrior like you.” Ramo told the guy to be strong. They did a few more rescues together, but this other guy had been shot in the leg, so he had to hide in the safe area. By noon, 2 apparent army units finally came to the area. They went and found an area with multiple injured teens and brought them to the police station.

Ramo took a very, very short break to drink some water and charge his phone. He wanted a new weapon, but there was nothing left. He remembers looking all around the road and feeling disgusted – there were tons of bodies everywhere. The sheer volume was not normal. It was total chaos and completely crazy. Remarkably, Ramo went to the party area to take photos to document the reality – he showed us some of these, plus some videos. At that point he also managed to rescue two other security guard who stayed put at the concert area and played dead. All in all, only 10 of the 36 security personnel survived. This again echoes what Noam told us, that the security guards at the event put themselves in harm’s way and saved many people that day.



Ramo returned home 15 hours after his shift began, at 930pm. He was totally exhausted. He parked his car a bit further from his house than normal to have a few minutes to walk home and clear his head, but his wife sensed his presence and went outside and met him with their kids in her car. There was total silence in his house, but he did see his brother who had wanted to come save him but couldn’t because would have been ambushed.

No joke, Ramo slept that night, but the very next morning he got dressed in his army uniform and went to work. He has had no vacation at all over the past 4 months. He thinks his psychology is to just not think about what happened. One cool follow-up note – Ramo called the guy who owned the Nissan Juke! When the guy answered the phone, Ramo at first couldn’t speak for about 15 seconds ! He composed himself and

managed to tell the guy that his car saved many people ! They eventually met, hugged, and told one another that they were proud of each other. Ramo showed us a photo of the two of them together. He also showed us a video of a car that was hit by an RPG that was completely burnt to a crisp.

Ramo also told us that he can show us videos people sent him to thank him. He truthfully didn't want any contact with these folks at first (sounds like he was in denial). But many found him via Facebook. He heard people were looking for him and got tons of calls and texts. At the end of Ramo's retelling, we gave him a round of applause and all lined up to hug him, thank him, and take photos with him. What an incredible story of an unlikely hero, and specifically a Bedouin Israeli citizen, who not only risked his own life multiple times, but also saved 200 kids from being part of the 403 casualties of the festival. An incredible, heart wrenching, harrowing, and compelling account. We were all completely blown about by his honesty, his transparency, and his descriptive details.

Hiba

After Ramo, we heard briefly from Hiba, a Bedouin woman with four children who is studying clinical psychology, and also offers beauty treatments for women following chemotherapy. Hiba was calm, pleasant, and smiling, even as she told us her very difficult and complicated story. She spoke to us in Hebrew, translated by a member of our group (Hila), but also is learning English, and speaks Arabic as well as her Bedouin dialect (each family/tribe has its own). She told us that all of her children are taught in Jewish schools, speak Hebrew, but don't know Arabic that well. She mentioned that Bedouins risk their lives simply by living where they do, because they are not as informed of the goings-on in Israel as their Jewish fellow citizens, and because their homes do not have bomb shelters. It makes them feel like 3rd class citizens. Even though much of her family is in the Israeli army or serve in the police.

Hiba mentioned that post-10/7 it feels like her whole family and community has PTSD. She is working 14 hour days giving counseling to bereaved and traumatized Jewish and Bedouin woman, subbing in because there are not enough psychologists available. Her husband is doing similar work in another area. She said nobody in their communities were really "ready" for the situation around and post-10/7. She has even requested treatment herself. She has experienced racism from Jewish Israelis who treat her poorly because they assume she is a Palestinian Arab. She's had to show her ID to prove exactly who she is. She was even removed from one of her graduate school classes' What's App groups because of this bias. (So now, she has switched to studying via Zoom in a remote class from Turkey).