

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi YY Jacobson

The Life-Saving Painter

Elyasaf Maria is a kind and humble man, a painter living in southern Israel. His story, which he shared with me, continues to inspire me each day.

For years, the relentless barrage of rockets from Gaza had left the residents of southern Israel with mere seconds—five, ten, twenty, at most thirty—to seek cover. In response to this ever-present threat, Israel constructed miguniyot—standalone, steel-reinforced bomb shelters—on nearly every street corner in the south, designed to withstand artillery fire.

Now, picture a young mother and her children huddled inside one of these shelters as rockets rained down around them. Though these structures offered physical protection, their stark, gray concrete exteriors only added to the sense of fear and isolation.

Enter Elyasaf, the painter. With his palette and brushes in hand, he began transforming these shelters—both inside and out. A flock of birds in flight. The brilliance of a sunrise. A splash of vibrant color. A child's laughter immortalized in paint. A graceful animal. A majestic mountain. A breathtaking landscape.

With each stroke, he infused these lifelines with warmth and serenity, reminding the trembling Jews within that beyond these walls, there was still beauty in the world. And he was meticulous—

each shelter bore a unique painting, giving it a distinct identity and character. The community cherished him, grateful for his kindness and sensitivity. And that was that—until the horrors of October 7th.

Sirens blared. Thousands of rockets rained down upon Israel. Civilians fled to the nearest miguniyot, desperate for safety. At the Nova Music Festival, thousands of young Jews ran in all directions, searching for shelter. Moments later, the unthinkable became reality—terrorists had infiltrated Israel in a brutal massacre, a modern-day pogrom.

Huddled together inside these bomb shelters, panicked civilians began making frantic calls. "Please, come save us. We are inside a migunit, a bomb shelter."

"Where are you? Which shelter?" came the desperate replies. But how could anyone find them? With hundreds of identical shelters scattered across the region, locating a single one was like searching for a needle in a haystack.

The trapped civilians didn't have an address. The only thing they could describe was the artwork—the images painted on the walls of their shelter.

The next morning, Elyasaf's phone erupted with calls and messages from frantic family members. The only clue we have is a painting, they told him. Our loved ones sent us pictures—a butterfly with two small boys chasing it, a girl in a green dress holding

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Deena bat Shoshana

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Yerachmiel Eliyahu Ben Esther Riva

Reuven ben Rochel

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a white balloon.

Call after call described one of Elyasaf's murals. But he knew exactly where each shelter was, because he remembered every painting he had created. Shelter by shelter, he guided families and rescue teams to their precise locations, helping save countless lives.

We often fail to recognize the true impact of our work. Had you asked Elyasaf on October 6, 2023, "What do you do for a living?" He likely would have answered, "I'm just a simple painter. Nothing dramatic."

But he wouldn't have realized the significance of what he had been doing. He would think that he is merely adding color to concrete walls. In reality, though, he had unknowingly created a life-saving system—a network of markers that, on one of the darkest days in Jewish history,

became beacons of help and hope.

Because wherever we are and whatever we do is guided by Divine Providence. And when we give our whole heart to our work—planting seeds of goodness, kindness, and love—we can never fully grasp the magnitude of what we are accomplishing.

Consider this.

Had the police contacted the Chief of Staff of the IDF, the Israeli Minister of Defense, the head of Mossad, the head of Shin Bet, or even the Prime Minister himself, not a single one of them would have been able to locate those shelters. There was only one person in all of Israel who could—Elyasaf Maria.

The Talmud teaches: "Each person must say, 'For my sake, the world was created'" (Sanhedrin 37a). We often struggle to believe this. Really? For me, the entire world was created?

But Elyasaf's story proves it so. There was something only he could accomplish—something no one else in Israel, or even the world, could have done.

We often see ourselves as ordinary people, simply trying to make it through life. But this is a shallow perspective.

Judaism teaches that G-d tells each of us, "I need you. No matter where you are, what you do, your emotional state, or your circumstances—your presence in this world is purposeful. You are here to save lives, to lift hearts, and to bring light into the darkness."

