



GROWTH

At The SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT YITRO

Unparalleled Craving

After 491 torturous days in Hamas captivity, Eli Sharabi has finally been released this past weekend. The poor hostage, who has been in the hearts and prayers of Jews worldwide for what seems like forever (together with the others who have been kidnapped), had been freed in a terribly weakened and emaciated state, only to find out that his wife and daughters had been brutally murdered in the October 7th massacre.

No one can ever fathom even a fraction of the immense suffering, pain, and trauma that these hostages and victims have been put through. Yet, even after enduring horrors beyond human imagination for 16 months, Eli Sharabi had displayed true super-human strength. One of his first requests upon his release was a pair of tefillin – a request that transcends mere ritual but expresses unwavering faith and a deep connection to Jewish identity that even the darkness of captivity could not shatter. R' Shneur Raskin, a Chabad emissary who had been in touch with Eli's family throughout his captivity, immediately provided a special pair of tefillin that was delivered in custom-embroidered bags with a message full of affection and unity: "The entire Nation of Israel embraces you."

As we continue to pray for the safe return of the remaining hostages and for the ultimate redemption to speedily put an end to our nation's long and bitter exile, let us draw strength and inspiration from our fellow brother who, despite physical malnutrition, craved spirituality and conveyed to the world that there is absolutely nothing that anybody can do to destroy the Jewish Nation or a single Jewish soul.

Refuah Sheleimah, b'toch she'ar cholei Yisrael:

Ariel Ben Frida	Gavriel Ben Dina	Avigail Bat Tehila	Yehuda Yaakov Ben Chaya Liba
Shlomo Ben Etal	Frida Bat Yaffa	Noach Yisrael Ben Victoria Yaffa	Miriam Bat Bakol
Chana Bat Malka	David Ben Rivka	David Ben Tzivra	Rena Bat Bakol
Ariella Bat Hila	Yitzhak Ben Naama	Yehoshua Ben Miriam	Eliron Ben Leah
Rachamim Ben Shifra	Eliana Rachel Bat Shifra	Dora Devora Bat Marusia Mazal	
Uriel Ben David	Esther Bat Frida	Svetlana Tzivra Bat Esther	Yisrael Zev Ben Tamar

"Everything you want in life comes down to the choice between being comfortably mediocre or uncomfortably great. The choices you make – where you put your effort – that's where G-d gives you success." (Charlie Harray)

Real Chesed

A certain grandson of the Chafetz Chaim studied Torah in Lakewood and, once in a while, he would come late in the mornings. The mashgiach, somewhat confused that a grandchild of the previous generation's gadol hador wasn't consistently punctual, was initially hesitant to approach him but wanted to resolve the problem. And so, one day, he conversed with the young man and gently asked if everything was okay.

"I'll tell you the truth," explained the young man, "I really plan on coming on time – every morning, actually. I plan on coming on time and even leave my house early enough to get to the bet midrash on time." He saw the confused look on the mashgiach's face, and continued, "Every morning, as I make my way to yeshiva, there's a lady who screams in need for help. So I find myself going to help her, and inside the house I see kids crying in need for attention. One needs a bath; one lost his sneaker; the other can't find his kippah; one needs tzitzit; she's struggling to find her own thing... I just feel so bad for this lady, so I go into the house and decide I want to help them. I assist them with their morning duties and help send the kids off to school. That is why I occasionally come late..."

The mashgiach was taken aback. "Wow, that's such a beautiful reason to be late," he replied. "I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to judge you unfavorably. What you are doing is such an amazing mitzvah. Is everything okay? Is this lady a widow or divorcee? Is everything okay with her marriage? Maybe I can also help..."

"No, no, G-d forbid," the young man answered. "That's my wife! My wife needs my help before our kids go to school in the morning, and that delays me by a few minutes."

For some reason, when it comes to helping others, it's a lot easier than assisting one's immediate family. Involvement in big communal projects while simultaneously ignoring one's own family is not only counterintuitive but foolish. Of course, acts of kindness are an amazing hallmark of Jewish values, but it can't interfere with giving to those who need us the most. The Chafetz Chaim's grandson reminds us how important it is to remember that true chesed begins at home...

(Story recounted by R' Yaakov Mizrahi)