



IAC Newsletter

Adar's Tzedakah Highlight



IN OUR MISSION TO SUPPORT ISRAELI SOLDIERS, CONGREGATION AHAVAT ACHIM'S ISRAEL ACTION COMMITTEE AND THE GLEN ROCK JEWISH CENTER PARTNERED TO HOST IDF RESERVIST ADI KARNI ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1.

IN A DEEPLY SYMBOLIC MOMENT, ADI REMOVED THE YELLOW RIBBON PIN FROM HIS LAPEL, MARKING THE RETURN OF THE FINAL HOSTAGE HOME TO ERETZ YISRAEL FROM GAZA. HE THEN BEGAN BY DESCRIBING THE REALITIES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY ISRAELI SOLDIERS, DRAWING FROM HIS EXPERIENCE AS A COMBAT ENGINEER IN THE IDF.

ADI SPOKE CANDIDLY ABOUT THE IMPOSSIBLE MORAL AND TACTICAL DILEMMAS YOUNG SOLDIERS ENCOUNTER, INCLUDING THE NEED TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN CIVILIANS—SUCH AS CHILDREN AND THE ELDERLY—AND TERRORISTS. THESE SPLIT-SECOND DECISIONS CAN MEAN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH, NOT ONLY FOR THEMSELVES, BUT FOR THEIR FELLOW SOLDIERS.

THROUGH PHOTOS AND VIDEO, ADI SHARED THE PROFOUND TRAUMA OF LOSING THREE OF HIS CLOSEST FRIENDS FROM HIS PLUGAH (UNIT). HE EXPLAINED THAT SOLDIERS BECOME A FAMILY, LIVING IN CLOSE QUARTERS FOR EXTENDED PERIODS—SLEEPING, EATING, SHARING STORIES, AND PROTECTING ONE ANOTHER. WHEN LOSS OCCURS, THERE IS LITTLE TIME TO GRIEVE. SOLDIERS MUST PUSH PAST THEIR PAIN IN ORDER TO CONTINUE FIGHTING. MOURNING OFTEN COMES LATER, THROUGH VISITS TO GRAVESITES, WHERE THEY TALK, LAUGH, AND EVEN SHARE A DRINK WITH FALLEN FRIENDS AS A WAY TO COPE WITH THE WEIGHT OF THEIR REALITY.

RECOGNIZING THE IMMENSE EMOTIONAL BURDEN CARRIED BY THESE YOUNG SOLDIERS, WE PARTNERED WITH ADI AND THE ORGANIZATION PEACE OF MIND TO HELP ADDRESS COMBAT-RELATED PTSD. PEACE OF MIND IS A THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION PROGRAM RUN BY THE METIV ISRAEL PSYCHOTRAUMA CENTER IN JERUSALEM. THE PROGRAM PROVIDES IDF VETERANS WITH THE TIME, SPACE, AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT NEEDED TO PROCESS THEIR COMBAT EXPERIENCES, STRENGTHENING THEIR EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AND EASING THEIR TRANSITION BACK TO CIVILIAN LIFE.



Finding Light in a Time of Darkness

By Deborah Kempin

People respond to trauma in many different ways. Since the Jewish nation was rocked by the catastrophe of October 7th, many of us instinctively turned to symbols to help us process our pain and express our solidarity.

Some wore dog tags in support of the hostages. Others donned Stars of David, placed posters on their lawns, tied blue ribbons around trees, pinned yellow ribbons to their clothing, hung Israeli flags from their homes, or lit candles. Each act—small or large—became a way of holding on to hope, a declaration that even in the darkest moments, light still exists.

Like so many in our community, I did some of the above. But the practice I clung to most was lighting a yahrzeit candle alongside my Shabbat candles each Erev Shabbat. With a small prayer card in hand, I pleaded week after week for Hashem to protect the hostages and our soldiers. There was something deeply comforting in that ritual. While prayer was the act of speaking to Hashem, the quiet glow of the candles seemed to extend the conversation, allowing the hope for peace to linger and illuminate my home.

