
October 7, Two Years Later: Holding Memory and Choosing to Show Up

Reflection by Maayan Snapir, granddaughter of Oded Lifshitz,
who was murdered in captivity

There's something very special about the Jewish people. We've gone through so much, for so many decades. Time and again, we face unimaginable realities and moral questions that become the topic of conversation at ordinary Shabbat dinners. What's more important—to save one life right now, or to save the lives of many in the future? Are we able to protect our own people when we failed in the past?

"What price is 'too high' for the life of an innocent child? A soldier? A grandfather? A friend?" he asks.

"You tell me," I reply, as I look into the eyes of a 20-year-old student at Columbia University, just three days after the Bibas family and my grandfather were brought back to Israel—dead. They had been taken hostage from the safety of their own homes and held captive for more than 500 days. The pain in the room, as people asked their questions, was soul-crushing.

This particular student, who barely knows anything about Israel, has gone through so much in the past two years. His closest friends abandoned him, people tried to physically hurt him and his Jewish friends, locked them in the university library, and so much more. G-d, the things we are going through... words cannot describe.

So I respond with a calm voice, doing my best to create a safe environment while everybody's on edge. This question is one of the central questions of the current war. "You tell me. How much, in your opinion, is too much? What is the price of freedom? And what if it was your brother?"

He looks back at me with tears in his eyes, captivated by the very difficult discussion we've been having with this group of students for the past hour. He will think about this moment later, I'm sure. It's too much to process as it happens. But this might be the first time he feels comfortable enough to ask, to share his doubts, to receive answers, new perspectives, and tools to handle a reality he was never equipped to face.

This is why I choose today, as we approach two years since October 7, 2023, out of all the experiences I've had, to share this moment with you. It might surprise you, but there's a good reason behind it. If you're reading these words, in one way or another you have a connection to The iCenter. It means that YOU are an educator—whether in a formal classroom or simply by being you around others—and that you carry one of the most important roles in shaping the future of our people, and even more importantly, the present.

It's urgent to talk about freedom. If there's one thing we've learned in our own hearts and skin over the past 725 days, it's that we have no time to waste. If we wait, more of our people die. The math is simple. The time is NOW.

Though not always easy to accept, I believe everything happens for a reason. If we, the Jewish people, continue to go through hardships time and again, there must be something very special within us.

It's this light that darkness tries to shut down. It's this light that brings new solutions. It's this light that will guide all of our people back home.

Every day we all get to choose the story we tell. We can share the story of endless loss and trauma, or we can highlight the unbelievable ways we rise up. Even though it takes time, even when we don't see the end, even when we're tired—we show up. From people sending toothbrushes, clothes, and food to evacuees in Israel, to emotional support, to rallies around the world every week, and to endless efforts that help families of hostages and soldiers continue to wake up in the morning and keep going. It has been too many days. No one can do this alone.

So we come together from around the globe because we know this one fundamental truth: we stay together not only because we share a common pain, but because we know—in our very bones—that this is the best and only way to get back up.