Like Elyasaf, you have something to offer that no one else can. And G-d is waiting for you to paint your picture and to illuminate the world with your unique light.

Rabbi Fischel Schachter

What's Your Name?

I was in Switzerland for a speech, and I was utterly exhausted. Just hours earlier, I had finished an entire Shabbos packed with speeches in Florida. From there, I flew straight to Zurich, barely catching my breath before rushing to pray at the shul. The people were warm and welcoming, but I could feel the weight of exhaustion pressing down on me.

There and then, they began auctioning off the aliyos. Now, I was no stranger to this, especially in more Chassidish shuls. I had seen it many times before: five dollars for a mitzvah, six dollars for another. Week after week, the same routine.

But this time, something felt different. "Ten francs for the mitzvah!" the auctioneer called.

"Fifteen francs for the mitzvah!" Wait. Francs? I turned to the person next to me. "You're selling aliyos for

hot dogs?" I asked, confused. They gave me a look and said, "That's the currency here."

Oh. That explained a lot.

The realization truly hit me later, when I walked into a store to buy a bottle of water. I reached into my pocket, pulled out a handful of hundred-dollar bills—well, not too many—and handed one over. The cashier shook their head.

"We don't take American dollars." "You don't take American dollars?" I repeated, as if I had just entered an alternate reality. "Nope. Not here." I sighed, realizing I might as well have used a credit card. And then, in that moment, a deeper truth settled over me.

One day, we will all stand before the Heavenly Court—and just like those hundred-dollar bills, all our wealth, all our possessions, will be utterly meaningless. It's not the cur-

rency there. It won't work.

But I had so much! "So what is the currency?" I wondered. That instant when we close our eyes in prayer, in connection, in truth—that is the real currency. That is worth more than diamonds. "But I tried," someone might say. "Tried?" That's like a credit card—it can take you somewhere, but only so far. Because if a person never truly focuses on a life of Torah and mitzvos, all the wealth in the world won't help them.

Later that night, I stood at a grand dinner, waiting for my introduction. The speaker took the stage and began addressing the crowd in Swiss or German—I had no idea which. I stood there, listening, but it was all just a blur of unfamiliar sounds.

Then, suddenly, I heard my name. That was my cue. I walked up to the podium and said, "I have no idea what the emcee just said. For all I know, he told you, 'Look, we got stuck with this crazy fellow.

He's a total nuisance. Let's just let him speak so we can finally get rid of him!"

The room erupted in laughter.

"And then he probably announced, 'And now, our special guest speaker!'" I continued. "I don't know what he actually said—but I heard my name, and that was enough."

It made me think: one day, we will stand before the Heavenly Court. And they will ask us one question. "What is your name?"

Not our wealth. Not our titles. Not our achievements. Only our name.

It reminded me of a moment years earlier, when I was in Israel for the first time after my wedding. I had gone for Shavuot, and I knew my way around fairly well.

That day, my wife and I had taken a taxi from the Western Wall to Chevron. The driver was an Arab man, and as he drove us deep into the territory, I noticed the roads changing. The scenery felt different. Then, suddenly, we hit a roadblock.

Armed soldiers appeared from nowhere. Within seconds, their

guns were aimed directly at our heads. My wife's voice was barely above a whisper. "They have guns." I whispered back, "Yes, I noticed." A strange, eerie calm settled over me.

One of the soldiers approached. "Passport," he demanded. I handed it over. "Get out of the car," he ordered. I held my ground. "No," I said. "I want to speak to your supervisor." My wife turned to me, her eyes wide with disbelief. You think this is the DMV?!

Just then, a man stepped forward. He wore a turtleneck, carried a gun, and spoke in flawless English. His voice was smooth, unnervingly so. "What's your name?" he asked. I gestured to my passport. "You have my name right there." He repeated, this time slower. "What's your name?" For a moment, I wanted to joke. You don't know my name? You've never heard my speeches? I should give you a two-minute highlight reel!

But something held me back.

At the end of it all, I don't know exactly what got us out of that situation. Maybe it was something I

said—something about having an uncle on the Foreign Relations Committee. My wife groaned beside me, "Oh no, no, no."

Maybe they believed me. Maybe they were going to let us go anyway. Maybe they were just trying to protect the Arab driver. Later, people asked, "You didn't just faint on the spot?" No. Because in moments of crisis, Hashem gives us a certain strength.

"Did you see the gun?" No. All I heard—over and over—was the question. "What's your name?"

And it made me wonder: Do we really know our own name? Are we living our lives now in such a way which elevates and focuses upon our essence. Are we listening to the call of our neshama? When we will stand before the Heavenly Court, they will ask: What is your name? Who are you?

And in that moment, when all else fades away, will we truly know the answer?

Rabbi Zechariah Wallerstein zt"l

What Every Couple Wants

Over the years, I've met with couples married for twelve years, thirty years, three months, or even just two days. And despite the differences in time, the story is nearly always the same.

I always let the wife speak first. I turn to her and say, "You've been married for twelve years. You have five children. Why are you here?"

And without fail, every woman says this: "Rabbi Wallerstein, do you know why we're here? Once

upon a time, this man loved me—or at least, I think he did. But now, I don't feel that love anymore. And I cannot stay in a marriage where I don't feel loved."

And the husband? His reaction is just as predictable. He turns to me and says, "See? She's the problem. What do you mean I don't love you? I don't understand why she says that! I pay the mortgage. I just bought her a car. I cover all the bills. I gave her a credit card." Because for many men, that is what love looks like. We're willing to

do anything—except give our time.

And then she says: "When I was single, my father paid the mortgage. He bought me a car too. Do you think that's why I married you?" And the husband, confused, asks, "Then why did you marry me?" "Because I wanted to spend my life with you. I just want your time. But you're always busy—you're at work, you're learning, you're on the phone, you're playing sports. I'm the last person on your list, and most days, you don't even get to me."

And I look at them and say, "This is fixable. This is easy. She's



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communicating exactly what she needs."

So I tell them, "Go away together for three days. Just the two of you. No distractions. Leave your phones with me. Arrange for the kids to stay with their grandmother—which ever side that may be. But for three days, focus only on each other."

And then, without fail, the husband looks at me and asks a question that speaks volumes. In Hebrew, he

says: "R'tzufin (consecutive)?"

And at that moment, I know we have a problem. He starts negotiating. I could take one day off now, then maybe another day in three months, and then... And she just stares at him. Because he still doesn't understand. What she wants—the most precious thing we all have—is time.

And it's not just women. Men also feel this way. They come home from

work, and their wives are on the phone—with their friends, with their families, with everyone but them. Because love isn't just about providing. It isn't just about responsibilities.

It's about presence. It's about time.

And without it, no amount of money, gifts, or security can ever replace it.

Rabbi David Yosef

Sanctifying the Beginning

In this week's Parsha, Hashem commands Moshe Rabbeinu to fashion special, beautiful garments for Aharon and his sons (Shemot 28:2). The Torah states that these garments are "to sanctify him to serve Me as a priest" (ibid., v.3) This means that these garments were not merely for aesthetics or status—they were essential to Aharon's sanctification and his role as a Kohen, a priest in the service of Hashem.

Even the clothing of the Kohen had to be crafted with pure intentions, entirely for the sake of Heaven (see Rashi, Shemos 28:3; Yoma 35b). When Moshe Rabbeinu oversaw their creation, he had to declare, "This is in honor of Hashem." We see this idea reflected in the construction of the Mishkan as well. The Torah commands, "Take for Me a donation" (Shemos 25:2) and "They shall make for Me a sanctuary" (ibid., v.8). Our Sages

explain that the phrase "for Me" means "for My sake" (Rashi, ibid.), emphasizing that from the very beginning, the entire endeavor had to be solely for the sake of Heaven.

This concept extends beyond the Mishkan. Many mitzvot require specific intent. When we prepare matzah, we must do so for the sake of the mitzvah of matzah (Pesachim 38b). When we begin writing a Sefer Torah, the scribe declares that it is for the sanctity of a Torah scroll (see Tosafos, Avodah Zara 27a). This applies to numerous mitzvot—because every sacred act must begin with the right intention.

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 85b) tells a remarkable story about R' Chiya. He wanted to ensure that Jewish children would learn Torah. How did he go about it? He wanted to write a Sefer Torah, but instead of simply purchasing parchment, he began from the very source.

First, he planted cotton to make nets. With those nets, he captured deer. Af-

ter slaughtering them according to Jewish law, he gave the meat to the poor. From the hides, he created parchment, upon which he then wrote a Sefer Torah to teach the children.

Why did he go to such great lengths? He could have easily bought parchment. But R' Chiya wanted to demonstrate that when holiness begins at the very first step, the outcome is elevated. By ensuring that even the most preliminary stages were infused with sanctity, he guaranteed that the Torah he wrote—and the Torah he taught—would be of the highest spiritual caliber (see Madreigat Ha'adam, Ma'amar Mezakeh HaRabim 3).

This is why, when we move into a new home—whether we purchase or rent—it is customary to hold a Chanukat HaBayit (a home dedication ceremony) on the very first day (see Zohar, Parshat Tazria). We want to establish the foundation of our home in honor of Hashem, ensuring that everything built upon it is infused with blessing.

May we always strive to begin our actions with pure intentions, dedicating them to the honor of Hashem.

Rabbi Label Lam

Uphold the Dignity

I can still hear the words of my father z"l ringing in my ears. If we ever referred to my mother as "she," we would be corrected immediately. Who is "she"? The cat's mother? Such a reference

was deemed disrespectful—it was no way to speak about one's mother. Rabbi Hirsch explains that the commandment "Honor your father and your mother" (Kibbud Av V'Em) is not solely directed at children in their re-

lationship with their parents. It is also an obligation upon the parents themselves—to uphold the sanctity and dignity of fatherhood and motherhood. And what greater way to fulfill this than for a mother to safeguard and elevate the honor of the father, and for a father to uphold and reinforce the dignity of the mother?

Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza and Partial List of Injured Soldiers

(Updated: 8 Adar)

שמות חיילים פצועים לרפואה שלמה

אביתר מנחם חיים בן זהבה
אברהם מרדכי בן יעל
אהרן בן שרה הנדל
אופק בו אלינור
אורי אברהם בן הדסה
אייל אליעזר בן חנה
איתן אשר בן דבורה
אלון בן מרים
אלחנן יאיר בן דבורה
אליה בן רות
אלישע יהודה בן רות
אלעד בן שרית
אמיר בן אלה
בנימין בן ריינה
בנימין יצחק בן שרה
בר חיים בן נורית
גלעד איתי בן אפרת
דוד בן זיוה
חיים מרדכי בן שרה איטה
טל גרשון בן שרה
יאיר יונה בן דרורה צפורה מלכה
יהודה אהרון בן מרים אסתר
יהונתן יאשיהו בן כרמית
יהונתן יוסף בן שירה
יואל בן אילה
יוחאי יהודה בן סיגל חוה
ירין אליהו בן סיגל
ישראל בן ענבל אסתר
כפיר חיים בן מירה מרים
מיכאל בן פריידל
מישל בת אנג'ליקה
מנחם דוד חי בן מרים
משה אהרן בן לאה בילא
משה צבי בן עירית
מתן בן דבורה
נועם אברהם בן עטרה שלומית
ניר בן אורנה
עדי מנחם בן מורן מירה
עודד אפרים בן ויויאן
עוז חי בן סמדר
עידו בן ענבל
עמיחי בן סיגלית רחל
עמית יהונתן בן מאיה
רואי בן עופרה
רון בן אבישג
רון בן שרון
רועי חיים בן מירב
תום שאול בן דניאל
תומר בן צפורה