This week's parsha invites us to look more closely at the power of that light. In Parshat Terumah, we are commanded to build a Mishkan—a physical dwelling place for Hashem's presence among the Jewish people. Parshat Tzaveh then turns our attention to the ongoing avodah within it, beginning with the Menorah. The Torah commands:

“כֹּוֹאֲתָה תְצַוֶּה | אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ אֵלֶיךָ שֶׁמֶן זֵית זָךְ כְּתִית לְמֵאוֹר לְהַעֲלֹת נֵר תָּמִיד:”

“Command the Israelites to bring you clear olive oil, crushed for the light, so that the lamp may always burn.”

This eternal flame of the Menorah, first kindled in the Mishkan and later in the Beit HaMikdash, continues in a different form: in our Shuls, in the lighting of our Shabbat candles, and in the sacred acts we perform each day. It reminds us that Hashem's presence endures, even when it feels concealed.



After October 7th, I began to notice that light more clearly. I saw it at a rally in Washington, D.C. Standing near the back, I looked out over a sea of thousands. Blue and white filled the sky—Israeli flags, shirts, hats, signs, and songs. In that moment, I could truly see the light of Hashem shining from the collective soul of our people.

Soon after, I began to recognize that same light in my Shabbat candles. I had always believed that candlelight made Shabbat more beautiful; now I felt that the light from the rally had followed me home. Adding a yahrzeit candle helped me feel that the souls of the hostages were present as well—held and watched over by Hashem. In moments of helplessness, this became my way of holding on.

Our tradition states, ‘The lamp of God is the soul of a human being’ (Mishlei 20:27). Rabbi Dr. Yitzchak Breitowitz teaches, "We are each commanded to nurture that inner light, to elevate it through mitzvot, prayer, and caring for one another. No darkness is so complete that it cannot be pierced by Torah, faith, and communal strength."

On Erev Shabbat, January 23rd, I lit my final yahrzeit candle, as Sgt. Ran Givili, the last remaining hostage, was brought home to rest. It was a moment filled with both relief and profound sadness—relief that all hostages, living and deceased, had finally returned to their families and to Eretz Yisrael, and sorrow that the pain of this chapter continues to linger. We still face the realities of war, terror, and rising antisemitism across the world.

And yet, as my Shabbat candles burn each week, I am reminded that the Shechinah dwells among us. In their steady light, I find comfort, strength, and the quiet reassurance that Hashem is here—and that we are not alone.

Shabbat Shalom!



COMBATING ANTISEMITISM- DEFENDING ISRAEL IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Meet the new IDF Arabic Spokeswoman - Captain Ella

By Isaac Cohen

When the Israel Defense Forces selected Maj. Ella Waweya (widely known online as “Captain Ella”) to become the IDF’s next Arabic-language spokesperson, it signaled more than a routine personnel change. It put a new kind of messenger at the center of Israel’s most consequential communications front: a Muslim Arab woman, born in the Arab town of Qalansawe, stepping into a role that speaks every day to the wider Middle East.

For pro-Israel advocates, her appointment matters for two reasons: it highlights a reality too often erased abroad—Arab citizens are part of Israel’s story, institutions, and future—and it strengthens Israel’s ability to communicate with Arabic-speaking audiences with linguistic and cultural fluency at a time when misinformation spreads faster than any military briefing.

The job: not translation, but a battle for truth

The IDF’s Arabic spokesperson is not simply the “Arabic version” of a Hebrew statement. Over the last two decades, the position has become a strategic communications post that mixes traditional media, rapid response, and relentless social media engagement.

Her predecessor, Col. Avichay Adraee, became one of the most recognizable IDF faces in the Arab world, particularly during the current war when his channels were used to issue warnings and urgent updates related to operations in Gaza and beyond.

Waweya is not walking into this job cold. She served as Adraee’s deputy in the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit, and will take over following the handover in the coming weeks, as multiple Israeli outlets reported.

A personal decision with real social weight

Waweya’s personal story is part of why the appointment resonated far beyond Israel. According to reporting, she voluntarily enlisted in 2013—a decision she initially kept from her family.

