

When a Dream Becomes a Real-Life Nightmare

This week, I was privileged to spend an evening visiting with women in Jerusalem on a trip with Aglow International, an incredible ministry that has at its core the mission “to be a watchman over the whole house of Israel ... calling forth all He has promised for that nation, the Jewish people.”

We talked and shared many personal things about Judaism, life in Israel and my work—to offer a perspective on life in Israel through the prism of my life. It was a moving and enjoyable experience.

During our conversation, one of the women asked if I had ever felt personally threatened or at risk being here. I answered that while I hadn’t, one can’t live in Israel without an awareness of the challenges and risks, of which I am very mindful. But I also shared how in many ways that this makes us closer, despite often polarizing differences.

The next day, I received an email from a friend who had just gone through one such experience. He wrote partly to share his experience so that it should be known, and partly in a therapeutic, venting sort of way. Other than affirming that life in Israel is indeed full of challenges and blessings, I take this opportunity to share his words in the hope that others will find greater understanding about part of life here:

All of us have had dreams where we feel like we actually are living something very real and then we suddenly wake up and wonder how we ended up in bed. Last week, I experienced the exact opposite. I spent an entire day in actual motion: breathing, working and doing things that needed to be done, but I was totally convinced that it was a dream and sure that

when I woke up I would realize it never happened. The next morning I woke up, showered, got dressed, had coffee and prayed as if the previous day was just a dream. Then, driving to work, I realized that what happened was not a dream, it was real, and I had done things I thought I never would have dreamed about.

At 8:30 Tuesday morning, I was at work preparing for a meeting when I got a phone call from my friend Eldad. He asked me where Elyada was because he needed to be told his brother was just killed by a terrorist. I called Elyada, my neighbor for all of four months, and asked if he was at work because I wanted to have something brought to his office to bring home from Jerusalem. I then called Eldad back and told him that Elyada was at work and someone official can go there and tell him.

Then I was told that our rabbi was not home and that there was nobody to tell Elyada, and I was the closest to him, so it was decided that I do it. I agreed I would drive from my office, an hour away. Eldad said there's no time for that. The news was out on the Internet, and I had to call him now so that his parents can be told.

I was double shocked. Eldad works in the Foreign Ministry. Surely there was someone official there who knows what they are doing who can tell him. Secondly, if there is something you will never be prepared to do, this is it.

So I closed my office door and made the call.

I called Elyada and asked where he was. "At my desk," he replied. I asked who was with him. He gave me three names. I repeated the names to make sure they were actually in the room with him.

I told him to sit. I said that better he hear this from me, with whom he has had many personal conversations, than from someone else. I asked what his brother's name was and then

said there is a chance it was he that was killed that morning by a terrorist. He said it could not be. He was in disbelief, but some facts were not clear. I verified the facts. It was Elyada's brother, Evyatar, married with five kids, the oldest being seven.

Then he asked me what to do. I said, "Give your keys to the person in your office and he will take you home, and if not my wife, Yoni, will pick you up now." I said I would meet him at home to be there when he tells the news to Yonit, his wife.

Elyada was worried that his father is not well man and asked the local rabbi to have a doctor on hand when breaking the news.

I arrived home before Elyada. I went up the 24 stairs (yes I counted each one as if I was climbing the steps to the unknown) to their front door and walked in to find his wife sitting, frozen, at the table. I hugged her and she cried. She asked what to do. I tried to calm her to be strong for Elyada, who was on his way, and that the two of us are now switching to "project mode" to map out what we needed to do and get it done—kids needed to be picked up from school, food arranged for lunch, verify timing and place for funeral, etc.

Yonit's father arrived, and so did Elyada. Yonit was hyperventilating, and I called a doctor. The doctor gave Yonit a pill to calm her, but Elyada refused. Later I told him that I had his keys and I was driving him in my car to the funeral. If he didn't take the pill he was not going. I usually work to help kids get off of drugs, and now I was pushing them big time. I was sure this was a dream and I would wake up soon. I gave him paper to write, to just write. He hugged me, cried and said he was so very angry. I said put it all on paper no matter what it is. Just get it out before we get to his parents. They needed Elyada to be strong.

My wife was on her way home and preparing to get them to the

funeral. Friends arrived and helped with all the arrangements. Meanwhile, the local media was flooded with stories about Evyatar, of blessed memory, who was murdered: stories about his career as an actor, a comedian and a great person. But during our drive to Elyada's parents', the news switched to stories about the burning of Palestinian fields, etc., as if he never lived or died, as if he was never brutally murdered by a terrorist released from jail only three months earlier.

My wife and I took Elyada. Yonit's father took her and their oldest daughter. We arrived to a house full of mourners and friends and family.

Then the 26-year-old widow and mother of five walked in. Friends who provided amazing warmth and strength surrounded her. Then, in walked the three oldest children. One of the boys asked if I had any snacks, and then he said, "Did you know that my abba [daddy] was killed by a terrorist? My abba has to sleep in a grave and the terrorist was taken to a hospital." It was this same child we all saw live and then in the newspapers hugging his dead father wrapped in a tallit (prayer shawl) asking him to wake up.

I was amazed that the people of Yitzhar, where they live, had total control and showed respect at the funeral. I was wrongfully expecting them to be demonstrating, etc.

But they didn't, and I saw a totally different side of them breaking existing paradigms, at least for me. There were 2,000 people at the funeral according to the news reports.

We got home at 8:30 p.m., changed our clothes in seven minutes and proceeded to the wedding of a good friend's son. We drank, we ate and we danced and went home. The next morning as I drove to work is when it hit me that yesterday really happened and it was not a dream.

When a Palestinian field is burned or a Jew throws a rock, it's front-page news internationally. But Evyatar's murder was

scarcely reported outside Israel. It's as if a Jew murdered in Israel is all perfectly normal.

Evyatar's last hours were spent living a full life. Close friends said they only saw him not smile twice, and the second time was at his death. He prepared lunch for his five kids, fed them, dressed them and took them to school. Then he went to the bus stop to wait for a ride to work, where he was practicing for his next play (he was an actor). Out of nowhere and with no provocation, a ruthless murderer stabbed him in the back. A friend of Evyatar's got out of his car, dragged him behind the bus stop, said Shema Yisrael affirming God's Oneness, and closed his eyes.

The terrorist was slightly wounded by the army and taken to an Israeli hospital.

When Elyada came home during the mourning period, I brought chairs to his house for those who would come to comfort the family. On Friday, Yehuda, his childhood friend, helped me take the chairs, passing them over the wall from his porch to mine, so that we can use them for a wedding celebration that Shabbat. I called Elyada to tell him that it was a very symbolic act. His brother spent his entire 31 years making people happy. It was so befitting that the chairs we sat on while mourning were used the next day to celebrate a new marriage.

May Evyatar's memory be a blessing forever. May his wife, children, parents and siblings have comfort from his merits in this world, and may we all see the complete true redemption of Israel and Yerushalayim in our lifetime.

Jonathan Feldstein is the director of Heart to Heart, a unique virtual blood donation program to bless Israel and save lives in Israel. Born and educated in the U.S., Feldstein emigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six.

Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel.