

Voices of Young Israelis: October 2024

Shir Mishaly (Amitei Bronfman '07)

"You and I have memories longer than the road that stretches out ahead"



My name is Shir Mishaly, Amitim 2007. I live in Be'er Sheva with my partner Ran and our son Yarden, who just turned one. I'm an economist. I grew up in Beit Shemesh, one of five siblings.

On October 7th, I lost my best friend, Adi.

The beginning of a love story

When I was 18, before I enlisted, I did a gap-year program at Mechinat HaEmek. That's where I met Adi. On the evening of my birthday, I came back to my room to find a small cake and a letter from Adi waiting for me. It felt like the beginning of our love story.

Throughout that year and in those that followed, our friendship grew, evolving and maturing with the changes in our lives. Seven years ago, I moved to Be'er Sheva, and Adi moved to Holit, 50 minutes west, on the border of the Gaza Strip. Sometimes, when we wanted to be with family on Friday nights but didn't feel like driving to our parents', we would go to Adi and Anani. They were our home away from home.

Whenever I talk about Adi, I worry that I won't manage to fully capture who she was. I remember, when we first found out she had been murdered, I cried for two whole days, and I kept thinking – we have to write everything down! What if we forget? What if we don't remember it all?

My Adi

Adi and I were relentless nerds. Three weeks after I gave birth, I was looking for ways to pass the long hours of nursing, so Adi sent me an article about breastfeeding in the medieval Jewish community. Honestly, the things she would send me... That was our space where we were free to be ourselves, where no one would call me pretentious. Our conversations were filled with wordplay and references. That place where my deepest thoughts meet texts – this was our language.

Adi was a very deep person. People often talk about her calmness, wisdom, and ability to listen. Whatever you needed, she would be there for you. I think that's one of the reasons her loss hit people so hard. She loved many things, and in everything she did – she excelled. She was an athlete and a musician, and she graduated with honors with a master's degree in chemical engineering. A lot of people looked up to her because she was truly kind, smart, and successful by any measure, but she didn't see herself that way. She always felt that this image didn't relate to who she really was.

We would talk on Fridays on the phone while cleaning and cooking. That was our time. We could chat for an hour, 'tossing words to the wind'. And sometimes we would just stay on the line in silence. I remember one conversation; I had just finished doing the dishes and was putting the rag down on the

counter, folding it into three sections, and suddenly I said to her, 'You won't believe what I just did. I've become my mother! Why did I fold it into three?!' She would say, 'Today, I organized all the containers by size, and then I arranged the lids the same way so they would be easy to match.' We had moments like that all the time, and we would laugh about how we were becoming like our mothers.

I think grief has many facets. There are so many places in my life where Adi is missing and so many moments that I know we should have experienced together. I'm learning, through the pain, to recognize those places where she had no substitute. Those phone calls, and that home away from home – there's no substitute for that. Adi was an exceptional person with God-given abilities and a purpose in the world. Truly something unique. But for me, she was the person I could talk to for hours on the phone about a dishrag.

Adi and I had been through a lot together, over the years. My journey to motherhood wasn't easy and when Yarden came along, it felt like we had reached a kind of fulfillment – we were finally going to raise our children together. But the last time I saw Adi was five days before he was born.

October 7th

On the morning of Saturday, October 7th, Adi was home alone with Negev (3.5) and Eshel (4 months). Anani was on a hike with friends in Nirim when the attacks began. He was the only one among them with a weapon, and for hours they hid in a wadi while he protected them until help arrived. During that time, Adi took the children into the safe room. Around 11:00 AM, she took a rifle out of the safe and called Anani to learn how to operate it. They exchanged a few words and then hung up. Negev later reported that "bad soldiers" arrived at the house, that Mom fought them, and then fell down. Throughout this time, the children had remained hidden. We now know that Adi killed one terrorist before she herself was killed.

The children were kidnapped along with their neighbor, Avital, and marched to Gaza. Eshel had difficulty breathing after inhaling gunpowder, and Negev had shrapnel in his leg. A few meters before crossing the border into Gaza, the terrorists released them. Avital took the children and walked with them back to Holit where, a few hours later, they reunited with Anani.

On that Saturday morning, I was at my parents' house for Simchat Torah with my newborn baby. The whole family was there. Like everyone else, at first, we didn't grasp the magnitude of the event. Adi wasn't answering her phone. At 1:00 PM I texted Anani, asking him to just tell me that Adi and the kids were okay. He replied, 'I don't know yet; I don't know anything.' We waited for answers and simply prayed. We imagined Adi was hiding in some bushes. Meanwhile, on Saturday afternoon, my brothers all put on their uniforms and left. Later, we learned that during those first days – and the days that followed – my brothers were recovering bodies in Be'eri and combating terrorists. Ran, my partner, was coming and going from the south while I stayed with my parents, who were in a state of extreme anxiety over my brothers.

For two days, no one knew what had happened to Adi. On October 9th, her body was found booby-trapped and hidden in the safe room, where she was killed.

I think people have the need to label someone as one specific thing; they want to tell a story. In the media, they love to portray Adi as the heroine, the lioness who protected her children with her life. And

that's certainly true. But when I think about Adi's last moments, I can't think about the heroism in that situation. I can only think about her terror – the terror of the little girl facing the threat of death, the terror of a mother for her children, the thoughts about her life that must have crossed her mind on the brink of death. I wouldn't want to take that away from her, that sense of self.

Grief, anxiety, and routine

After the *shivah* was over, we returned to Be'er Sheva. I was on maternity leave and Ran, my partner, went back to work. I was home alone with a baby, with sirens going off three times a day, while all four of my siblings were off fighting in life-threatening places – first on the southern border and then deep inside Gaza. At any given time, at least one of them would be unreachable. Those were long months of anxiety for their lives and our existence. My grief was... not suspended, but intertwined with it. I cried all the time, always for a different reason. It was like emotional chaos.

In February, I went back to work and began to reintegrate into the world. In March, the last of my siblings was discharged and now they are trying to pick up the pieces. My friends [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) who served in the reserves are all dealing with PTSD; they walk around with a glazed look in their eyes, existential anxiety, a sense of futility, and fear.

In search for meaning

From the day I learned Adi was gone, I've felt a need to imbue all of this with meaning. I don't know what God had planned; I don't know why He took her, I don't know why the children have to grow up without a mother. It's bigger than me. I hope there's some plan for everything we're going through, and I know it's possible that there is none. It's also possible that there is no God, but I prefer to be on the side that hopes there is – now more than ever.

Adi is no longer here; the price has already been paid. So what I take from this, the meaning I choose to infuse into my life, is to be joyful. I choose to be grateful for what I have, I choose to be thankful for Adi's beautiful children who are still here, surrounded by their loving father and family. To celebrate what they created – the life they built, the fields they cultivated – and work to rehabilitate this place. I have no idea how, but I feel that these are the tasks required of us. Otherwise, it really is all meaningless. And the thought of a person dying without meaning is unbearable. I feel we have to build back better. I guess I'm optimistic, and I feel that this is part of my grieving process for her: to be optimistic and hope for the best.



Living with her, without her

Many years ago, Adi gave me a coffee set. All the cups have broken since then, but one. That cup is now in my kitchen. During the week of her birthday, everyone who visited me and asked for an espresso received it in Adi Vital's cup.

I try to find moments like these, to allow her to be with us. Then sometimes I tell myself – but she's gone, do you understand? But I do understand. I know with every fiber of my being that she's no longer here. And still, though she's gone, I try to live with her and not leave her behind.

I try to let her in, to remember her in small moments. And I'm learning, with time, to release the need to write everything down.