That detail is not a footnote. It reflects a social reality: for many Arab citizens of Israel, military service is not a neutral career step; it can be a charged choice, surrounded by pressure, misunderstanding, and stigma.

Choosing to serve—then building a career in one of the IDF’s most visible units—takes unusual conviction.

Her path also punctures a common caricature: that Israel is a monolith and that Arab citizens have no meaningful agency within national institutions. Whatever one’s politics, the simple fact is that an Arab woman can rise to a senior, public-facing role in the IDF and become the voice addressing Arabic audiences daily.

“Captain Ella”: an Arabic spokesperson built for the digital age

Waweya’s reputation wasn’t built only in press rooms. It was built in the modern arena: short-form video, captions, and live reactions.

The Times of Israel reported she has more than half a million followers on TikTok and around 170,000 on X, a footprint that makes her one of the most followed Arabic-speaking IDF figures online.

That matters because the Arabic spokesperson role today is about reach plus speed. In the same feed where users might see false claims, recycled footage, or manipulated headlines, the IDF is trying to put out real-time information-often in blunt, direct Arabic.

A symbol-and a strategy

It's tempting to talk about Waweya's appointment purely as symbolism, but it's also strategic. Israel's enemies invest heavily in a narrative that the state is irredeemably racist and that Arabs inside Israel are either invisible or powerless. Putting a Muslim Arab woman into this specific role challenges that narrative on camera, in Arabic, every day.

To be clear: representation doesn't erase real tensions or inequality, and it doesn't end political conflict. But it does illustrate something important - Israel's civic identity is more complex than the slogans that dominate international discourse.

The pressure she'll face-why it strengthens the message

The Arabic spokesperson role is one of the most criticized jobs in the IDF, because it sits on the fault line between military operations and public perception. Adraee was attacked relentlessly online for years; his prominence only grew during the war.

Waweya will face a double intensity of scrutiny - from those who oppose Israel's very legitimacy and will reject any message she delivers; and from those who object to the idea of an Arab citizen serving in uniform at all. But in a paradoxical way, that pressure is also why her voice can be effective. She understands the language- and the emotional register-of Arab audiences, and she knows the Israeli system from the inside. She is, in a sense, a living rebuttal to the "colonizer vs. colonized" script that is so being pushed so strong by Israel's adversaries.

Why Captain Ella's story matters

Maj. Ella Waweya's appointment is a personal story of ambition and belonging, and it is also a strategic upgrade to how Israel communicates in Arabic.

At a time when Israel is judged worldwide not just by its actions but by the credibility of those speaking for it, "Captain Ella" highlights a reality that's easy to miss: Israel's diversity isn't a marketing line-it's on display and harder than ever to dismiss.



Ancient Paths, Enduring Love *the City of David*

By Betsy Sonnenblick



During our recent trip to Israel to visit our children and grandchildren we went to Ir Dovid (the City of David), one of my favorite places in Jerusalem.

The City of David is located just South of the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem. It was established as the Capitol of Israel during the reign of King David. It is a strategic location that made it easy to defend during ancient times. In addition, it has a natural water source (Gihon Spring) that was essential in the dry area of Jerusalem.

Today The City of David is an archeological park with ruins from the First and Second Temple period as well as some ruins that are thought to be even prior to that time.

There are several tours that are available in English in the City of David. The city of David requires walking amongst the ruins as well as up and down hills. It is not for someone with difficulty walking or strollers.

1. Biblical City of David Guided Tour-This is an approximately 3 hour tour through the ruins of the ancient city including the first and second temple period. It also allows you to walk through Hezekiah's Tunnel which still contains water. (the tunnel is narrow and low at points. You need to have water shoes and you will definitely getwet). The tunnel is mentioned in Kings II as being built during the reign of King Hezekiah who prepared for an impending siege by the Assyrians by securing water from the Gihon Spring. It was built by two teams digging from opposite ends and meeting in the middle.It continues to carry water to the Pools of Siloam at the bottom of the City of David.

2. Self-guided or shorter tours –There are options for self-guided walks through key parts of the National Park for those who prefer to go at their own pace.

3. Hallelujah Night Show-Tells the story of ancient Jerusalem in the time of King David and our return to rebuild the ancient city. It is an outdoor cinematic experience projected onto the ancient ruins in the actual site where this story unfolded. Headphones in your preferred language are available



Marty and Betsy Sonnenblick (left) and Esti (Sonnenblick) and Orel Cohen (right) walking up the Pilgrimage Road (1/20/2026).

4. Pilgrimage Road Guided Tour – This is a newly opened site. We were in the first group to take the English tour during our trip. The tour takes you along the newly opened Pilgrimage Road. This was the main street from the Second Temple period, which pilgrims once used when traveling from the Pool of Siloam to the Temple Mount to bring sacrifices. This tour in particular includes steep hills and stairs (both up and down). Some of the uncovered stones are the original and it's amazing to realize that you are walking in the path of our ancestors.

The tour ends at the junction of the Southern and Western Walls to the Temple mount, and is just outside the Davidson Center and Southern Wall excavations which are also interesting site to visit.

The City of David Foundation also supports other educational, archaeological and educational centers in Jerusalem. Among them is the Information Center on the Mount of Olives.

The information center on the Mount of Olives has catalogued and replaced many of the graves that were destroyed on the Mount of Olives during the Jordanian occupation of East Jerusalem from 1948-1967. On a previous trip, they helped us locate and visit the graves of my maternal great grandparents. None of my family had been to their graves since their burials in the 1930s.

For additional information about The City of David visit <https://cityofdavid.org.il/en/>

For additional information about the Pilgrimage Road Tour visit <https://www.timesofisrael.com/2000-year-old-pilgrimage-road-to-temple-mount-opens-to-public-after-years-of-digging/>



**AHAVAT ACHIM'S
ISRAEL TRAVEL BLOG FEATURING:
DR. MELANIE KWESTEL**

Living the Volunteer Life

Like most people, when the war broke out in October, 2023, I fell into an increasing despair over an inability to do more than give money. I had heard great things about JNF's mission to Israel, and I decided to combine it with a week of volunteering at an army base through Sar-El, Israel's national volunteer project for foreigners.

I was a Sar-El veteran, having spent two weeks at Tel Hashomer, a large military base attached to the hospital, in 2006. During that stay, my group spent long days unpacking and repacking medic backpacks that made their way to the northern border every night. To borrow a phrase from Lin-Manuel Miranda, the operation was "young, scrappy and hungry," disorganized but well intentioned. I had forgotten that part when I signed up a second time.

We met at Ben Gurion airport early Sunday morning, and the group of more than 200 was split among three bases. I ended up back at Tel Hashomer. The first time I volunteered, we were quartered on base and outfitted in uniforms by the quartermaster, who had the uncanny ability to size each person up, literally, and give them a uniform that fit without once asking for a size. This time we lived adjacent to the base, and the uniforms were piled haphazardly in a room. We were told to just pick out something that would fit. "Get in front," someone whispered in my ear. "The women's sizes go very fast."

After lunch, we were sorted into work groups and sent to different machsonim, or warehouses. My warehouse packed infusion kits. For eight hours a day we worked on an assembly line, filling boxes that were stacked outside and picked up nightly for delivery into Gaza. The work was tiring and incredibly fulfilling at the same time. But no matter how bored we got, when we woke up in the morning to find the boxes gone, we knew what we did was important. I was both thrilled to be there and happy to leave on Thursday.

Volunteering through Sar-El means you are considered part of the army. We wore uniforms. Each day began with raising the flag and singing "Hatikvah." Surprisingly, it didn't feel corny. It felt grounding. Meals in the army dining hall offered the best part of the day: conversation. Our group was diverse — not all Jewish — including Europeans who came simply to help and a Christian couple who insisted we had more friends in the world than we realized.

And yet, the experience was far from seamless. As someone who has spent a career studying organizations, I found the lack of accountability exasperating. Once you board

the bus, Sar-El says you are under army jurisdiction — and during wartime, volunteers are understandably not the army's top priority. Our assigned madrichim rotated frequently. When women housed in an auxiliary building felt isolated and unsafe, it took significant pressure to be heard. By the end of the week, tensions ran high enough that the army briefly refused to clear our bus to leave. It was a reminder that meaningful work can coexist with imperfection.

