

ISRAEL FROM THE INSIDE

with **DANIEL GORDIS**

"Don't send your kid to the army without a second passport." Heart-filled joy for Edan Alexander can't lighten the heavy hearts....

A photo from an L&D ward in a hospital, a Facebook post from a former Prime Minister, and first, thoughts on our dented sovereignty.

Daniel Gordis May 13



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I remember America's bicentennial mostly because of the celebration that didn't happen.

It was, of course, July 4, 1976, and at Camp Ramah, we were gearing up for a serious celebration. The dining room would going to be decked in red, white and blue. There would be fried chicken and French fries. American flags. The works.

Except, at least to my recollection, it didn't happen. Or if it did, I no longer remember it because of the moment that the camp director got everyone together on the huge grassy hill that lies at the center of camp.

Except for Kabbalat Shabbat on Friday nights, we almost never gathered as a camp. Thus, when word spread that the entire camp was being called together, no one knew why (forget cell phones—there was hardly a working TV in camp). But there we were, almost a thousand of us campers and staff, seated on the grass and wondering. Then, Dr. Yissi Spiegler, who was the acting director of camp that summer, with a voice that was close to breaking, told us what had just happened hours earlier in Entebbe. It was just about half a century ago, but I still remember the timber of his cracking and emotional voice as if it were yesterday.

And I remember how we felt as we dispersed.

We were young and we were lucky—it had never been hard to be a Jew in the US during our lifetimes. Still, it suddenly felt different to be a Jew because there was an Israel. If you were a Jew, Israel had your back.

If you were a Jew, Israel would save you. Even as far away as Entebbe.

The contrast between those feelings a century ago and the feelings washing across Israel today could not be more stark.

"Don't send your kid to the army without a second passport," countless comments on Israeli social media have said in one form or another. Because, the point is, it's not the Israeli passport that got Edan Alexander out of his hellish captivity at the hands of barbarian savages. It was his American passport.

"I remember when an Israeli passport was considered a powerful document," one father of a soldier whose son's body is being held by Hamas said on the radio yesterday." He didn't have to finish the thought.

Despite the relief, delight and gratitude that Edan Alexander has been released and saved, feelings here are very complex. They're complex because it feels like our sovereignty has gotten dented, again and again, in recent weeks and in the months before. It took the Jews many, many, many centuries to reclaim sovereignty after we lost it in 70 CE. Yet while we still thankfully have it, sovereignty today feels nothing at all like it did in July 1976.

Why is that? Because Israelis cannot help but notice that:

- It is Donald Trump who got all the hostages in the latest releases out, and he also got Edan Alexander out. Bibi Netanyahu couldn't. (How hard he has tried is a matter of some debate here.) No one else in this country managed to do it. We've come a long, sad way from Entebbe.
- What did Donald Trump promise Hamas in exchange for this? We don't know. Will we ever? Probably. Whatever it was, it was likely something that is going to make us unhappy. And, we should note, to make this happen, the US crossed a red line that the US itself had drawn: Until recently, the United States had never engaged in direct negotiations with Hamas. This policy stemmed from Hamas being designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. State Department in 1997, leading to a longstanding stance of avoiding direct contact. That all ended in early 2025, when Trump decided to get the American hostages out.
- Speaking of crossing red lines, aside from all the legal issues raised by the "gift" of Qatar's gift of a \$400M airplane to Trump, it's worth recalling that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, one of the masterminds of 9/11, originally escaped US authorities as a result thanks to the Qatari regime tipping him off.

But despite all that, Qatar is kosher now, while Israel is sidelined.

And as the US is cozying up to Qatar and the Hamas terrorists (and October 7th massacre) it has long funded:

- Trump cut a deal with the Houthis in which they promised to stop attacking ship traffic in the Red Sea, but did not make any similar assurances about not attacking Israel.
- The US is negotiating a deal with Iran that may or may not be bad, but Israel is out in the cold on this one, too. What's being cooked up, the people in Israel who matter apparently do not know.
- Bibi & Co were fairly confident that Trump & Co would either join Israel in an attack on Iran, or at least give Israel the green light. But nope—Bibi came back from that trip to the White House empty-handed.

- The negotiations about Edan Alexander happened behind Israel's back. Because Trump didn't want Israel sabotaging the negotiations? Perhaps. Because Trump is trying to get Bibi to understand who's really in charge? Perhaps.
- Is Trump now going to put a stop to the war in Gaza (Israel obviously cannot continue it if he shuts down the arms pipeline) and in the process, get the rest of the hostages out? A majority of Israelis, polls show, favor ending the war to get the hostages out (we can start the war again whenever we need to), but that poll assumed that the decision would be Israel's. Do most Israelis feel good about the resolution being imposed on Israel by a country whose policies no one can predict?
- The United States badly wants a deal that will bring Saudi Arabia more into the orbit of the West. As part of that, the Saudis were widely expected to begin normalization of relations with Israel, but they have also said that they will not do that as long as the Gaza war continues. Trump needs the Saudi deal for the Nobel Prize he wants. It used to be thought that Bibi would want it for his legacy, but it increasingly appears that he's inclined to keep his coalition together for the short term, rather than tend to his image in the history books. Will Trump then make a Saudi deal without including Israel? Will he force the end of the war in order to get that deal?

