

ISRAEL'S RESTORATION

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“You are bringing us the love of God!”

MOURNING WITH THOSE WHO MOURN

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PRAY



By *Betty Intrater*

The first phase of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has ended. We still have approximately 24 hostages who may be alive in Gaza and 34 murdered dead bodies being held there.

It is not actually known how many of the hostages are still alive, although the statistics are becoming clearer with testimonies of recently released hostages. Many families have gone through this past year and a half in agony, not knowing if their loved ones are alive or dead. It is obvious, however, that time is running out for those left behind, being deprived of food and basic hygiene, and of course medical care. Recently released hostage Eli Sharavi testified that he spent the entire last year in leg chains, deep under the ground, on a diet of less than 200 calories a day. It's astounding that he even survived.

If talks cannot salvage the second stage, we will return to active war and the fate of the remaining hostages will be in jeopardy. Israel is not willing to pull out of the Egyptian border of Gaza where arms are smuggled in, or promise to end the war altogether.

Hamas, of course, is not willing to disarm and allow an outside coalition to govern Gaza. There is great anger and division in Israel over these extremely complicated and emotionally charged issues.

Please pray for:

1. Protection and strength for the remaining hostages
2. Wisdom for our government leaders to know which issues are non-negotiable and where to concede
3. Willingness of the enemy to accept the new conditions, albeit for the wrong reasons
4. Wisdom for Arab nations involved in negotiations to know how to pressure Hamas to cooperate
5. Protection against a renewed series of terrorist attacks spurred by the month of Ramadan
6. A solution to the growing concentration of terrorist activity in the West Bank territories
7. Protection for residents of northern communities returning to their homes under a shaky truce
8. The ability to rebuild the north, heavily damaged by the war with Lebanon
9. Wisdom to know how to approach the 'new' Syria and prevent it from military aggression
10. Protection and stamina for our soldiers, many of whom are young fathers, who have put an excessive amount of time into reserve duty this year
11. Healing for a new generation of injured Israelis, mentally and physically
12. That the extreme trauma of this war will lead our country to salvation, that all Israel will be saved



THE SIGN OF ALMOND BLOSSOMS



By Hannah Tekle

During the second half of February, almond trees all over Israel burst into breathtaking bloom for a few weeks – right at the height of the winter. Isn't that like God? To give us *hints and evidence of His faithfulness in the deepest moments of darkness!*

Catching almond flowers in their glory can be tricky because the extravagant display is so transient. Last year, by the time we went out to see the blooms, only a few trees and only a few branches were still adorned in white. This year we visited an almond orchard nearby, in time to see many trees that had yet to exchange their puffy white gowns for the much more practical green “work-clothes” of a fruit-producing orchard. From a distance, only the cottony white of the flowers can be seen; closeup the full range of colors becomes visible – light pink, fuchsia, yellow and orange at the tips of the stamen. And only as you draw near can the subtle sweet smell be detected – like fresh almond cookies baking in the oven.

The almond tree is our first hint that spring is coming. It coincides with the holiday of Tu B'shvat that Israel celebrates by planting flowers and trees. This year's “KKL-JNF” tree plantings were held in the North and the South in the areas especially damaged by the war, and where farmers have had their orchards and livelihoods severely damaged. The excitement of the general public to participate in the restoration was obvious.

Two of the recently-returned hostages, Eli Sharabi and Omer Shem Tov (who were freed right around the time of Tu B'shvat), have both given detailed accounts of the darkness of their captivity – lasting 491 and 505 days respectively. It was unfathomable to hear them describe the horrors, among them lack of light, running water and food. Eli chided viewers to be grateful for the most basic daily act of opening the refrigerator to see what's there and take food. Omer recounted that after receiving a beating on his birthday, he had wished a simple birthday wish for himself – that on his next birthday he wouldn't be beaten.