After five days on base, I joined a Jewish National Fund mission. The contrast was striking. If Sar-El was improvisational, JNF was highly structured. Our first day was spent rebuilding a moshav that had been overrun on October 7. I was able to show off the carpentry skills I picked up putting together Ikea furniture over the years. Other people created colorful murals or painted classrooms. We then spent two days picking vegetables in the Galil and Gaza envelope. Note to all: eggplants are hard to harvest. Onions are easy. Wherever we went, people opened their homes and told us their stories. Some of it was heartbreaking; a mother described life on a border kibbutz prior to October 7. "Who is going to let their children run free now that we know that there is not enough time to get to your shelter when the alarm goes off?" she asked.

Suffice it to say that an organization responsible for much of Israel's infrastructure has the kind of extensive contacts to create an amazing experience. Our trip to the Nova site, now a pilgrimage for everyone who visits Israel, was narrated by a young survivor who described in detail fateful decisions that kept her party alive on October 7. After about 10 minutes, our group was surrounded by the other tour groups, who hung on her every word. We spent an afternoon cooking with the female Druse proprietor of an award-winning restaurant who turned it kosher when she delivered 400 meals to a nearby Army base and noticed that half the troops couldn't eat her food. Alongside the certificates that attested to the restaurant's renown was a slew of teudot kashrut. When we delivered the food to the base, we were entertained not only by the soldiers, but by an a capella troop comprised of neurodivergent soldiers who found a home in the IDF thanks to JNF support.

Much has been said about how empty Israel was during the war. However, we were impressed by how normal things were. People were eating in restaurants, hanging out at the beach, walking the streets. The one exception was Wednesday evenings in Tel Aviv, when people descended upon Hostage Square, adjacent to Israel's military headquarters in Tel Aviv. There, hearts were torn anew as family members described life without a loved one.

Wherever we went, people thanked us for coming, telling us how they needed our support. Honestly, we went thinking we were there to strengthen Israel. In many ways, Israel strengthened us.

Living the volunteer life, even briefly, did not solve the war or erase the heartbreak. It did something quieter and perhaps more enduring: it replaced helplessness with purpose. And in a time defined by uncertainty, that felt like no small thing.

AHAVAT ACHIM'S TZADAKAH INITIATIVES UPDATE!

To date, we have fundraised **\$1,444.00** towards
Peace of Mind.

Thank you to all that contributed to this very important cause. Those interested in still wanting to support Israel's soldiers and participate in this important fundraiser are encouraged to click the link below.

Our soldiers protected us. Now they need us.

[Click here to support our soldiers through Peace of Mind](https://www.jgive.com/new/en/usd/donation-targets/163129)

or go to:

<https://www.jgive.com/new/en/usd/donation-targets/163129>



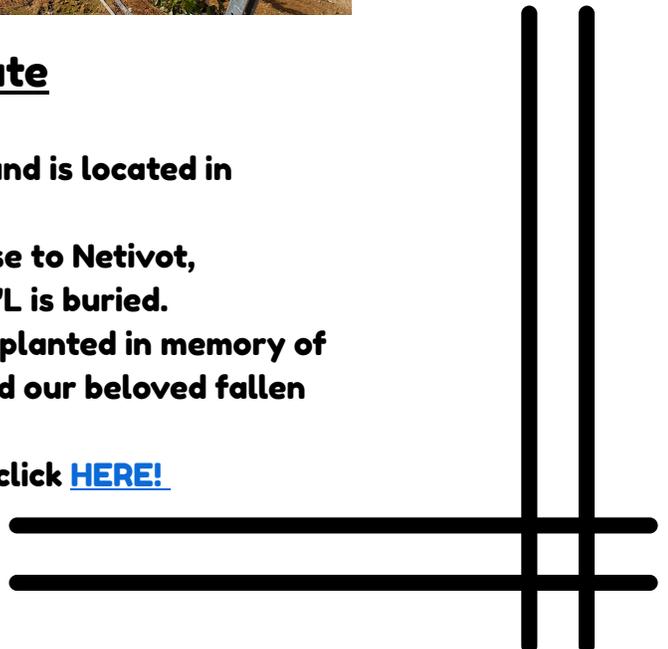
Zo Arteinu Update

Our orchard has been completed and is located in
Moshav Tkuma
by the Gaza border area. It close to Netivot,
where the holly Baba Sali ZT"L is buried.

