

From Dancing with the Torah to War in an Hour

It was an unfathomable scene in synagogue this weekend.

One by one, as men were dancing with the Torah in celebration of the holiday of Simchat Torah, the phones in their pockets began buzzing. And they knew exactly what it was.

Each one of them had the same response—they kissed the Torah, hugged their friends, then ran home to change from their holiday clothes into their army fatigues.

In the span of an hour, nearly a dozen men in our tiny synagogue were called up to reserve duty in the Israeli Defense Forces; to transition from spiritually protecting Israel through prayer to physically protecting Israel with their bodies.

David, my neighbor, returned to synagogue wearing his fatigues, to give one last kiss to his wife and two young children before he departed. His wife broke down hysterically; her reality had changed too quickly and drastically for her mind to process. Just a few hours earlier, she had been eating a carefree holiday meal with her husband and children, laughing and taking joy in each other's presence. Now, she was sending her beloved out to war.

In Israel, unfortunately, we know war. We have gotten used to things that no one should have to get used to: thousands of rockets being launched at our cities. Cafés being blown up. Stabbing attacks at bus stops. Terror tunnels being dug under our towns, even our homes.

But we have never experienced anything like this. The images of an elderly Israeli woman being abducted from her home by Hamas terrorists and taken as a captive to the Gaza Strip is

too much to bear. Watching a mother and young baby be taken hostage by terrorists is a living nightmare.

I am a mother of four children myself. Thank God, they are okay. But since I saw the images of young, beautiful children who were enjoying an outdoor party being dragged away by terrorists to be held hostage in Gaza, my tears haven't stopped flowing.

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War in Israel may be world news, but it is also deeply personal for every single Israeli. In this tiny country of under 10 million citizens, we all have horror stories already, and the war has only begun.

My niece's friend was one of those kids kidnapped from the party. My other niece was deployed for active duty on the front lines. One of our board members has two sons who have been called up for duty. Both are in elite combat units. And, heartbreakingly, a dear Fellowship partner, Ofir Liebstein, was killed in a firefight with terrorists while protecting the people of his city, Sha'ar Hanegev.

As friends in the U.S. face the question of what to cook for dinner, the question I face now is how to tell my daughter that the police station we visited in Sderot recently has been overrun by terrorists. And how to comfort my son, whose teacher was called up for duty.

With thousands of rockets launched at Israel in the past 12 hours, I'm running between my home office, where I'm organizing The Fellowship's emergency response plans to help protect the people of Israel, and my bomb shelter.

This is Israel's 9/11. We're experiencing deep fear, the terrifying unknown and devastating loss. Yet, even after the

men left the synagogue earlier today, there were still people dancing with the Torah.

No one should think that we have lost even a bit of hope. Israel is a *nation* born of hope in the face of *people* of hope despite endless embodies a *spirit* of hope that can't be extinguished—although many have tried.

We have sung this verse for generations, with hope, and we are singing it now in Jerusalem, Sderot, Tel Aviv and even among those imprisoned in Gaza:

Am Yisrael Chai—the nation of Israel lives!

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Yael Eckstein is President and CEO of The Fellowship, where she oversees all programs and serves as the international spokesperson for the organization. With over a decade of non-profit experience in multiple roles, Yael has the rare distinction of being a woman leading one of the world's largest religious charitable organizations. In addition to her podcast exploring the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, *Nourish Your Biblical Roots*. Yael also invites thought-leaders, pastors, authors, and other influencers to discuss Israel and Jewish-Christian relations on *Conversations with Yael*. She is the 2023 recipient of the Jerusalem Post's Humanitarian Award, and in 2020, 2021 and 2023, was named to the publication's list of 50 Most Influential Jews. Born outside of Chicago, Yael is based in Israel with her husband and their four children.