

## Reflections from Netzer Shlichah Hadar Lev-Tzori

I was in silence. For such a long time, I was in silence. Words simply ran out of me. Months of silence. I could not utter a word.

On Shabbat, the 7<sup>th</sup> of October, something inside of me was broken. I couldn't believe that a human being can do anything like that. I refused to accept that such evil exists in the world. Optimism turned into darkness.

I thought that the people on the other side of the fence were just flesh and blood like me. I believed in the kindness of humanity and the inner beauty of mankind. I thought that when we see a little child, a puppy, or an elderly grandmother, our human instinct is to support and help. I always believed that compassion is inside us, humans.

On October 7th the boundary of humanity was crossed. My people. My country. My family. My faith. Something within me shattered. It wasn't a war over land, it wasn't political, not about liberation or religion. It was a brutal attack by Hamas – a terrorist organisation – that harmed both Israeli citizens and the Palestinian people. On that dark Shabbat, something inside of me was broken, something in us shattered and will never be whole again.

On the September 6th, we arrived in Sydney on a family shlichut. The love we hold for Israel brought us here, and by October 7th, it had transformed into an understanding of why being here is so important.

The ongoing conflict in our homeland fills us more than ever. Every fallen soldier, every hostage, every wounded becomes part of our family. They are our people. Suddenly, we find ourselves identifying with those who made Aliyah during the 1950s, kissing the ground they touched—a pure love for the land, the nation, the soil, the air, the atmosphere, the ruach.

**This is the time** to raise our voices, calling out to the world for help in bringing back the 101 hostages who have been in the Hamas tunnels for over 350 days. **Now.** We need the collective power of Jews worldwide. Especially when antisemitism is on the rise, this is the time we should NOT be afraid to walk proudly down the street with the Magen David necklace and a shirt with Hebrew words.

As we mark the High Holy Days this year, these days are even more powerful. We remember our brothers and sisters in Israel and look at our Jewish community here in Australia. We had a painful year; a year that will be never forgotten.

Our country, our beautiful homeland is broken. It's not a secret that there are so many complexities in Israel right now. We face rockets from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen, war in Gaza, economic challenges, debates about equality in army service,

thousands of evacuees from our northern border and a government that struggles with public trust.

How can someone who has lost a sibling in battle finish Shiva and fight again? How does a grandmother, waiting for her grandchild's return from captivity, find the strength to encourage her son? How does a child who lost a parent manage to attend school every day?

It's the Jewish spirit—the ability to rise from crises—that defines us. We stand tall. The historic Jewish resilience is impressive. We face so many challenges, yet we lift our heads high, proud of our heritage, our people, and our nation. Israel is in a phase of rebuilding. The pieces we collect will eventually form a stronger whole. It won't happen overnight or even in months. Slowly but surely, we gather the fragments, just as our Jewish faith teaches us.

**We sanctify resilience.** In the month of Elul, we blow the shofar. The sound of the shofar is so powerful. A sound that stops everything. It seems that all living creatures listen to it: nature, humanity.

The Shofar brings this complicated year to an end. It gives us the opportunity to look back and see what we have gone through. We lost friends and family members. We fought for our freedom like never before. But we also saw how the Israeli society comes together. How the communities in the western Negev rebuild themselves. We see the wounded people recover. We see the connection between so many sectors in Israel.

Naomi Shemer, the national poetess of Israel wrote right after the Yom Kippur War in 73:

מָה קוֹל עֲנוֹת אֲנִי שׁוֹמֵעַ, קוֹל שׁוֹפָר וְקוֹל תְּפִים. כָּל שְׁנֵבִיקָשׁ לִי יְהִי.

זֶה סוּף הַקְּיִץ, סוּף הַדֶּרֶךְ, תֵּן לָהֶם לְשׁוּב הַלּוּם. כָּל שְׁנֵבִיקָשׁ לִי יְהִי

“What is the sound I hear, the sound of the shofar and the sound of drums. All that we ask, let it be.

This is the end of summer, the end of the road, let them return here. All that we ask, let it be.”

**Bring them back home safe and sound.** לִי יְהִי!

The most important blessing for the coming year is a year of peace. I wish us all a year of peace among us, and peace in the Middle East. Amen.