אבינתן בן דיצה תרצה (אור)
אביתר בן גליה (דוד)
איתן בן רות אדית (הורן)
איתן אברהם בן אפרת (מור)
אלון בן עידית (אהל)
אלקנה בן רוחמה (בוחבוט)
אריאל בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)
בר אברהם בן ג'וליה (קופרשטיין)
גיא בן מירב (גלבע דלאל)
גלי בן טליה (ברמן)
דוד בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)
זיו בן טליה (ברמן)
יוסף חיים בן מרים (אוחנה)
מקסים בן טלה (הרקין)
מתן שחר בן ענת (אנגרסט)
מתן בן ירדנה עינב (צנגאוקר)
נמרוד בן ויקי (כהן)
עידן בן יעל (אלכסנדר)
עמרי בן אסתר ורוניקה (מירן)
רום בן תמר נועה (ברסלבסקי)
שגב בן גלית (כלפון)
תמיר בן חירות (נמרודי)

Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza and Partial List of Injured Soldiers

(Updated: 8 Adar)

INJURED SOLDIERS

Evyatar Menachem Chaim ben Zehava
Avraham Mordechai ben Yael
Aharon ben Sarah Hendel
Ofek ben Elinor
Ori Avraham ben Hadassah
Eyal Eliezer ben Chana
Eitan Asher ben Devora
Alon ben Miriam
Elchanan Yair ben Devorah
Eliya ben Ravit
Elisha Yehudah ben Rut
Elad ben Sarit
Amir ben Ella
Binyamin ben Reina
Binyamin Yitzchak ben Sarah
Bar Chaim ben Nurit
Gilad Itai ben Efrat
David ben Ziva
Chaim Mordechai ben Sarah Itta
Tal Gershon ben Sarah
Yair Yonah ben Drora Tzipporah Malka
Yehuda Aharon ben Miriam Esther
Yehonatan Yoshiyahu ben Carmit
Yehonatan Yosef ben Shira
Yoel ben Ayala
Yochai Yehudah ben Sigal Chava
Yarin Eliyahu ben Sigal
Yisrael ben Inbal Esther
Kfir Chaim ben Mira Miriam
Michael ben Freidel
Michelle bat Angelika
Menachem David Chai ben Miriam
Moshe Aharon ben Leah Beila
Moshe Tzi ben Irit
Matan ben Devorah
Nir ben Orna
Noam Avraham ben Atara Shlomit
Adi Menachem ben Moran Mira
Oded Efraim ben Vivian
Oz Chai ben Smadar
Ido ben Inbal
Amichai ben Sigalit Rachel
Amit Yehonatan ben Maya
Roi ben Ofra
Ron ben Avishag
Ron ben Sharon
Roi Chaim ben Meirav
Tom Shaul ben Danielle
Tomer ben Tzipporah

Avinatan ben Ditzza Tirtza (Ohr)
Evyatar ben Galya (David)
Eitan ben Ruth Idit (Horen)
Eitan Avraham ben Efrat (Mor)
Alon ben Idit (Ohel)
Elkana ben Ruchama (Buchbut)
Ariel ben Sylvia Monica (Konyo)
Bar Avraham ben Julia (Cooperstein)
Guy ben Meirav (Gilboa Dalal)
Gali ben Talya (Berman)
David ben Sylvia Monica (Konyo)
Ziv ben Talya (Berman)
Yosef Chaim ben Miriam (Ochana)
Maxim ben Talleh (Herkin)
Matan Shachar ben Anat (Angrest)
Matan ben Yardena Einav (Tzangauker)
Nimrod ben Viki (Cohen)
Idan ben Yael (Alexander)
Omri ben Esther Veronica (Miran)
Rom ben Tamar Noa (Braslevsky)
Segev ben Galit (Chalfon)
Tamir ben Cheirut (Nimrodi)