



Israel & Iran and a Meeting with Yocheved and Sharone Lifshitz

As we follow events with deep and anxious concern, we pray for the safety of Israel and all innocents and hope for a free and secure future for all. We will be including the prayer for peace in our services tomorrow.

I had intended, and still will, share words I wrote after attending a powerful event at our sister Synagogue, New North London, this week. Rabbi Jonathan was in conversation with the freed hostage, Yocheved Lifschitz and her daughter, Sharone, herself a member of Stoke Newington Masorti. Yocheved's husband, Sharone's father, of blessed memory, Oded, was also taken to Gaza on October 7th, murdered and

only returned in February 2025.

The most striking moment, for me, came when Rabbi Jonathan enquired – was it true that Yocheved had met the Pope, Mohamed Sinwar – leader of Hamas in Gaza - and Israeli PM, Bibi Netanyahu? She had. What happened?

Yocheved enjoyed meeting the Pope. They had prayed together and bonded over their shared history of social activism. Yocheved, together with Oded, and so many along the Gaza envelope, had been a peace builder and campaigner for a two-State solution and Palestinian independence for decades. Sharone shared how, as a child, she would sit with her parents and, using her father's binoculars to look across the border into Gaza, would feel hope looking at the development of Gazan infrastructure just a kilometre away.

And what, Rabbi Jonathan asked, had she asked Sinwar – while in captivity? “I asked him, ‘Is this the way you behave towards people who help you and work for the best for you?’” How did he reply, “He didn't reply”.

And what – after her release - had she said to Bibi Netanyahu? “I asked him, ‘Do you know how to use a map?’ He said, ‘Of course.’ So I said, ‘So how come you don't know where Nir Oz is?’” It's an accusation of leaving a vulnerable community right on the border without the military and governmental protection its innocent residents deserved.

I came away, shaking slightly from the proximity to a level of pain it's hard to imagine. Yocheved Lifshitz was held hostage for 17 days. There are still 53 hostages, some 20 of whom are thought to be alive, 615 days later. 615 days!

I came away in awe of Yocheved, Sharone and so many others – including Noam Sagi and his mother Ada, also from Nir Oz, Itay Shabi and his family from Kibbutz Be'eri – so, so many others. There are so many people who have been visited by the most awful inhumanity and retained their humanity, despite everything.

I want to pay particular tribute to those who fight to ensure the plight of the hostages remains central. In particular I want to acknowledge the role of David Krikler, child of New London, whose article about Oded and the family can be read at [OPINION: Oded knew the cost of peace – now his daughter carries his torch - Jewish News](#).

I also came away more committed to the claim of both Yocheved and Sharone, even after everything they and Oded experienced, that there needs to be a pathway towards peace and Palestinian self-determination. Palestinians need hope. Israel's security cannot be built through the militarised destruction of an ideology that feeds off despair. It cannot be protected solely by fences, missiles and, even, ground force fighters.

Many things are true. The terror attack of 7th October was awful. All the hostages must be released unconditionally and immediately. Both Palestinians and Israelis have been appallingly led. Both have genuine needs that can be accommodated in the region. But both have given the impression that they wish the total destruction of the other. And so both suffer in ways that actively promote their own cyclical pain.

What is needed is a coalition of those who insist upon another way. And there are so many people who are prepared to do that hard, hard work. Even though it's unsafe, even though they/we are called naïve or treacherous. Yocheved and Sharone Lifshitz are such people. I'm proud to know many, many such people.

May all the hostages be released.

May we find this other way.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Jeremy