Once again, the reality of darkness and terror juxtaposed with the beauty of God's creation stops us in our tracks. It poses a challenge to perceive these entirely incongruous things at the same time, and yet points toward the solution...

Two biblical passages mention the almond tree – in Jeremiah and in Numbers. In Jeremiah the almond tree is a symbol of the **diligent faithfulness of God**.

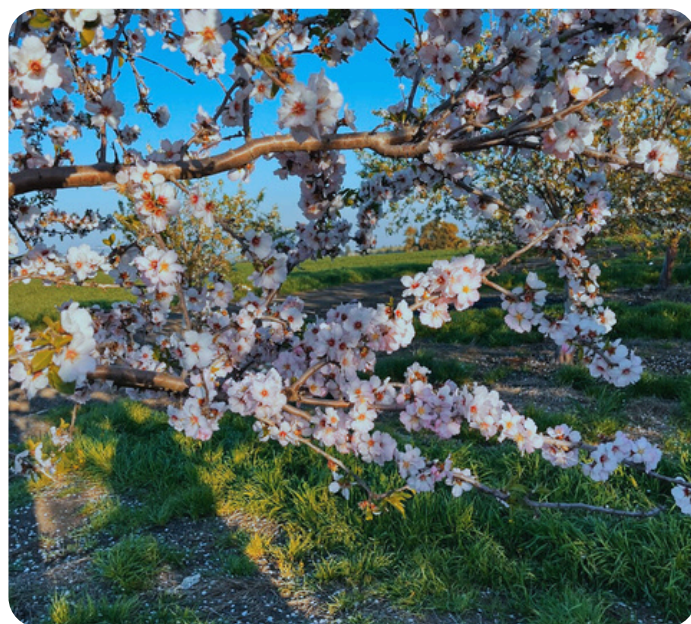
“And the word of the LORD came to me, asking, ‘Jeremiah, what do you see?’ I see a branch of an almond tree,” I replied. ‘You have observed correctly,’ said the LORD, ‘for I am watching over My word to accomplish it.’” (Jeremiah 1:11-12)

The passage in Numbers has God using the supernatural blossoming of the almond wood staff to direct the people and show them **God's design for leadership and future**.

“The next day Moses entered the tent and saw that Aaron's staff, which represented the tribe of Levi, had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds.” (Numbers 17:8 NIV)

We have come such a long way since the beginning of the war, and we have witnessed so many faithful, miraculous things. Yet we are still in desperate need of the diligent faithfulness of God to release the remaining captives, and provide direction for our leaders to walk forward in wisdom and brave and humble leadership.

May the sight of the almond blossoms remain in our mind – God's sign to us of His faithfulness and direction.



HOW TO TRIUMPH AMIDST ULTIMATE CONFLICT



By Leon Mazin

*“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them day and night before our God, has been hurled down. They **triumphed** over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.” (Revelation 12:10-11)*

The words seem to contradict each other:

- ✓ The Kingdom of God and His Messiah has come. (We rejoice!)
- ✓ But at the same time the “accuser” is hurled down to the earth (see v. 9), and makes war on the believers. (There will be titanic conflict – v.17.)
- ✓ Yet the believers defeat him by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and being willing to sacrifice life itself. (The Kingdom has come, but we still need to triumph.)

It seems to me that all these actions/processes take place simultaneously. In the spiritual dimension, the Heavenly Kingdom already exists inside us: Yeshua strengthens His disciples saying: *“... for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you”* (Luke 17:21 KJV).

However, a few “negative qualities” also remain in us; and far worse are the accuser’s abundant works around us. The accuser strives to stimulate all manner of evil – causing the conflict and contradiction we find ourselves in. (A) God’s Kingdom has come in power and in the authority of Yeshua. But (B) We are at war with the accuser. If we keep our spirit in humility, (C) We can break free from these negative qualities and experience victory over our accuser by the POWER OF MESSIAH’S SACRIFICE and by the WORDS OF OUR CONFESSION – keys to overcoming the enemy given in Revelation 12:11.

