



Sharing Their Stories, Part 6: Voices of Young Israelis

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Voices of Young Israelis, Part 6

We continue to check in with our Israeli community, seeing how we can help and offer care during this difficult time. Below is our sixth installment of accounts written by young Israelis (fellows and alumni of Amitei Bronfman).

We are pleased to be partnering with *The Forward* in sharing these first-hand accounts. Two installments have been published so far ([part 1](#) and [part 2](#)), with more to come. We encourage you to share *The Forward* coverage widely; these vignettes amplify the voices of our community and help demonstrate the complexity and multi-faceted nature of Israeli society to a wider audience.

Shabbat Shalom. Wishing you and your loved ones a happy, safe, and light-filled Chanukah.

The following are all translations from Hebrew; please excuse any mistakes.

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Name: **Cana Galpeein '18**

Lives in: **Kibbutz Migdal Oz**

Age: 22

Having been asked to write this, it's the first time that I'm looking at the past month and a



half as a series of separate incidents, and not as one, long, continuous account. It feels either like just one day or my entire life, but there are distinct moments within it.

There is the moment on Simchat Torah, when we spent Shabbat with soldiers from the Nativ military company, which is comprised of soldiers who are undergoing the conversion process. We celebrated the holiday together—soldiers, commanding officers, and rabbis. There were sirens; it was a long and emotional day, but when I think about it I mostly remember my soldiers who took off their white [holiday] shirts and put on their uniforms. The Rabbi

blessed them and they got in their cars and drove south. For me, that's where the war began.

There was the moment when my husband called to tell me that he was turning off his phone and going into Gaza with his soldiers. He asked me to pray for him and since then, I always wonder if my prayers are good enough, protective enough for him.

I was discharged from the army a week ago, after three and a half years of service as an officer in the education corps. I always thought it would be a moment of release, of freedom, but when it's like this during a war, I simply feel like I'm not in the right place.

My teacher's father died of old age. He wasn't a casualty of combat, he didn't live in the Gaza Envelope, and a missile didn't fall on his house; he was very old and he died at a ripe old age. I read the announcement twice; it took me a moment to understand it.

I feel like part of history; I feel all of the generations of this nation with me—leaving Egypt, writing the Mishna, the Shoah, and the establishment of the State of Israel—and this gives me strength. Even murder like this can't annihilate us; there is sufficient confirmation of this from the entire world. We now feel like the nation that we are and this gives me strength.

Name: **Dar Hazan Arnoff '18**

Normally lives in **Jerusalem**

Currently lives in **Jerusalem**

Age: 22

Like many young Israelis, after my army service, I flew off to fulfill my dream of a big trip to the East: a period of searching for meaning, self-discovery, and simply vacation and adventure after a period of intense military service.



The trip took an unexpected about-face when the war erupted. It was clear to me that the right thing for me to do was shorten the trip and return home, to give what I could to the cause, to be there for my many friends who are still serving in the army or in the reserves, to be close to my family, and to feel the pain together with everyone over the horrible things that transpired and continue to transpire.

Indians whom I met while hiking, who inquired as to my welfare, asked in astonishment, “Why are you going home? There’s a war there!” For me and another 300,000 Israelis who returned from the Diaspora since the war began, it was clear—when our land is in upheaval, we want to be there on it, on the battle front or the home front.

I exchanged the vistas of India for the hard reality of war. In the first month of the war, my focus was on children who were evacuated from their homes. We tried to create a pleasant and safe space, in which laughter and play could provide a break from the trauma and the upheavals that they experienced. The resilience of children and their ability to find joy and [use their] imaginations from within distress awakens inspiration and gladdens the heart.

Now, I am prepared to begin a gig as a counselor in a pre-army preparatory program that’s mixed, for secular and religious Israelis, because all of their usual counselors were called up for reserve duty. As a counselor, my role will be to accompany the students along their personal and collective journeys, with all of the challenges that this period presents, in preparation for meaningful army service. And, of course, for their futures as active citizens who contribute to society.

Alongside the feeling of obligation to contribute to my community, a continuous worry [about people at the front] accompanies me. Many of my friends, including my partner, are found at the battle front. Many of them, like me, were on their big post-army trip, enjoying their vacation after meaningful military service, and without hesitation they returned home to contribute to the war effort, with a deep feeling for their mission and sacrifice of their dreams. The camaraderie that we shared a few weeks ago in pursue of adventure and self-discovery changed into a shared responsibility to defend our people, each of us from our own vantage point.

From the vistas of India straight to the heart of the struggle in Israel, this trek had an unexpected nature, from giving and finding comfort with uprooted children to guiding those

who are next in line to defend us. Each part tells a story of resilience, obligation, and sacrifice, that echoes the feelings of my generation, who, like so many before us, had to report to duty to defend our wounded country.



Name: **Itai Ohel Gallili '23**

Normally lives in **Jerusalem**

Currently lives in **Jerusalem**

Age: 17

Hi! My name is Itai Ohel Gallili, and I'm a 17-year-old from Jerusalem. I feel distant from the present situation specifically here in Jerusalem, the city in which the "situation" is volatile even when we aren't at war. Too distant. There are almost no sirens here, even though there are sirens on an almost daily basis in many areas of the country. School has resumed and the streets don't

look so different from how they looked on October 6th.

Because of this sense of distance, within a few days of the massacre I started to volunteer at any place I could find. Upon arrival at a hotel that was hosting evacuees from the Gaza Envelope, I was able to help with hospitality duties, I donated blood for the injured, I traveled to greenhouses to help farmers. Nothing is enough and I still feel like my life is too similar to how it looked two months ago. I can't stop thinking: How can it be that my troubles are limited to submitting school assignments when there are youth my age who lost their entire families, or who were kidnapped into Gaza, or who were murdered?

Despite this, I understand that we should all aspire to my [relatively safe] situation, and that there's no logic to comparing myself to people who have suffered such immense tragedies. If we relinquish living our daily lives, that would be a victory for Hamas, because their goal is to disrupt our regular lives here. I hope that a day will come when we will be able to return to living our lives as we did before the slaughter, with the same sorrows and the same joys, and maybe then we can begin to think of a new path towards peace.

View our [resources page](#) for ways to help, educational links, and mental health resources.

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