The orchard, more than 100 trees, were planted in memory of
the victims of terror on October 7th and our beloved fallen
Chayalim!

To contribute to our orchard click [HERE!](#)

ADDITIONAL
TZADAKAH
RESOURCES



Jewish Community Events and Israel

Thursday,
April 30 | 7PM

Glenn Cohen "Frontline Hostage Debriefing"



Glenn Cohen was the first person to debrief hostages upon their release.

Glenn Cohen is the Hostage Debrief Team Leader and former Mossad Chief Psychologist. Born and raised in New York City, he moved to Israel after high school and went on to serve more than three decades as an air force pilot, special-forces psychologist, and IDF Hostage Negotiator.

Register Today!



Laura Freeman LauraF@jfnj.org | 201.820.3923

[Click Here for Link!](#)

JEWIS FOR NJ

HAMANTASHEN BAKE

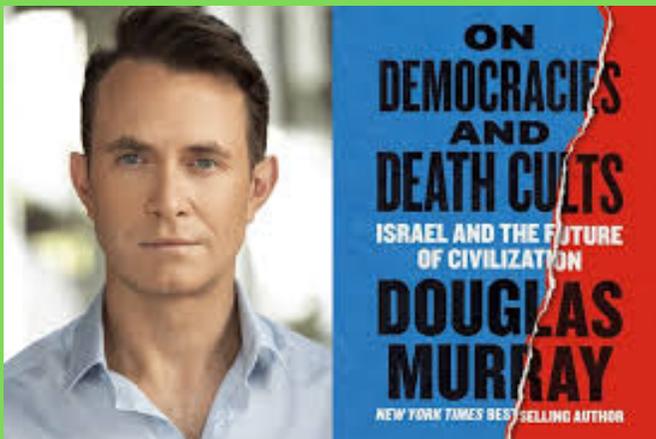


HADSDEN	GLOSTER	WICKOFF
Sunday, February 22 4:00pm	Wednesday, February 25 7:30pm	Thursday, February 26 7:30pm

SIGN UP! Three locations, One Hamantaschen Bake

bit.ly/JewsForNJHamantaschen

[Click Here to Sign Up!](#)



On Democracies and Death Cults: Israel and the Future of Civilization by Douglas Murray (2025) argues that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a fundamental clash between a democracy valuing life and a "death cult" (Hamas) seeking annihilation. Murray analyzes the post-October 7th, 2023, landscape, documenting atrocities and criticizing Western support for extremists

Return Of The
USA CHALLENGE CUP
February 22, 5pm - UBS Arena

Hockey Club Tel Aviv **TLV**  **JER** Jerusalem Capitals



February 22nd
5 pm
Historic Night for Israeli Hockey:
Jerusalem Capitals Edge HC Tel Aviv in Thrilling OT Win at
UBS Arena

[For Tickets Click Here!](#)

“Inspired by Israel? We Want to Hear From You!”

Have an unforgettable experience from your trip to Israel?

Or is there an Israel-related topic you feel passionate about?

The Israel Action Committee would love to hear from you.

We're inviting members of our community to share their stories, insights, and experiences—whether it's a meaningful encounter, a volunteer journey, a historical perspective, or a personal reflection.

If you have something to share,
we want to give you the opportunity to inspire others.

Let your Israel story be heard!

To contribute your story, please click [here](#).

Your ideas matter to us!

Please click the words “Suggestion Box” below to share any ideas that you would like to see implemented in our shul related to celebrating Israel.



AHAVAT ACHIM
— קהלת אהבת אחים —
THE FAMILY SHUL