This is the response the Creator expects from us, empowering us to triumph. His desire is our sanctification – that we will belong to Him 100%. This requires going through His “training camp” to prepare for victory over all the power of evil. May God help us!

Ministry Updates

First, we want to invite you to visit our revamped website: www.returntozion.org!

Music School: At the conclusion of the semester we held several concerts, and we are very happy with the children’s successful performances. They skillfully play musical instruments and sing, and have significantly improved over the last year, despite wartime interruptions.



Men’s Retreat: I am excited to share about an excellent retreat held for our brothers in the Lord. On the last Friday and Saturday of February more than 40 men from our congregation arranged a special jeep tour and afterwards a seminar on “How to be a good husband and father.” It was a great time of healing and renewal, especially after the tensions we’ve all been living in lately.



I kindly ask you to pray for our congregations: Return to Zion, Or Chai and Netzer ha-Galil. We seek God’s face and strengthening in the Lord. Please, pray as well for our humanitarian ministries. From the time of COVID 19 and then throughout this war, they’ve grown by 60 – 70 percent.

We wish God’s peace and good health to you and your loved ones.



UNITY AT ANY COST?

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By Guy Cohen

Yeshua's great prayer in John 17:21 is for us to be one as He and the Father are one. But do we believe in unity at any cost?

This question arose some 29 centuries ago during the time of King Jehoshaphat, son of Asa. In 2 Chronicles 20:31-37 we read that he walked in the way of his father, doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord. However, he did not remove the idols which remained on the high places throughout the Kingdom of Judah.

"So Jehoshaphat was king over Judah. He was thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. And he walked in the way of his father Asa, and did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord. Nevertheless the high places were not taken away, for as yet the people had not directed their hearts to the God of their fathers..."

King Jehoshaphat was seeking unity between the (Southern) Kingdom of Judah and the (Northern) Kingdom of Israel. During his reign over Judah, there were two kings who ruled over Israel – Ahab and then his son Ahaziah. Seeking a strategic alliance through marriage, King Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram was wed to Athaliah, daughter of King Ahab and Jezebel (!) joining their families for political purposes.

Jehoshaphat made this alliance because of his desire for unity at any cost.

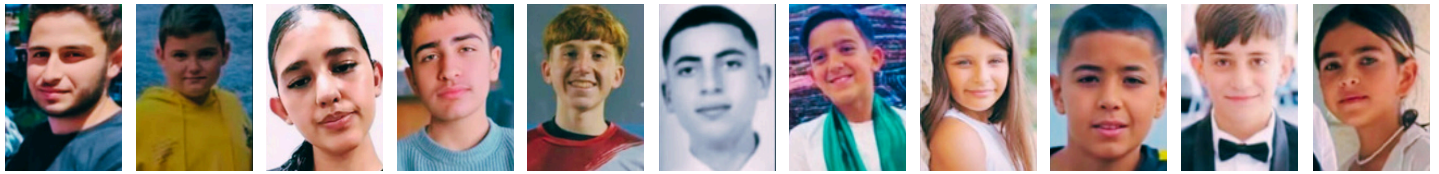
"After this Jehoshaphat king of Judah allied himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who acted very wickedly. And he allied himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish, and they made the ships in Ezion Geber. But Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the Lord has destroyed your works." Then the ships were wrecked, so that they were not able to go to Tarshish." (NKJV)

As a result of Jehoshaphat's compromise, the prophet came and told him that the Lord had broken the treaty made with Ahaziah concerning ships to be sent to Tarshish (Ophir) for gold. The ships, due to sail from what is today Eilat, were destroyed. When King Ahaziah wanted to continue the plan to send ships – Jehoshaphat, finally heeding the words of the prophet, refused.

This sad story of King Jehoshaphat doesn't end here but continues with the reign of his son Jehoram, who killed his six brothers to secure his position. I wonder if Jehoshaphat would have made the same decisions if he knew from the beginning that his desire for unity through compromise would open the door for God's judgment?

