

These are not just stories of captivity. They are stories of silence, injustice, and what it means to keep remembering when the world moves on.

Among the faces etched in our collective memory:

Hostages or Forgotten Souls?

The Price of Bringing Our People Home — Drop by Drop

By Rifka Epstein[©]

We watched the names scroll like silent prayers.

Some were freed.

Some were murdered.

Some... are still waiting.

In these impossible months since October 7, we have lived in two Israels: one above ground, trying to carry on, and one buried beneath the rubble of what was — homes, hopes, hostages.

Every returned soul is a miracle. But every deal has been a devil's bargain. We brought some back wrapped in blankets — and others wrapped in burial shrouds. The cost has been unbearable, yet the silence around that cost even more so.

The agony felt by every Jewish soul is indescribable. There are no words that can truly express the pain — especially for those with a son, a daughter, a parent, a partner, a grandchild, a close friend still waiting or already gone.

We are now living through the aftermath of a nightmare. And even those who returned — their bodies alive — came back shattered in ways we may never fully understand.

In these first months of the ceasefire, hostages were exchanged for 30 men (including some women and young adults) who had murdered, maimed, and kidnapped — and would not hesitate to do so again.

And yet, we had no choice.

In what follows, I do not attempt to speak for every family. But I feel compelled to speak of two stories that have carved themselves into the soul of this nation — and into my own:

The Bibas family — whose fate remains uncertain, even months after the ceasefire. And Eli Sharabi — who, long after March 2024, would return from hell with no one left to bring home.

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The Bibas Family

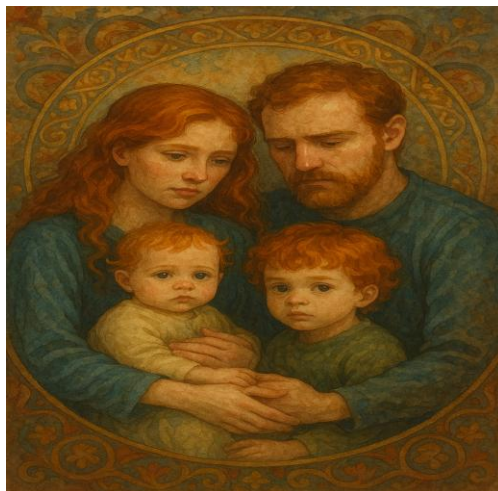
“This image I cannot delete from my eyes,” the author writes.

Shiri, Ariel, and baby Kfir Bibas — a family stolen.

A baby turned one in captivity. The image of their ginger curls, wide eyes, and terrified stillness haunts us. And yet — no answers. No bodies. No closure.

And then came the final cruelty. The Hamas leader, Yahya Sinwar, is reported to have boasted to Yarden Bibas the father — the husband — (Yarden, was released in Feb. 1, 2025) that he had killed his wife and children. “Don’t worry,” he said, “you’ll find another wife and have more children.”

There are some sentences that should never be spoken. There are wounds words should never leave. That one lives in our national memory now — not as a quote, but as a scar.



Eli Sharabi: A Brother’s Cry in the Wilderness

Eli Sharabi doesn’t shout anymore. His voice has grown hoarse from begging, from interviews, from nightly prayers that echo off concrete and come back unanswered.

His brother, Yossi Sharabi, was murdered in Hamas captivity.
His other brother, Itzik, is still held hostage — or so we hope.

Eli's heartbreak is not just personal. It is national. He stands as the face of the families — the ones we interview when there's time to fill in on the news, the ones we forget to check on the next day.

When the ceasefire was negotiated, when lists were exchanged, and buses waited at the border, Itzik's name was not called. And Yossi's body was never returned.

Eli asks the questions no one wants to answer:

- Why were their lives negotiable?
- Why does it seem like some hostages matter more than others?
- Will justice ever come — or only more funerals?

And still, Eli shows up. “Candle in hand. Hope in fragments. And the love for his brothers shining stubbornly through the fog of despair”.



Note from the autor of this article: *These watercolor portraits are not photographs. They are quiet echoes — visual prayers — created to reflect the soul, not the surface. Artwork created exclusively for Rifka Epstein. Please do not copy or reproduce without permission.*