The Word of God teaches us to walk in the light of holiness and not to live in compromise. We can learn from the example of King Jehoshaphat, that when opportunities come before us, we must use discernment. Our yes should be yes and our no should be no. We cannot compromise with idols nor with those who serve idols. We must be set apart to the LORD. The unity we seek comes only from Him.





“You are bringing us the love of God!”

MOURNING WITH THOSE WHO MOURN



By Motti Cohen

Following October 7th, Hezbollah attacked Israel's north with thousands of rockets and armed drones. Last summer a 24 cm diameter rocket hit a soccer field in Majdal Shams, an *Israeli Druze** village in the Northern Golan Heights, **killing 12 children** and injuring many others with its 50 kg warhead of explosives.

The entire nation was gripped with grief over the massacre. Shosh Navon, Tiferet Yeshua's official savta (grandmother) at 92-years-old, suggested that we organize a group to share our condolences in person. Our visit happened weeks after the attack, but we would soon find out that God's timing was perfect.

After a four-hour drive, we arrived and parked. A young woman came out of her nearby shop and randomly invited us to have a coffee; she had just made a fresh pot. Two of the ladies in our group went over to talk with her. Soon, I noticed Ma'ayan praying for the woman. As she prayed, the woman started weeping, and Ma'ayan tenderly embraced her.

Divine Appointment with 12 Bereaved Fathers

Then it turned out that all the families of the 12 children were at that very moment in the community center. They had just finished a workshop on grief and mourning. *“The families are there waiting to meet you,”* our contact, a village leader, told us.



Our "grandmother" Shosh interacting with the bereaved fathers

We arrived at the community center and met with the twelve fathers of the murdered children. We shook hands with each one, telling them, *“We have come to comfort you in your mourning and to tell you that God loves you.”*

They invited us to come sit with them, setting out a table of refreshments for us. We also brought along food and refreshments that we contributed. They asked us who we are. Shosh began speaking in such a loving and eloquent way, that it was clear the Holy Spirit was upon her. Shosh explained that we are Jews from a Messianic fellowship in Tel Aviv.

When it was my turn to speak, I also briefly shared that several times we had prayed for their comfort, healing and protection. After several of us spoke, we asked if we could pray for them now in person, and they agreed. It's hard to explain, but God was there in a powerful way; we expressed simple words of comfort, but the fathers wept with us and were visibly touched by what we shared and when we prayed. The sheikh who had brought us to this meeting and stayed there throughout kept saying, *“Something special is happening here.”*

We stayed with the fathers for nearly an hour; and when it was time to leave, we embraced each of them. Before we left, one of the mothers who had stayed to listen approached me and began telling me about her 15-year-old daughter who was killed in the attack. *“My daughter was gifted, and she knew four languages... Arabic, Hebrew, English and German.”* It turns out that her daughter's dream was to study at the University of Munich. Two weeks before the attack that killed her daughter, the whole family had visited Germany to check out the university. The ladies from our team embraced this mother and asked if they could pray for her. She agreed, and when they did, she said, *“I feel something, something from God!”*

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Often we heard from the people we met and prayed for at Majdal Shams, “*You are bringing us the love of God!*” In their brokenness and mourning the precious families and their community at large opened their hearts to us; and in return God graciously touched them with His love.

After visiting with the families for nearly five hours (they brought us to the soccer field to see where their children were murdered), I was amazed and blessed but starting to feel tired and thought we should probably get on our way. Just then, the sheikh said, “*I want to host you at my home; it is important to me to introduce you to my family. I’ve already called, and my daughters are coming with the grandchildren.*”

At the sheikh’s home, a table was set before us with coffee and fresh cherries and apples from their orchards. He introduced his wife and each of his daughters with their children. The sheikh explained to us that he works as an interfaith and cultural advocate and has had many meetings with different religious groups in Israel. “***But you,***” he said, “***have something different.***”

When it was time to leave, the sheikh himself guided us out of the village and explained to us how to get to the Sea of Galilee. As he was saying goodbye to us, suddenly he **broke into tears**. “*You are such special people!*” he said. “*In just these few hours you were with us today I feel a special connection with you.*” On our way home, every 45 minutes he would call to make sure we were on our way safely. His last call to check on us was at midnight when we were close to Tel Aviv.

After I arrived home, I saw that the sheikh had sent me a personal message:

“We were privileged to receive the visit from amazing people who came to comfort us in the loss of our precious children who were murdered in a painful terror attack, our twelve shining stars whom we will never forget. Despite the pain, you all were ambassadors of peace. You brought something precious, and we were privileged to meet people who are clean and pure. Your visit was a very emotional and special time for us with tears, sympathy and mutual affection. This disaster unified us and transcends all boundaries of religion, politics or language. You are an example of humanity, and you left a precious seal on our hearts. For me and my dear family, your visit has become a treasure. I want to thank you for your initiative and the effort you made to come from so far.”

Please pray for all the dear people we had the incredible privilege to spend time with in Majdal Shams, that God would continue touching their hearts with His love, that He would comfort them and reveal Himself to them as the one who seals ours hearts with His perfect love!

*[*The Druze are a moderate, Arab-speaking, non-Muslim minority in Israel who are highly integrated in Israeli society, serving with distinction in the IDF and in the government.*



IN THE MIDST OF PAIN, GOD IS THERE



By Youval Yanay

In the midst of all the turmoil and uncertainty here in Israel, I often find myself wondering, *Does God really see me? Does He see this land and its people?*

Not just in a broad, distant way, but in the raw, unfiltered reality of who I am – the good, the bad, and the broken places. I often find myself returning to Psalm 139 because it doesn't just talk about God – it invites us to step into His presence and be fully known.

“O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off.” (Psalm 139:1-2)

There's no pretending with Him. No hiding. He sees us completely – our strengths, our struggles, the things we don't even admit to ourselves. And yet, He still loves us. It reminds me of Yeshua's name: Immanuel – God with us. **He didn't just watch from a distance; He stepped into our world, into our pain,** into our humanity. He knows what it's like to feel weak, rejected, and alone. Even when fear and loneliness seem overwhelming, you are not alone. You are not invisible.

There have been times I felt like running; maybe you have too. Not physically, but spiritually – avoiding issues, covering up wounds, and keeping busy so I don't have to deal with what's underneath.

“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.” (v. 7-8)

I love that phrase, *“If I make my bed in hell.”* How many of us have been there in our choices, our regrets, the places we thought were too dark for God to enter? Yet Yeshua, the Good Shepherd, goes after the lost sheep. Even when we hit rock bottom – even when we run – He never stops pursuing us.



This psalm also speaks to our identity. The world tells us that our value comes from what we achieve, how we compare to others, or what they think of us. But Psalm 139 cuts through the noise:

“For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” (v. 13-14)

Do we really believe this? Or do we carry the lies of the past – negative words spoken over us, failures, shame – allowing them to define us?

“For we are His workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works.” (Ephesians 2:10)

Yeshua doesn't just see us; He restores us. The end of the psalm is a challenge. A call to stop running to stop covering up, and to invite God into the deepest parts of who we are.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.” (v. 23-24)

This is a dangerous prayer because it means surrender. It means releasing control. It means allowing God to remove things that don't belong. It means being real with Him – and ourselves. This is the invitation of Yeshua. Not to fix ourselves before coming to Him, but to come as we are and let Him do the healing. This is also the heart behind Revive Israel – cultivating healing, restoration, and renewal. We want people to encounter the love of God in tangible ways.

So here is the invitation: stop running, stop hiding, and let yourself be seen. Yeshua sees you, loves you, and extends His hand to you. The question is: will you let Him in?