No matter how you skin this cat, Israeli sovereignty is no longer looking like the shiny car that just got driven off the lot. It looks a lot more dented, a lot more rusted.

And while everyone here is thrilled that Edan Alexander is free, people here cannot help but notice that when we negotiated releases, our hostages were subjected to repulsive and frightening ceremonies in which they were forced to stand on stages, to get out of cars amid an ominously threatening crowd.

When the Trump administration did the deal, there was no ceremony. No public humiliation. Edan Alexander was simply handed over to the Red Cross, as would have happened in the previous instances, if only Hamas feared us more than it does.

So this is a joyous day, but a complicated one, too. Which brings us to the photo above.

We've mentioned Hanoach Daum and the truly extraordinary work he's been doing since the war began in the past, and we'll have more about his contributions in the future.

For today, though, just this post of his on Facebook in which his two-lines of text say everything:

“When dad comes to the delivery room from his fifth round of reserve service ... Mazal tov,



Hero. Mazal tov to the Heroine, too.

”

Guns and newborns.

Dented though our sovereignty is, most of us believe we’re going to bounce back. Not tonight, not tomorrow. And not next month. But sometime.

And when we do, it will be because of mom’s and dad’s like that ... and the values on which this baby will obviously be raised.

Hanoch Daum - חנוך דאום

כשהאבא מגיע לחדר היולדות מהסבב החמישי...
מזל טוב גיבור. ותודה גם לגיבורה ❤️



And finally for today, [a Facebook post](#) by former Prime Minister Naftali Bennet, who’s making a point of letting Israelis know that he gets it—this is a wounded and hurting

country. Only one of the women in the photo below, taken as they're hiding from Hamas at the Nova Festival, looks petrified, but they all were.

And here's what one of them had to say, which Bennett (who is more than edging his way back into the public sphere) believed was worthy of sharing far and wide, so Israelis will know, so we'll understand, so we'll do the right thing.

Despite everything above, despite the sadness and the heaviness, the wellspring of Israeli goodness and decency, the nature of the human capital, is often beyond description.

Sooner or later, that is what is going to make all the difference.



Here's an (AI generated) translation:

Malat Ben Haim is a survivor from the Nova [festival]. Like many others, she suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Here are important things she wrote that enlightened me and are worth everyone knowing regarding people who suffer from PTSD:

Things I've Learned Since I Have PTSD, and I Wish Everyone Would Understand

When you go through a severe traumatic experience, the brain actually changes itself. The neural pathways that were formed over a lifetime get disrupted, and even when returning to “normal” situations, the brain interprets things through the lens of the traumatic experience. All of this is meant to protect us, but sometimes it feels like it's ruining my life.

Our reactions-anxiety, deep sadness, crying, fear, or paralysis-sometimes seem exaggerated, and it's hard for outsiders not to think we're just being dramatic. Phrases like “You're in a safe place, there's no reason to be stressed” aren't enough to calm or pull someone out of distress. As I explained, our brains have physically changed. Our reactions, however extreme, are completely real and require deeper therapeutic tools than the simple explanations we're used to giving a friend who's anxious or sad. Logic alone won't get us out of it. Our brains have already learned that even in “safe places” like home or a festival, real danger can be experienced.

Most of the time, my brain is busy with the trauma. It makes me impatient. I don't want to be like this, but the truth is that almost every situation overwhelms my brain and heart so much that I don't have the energy to meet or even talk to people. When I'm anxious, I can come across as short, unfriendly, or aggressive. It's not personal against anyone. These are involuntary reactions that stem from a mistaken interpretation of reality that I have no control over.

Almost anything will make my brain think I'm in distress, and then I'll either flee, attack, or freeze. Freezing can look like difficulty moving or being unable to speak. It's a horrible feeling because in those moments I feel trapped inside myself. I want to scream a lot of things, I want tissues, water, a hug, and to run away. But I'm frozen and terrified.

Every time I leave the house, every social encounter, every task-requires five times more energy from me than before. There are days when answering WhatsApp, showering, or making myself coffee overwhelms me and feels impossible. On those days, I judge myself harshly, which exhausts me even more. And so a day or a week can go by where I'm in a loop—not leaving the house, not answering, not showering, not even managing to get myself water. And I keep thinking—what's wrong with me? Just get up and get some water. But then another three hours pass on the couch. And I have no energy. Over time, I try to at least learn not to hate myself for it.

It's important to remember—during an extreme reaction, you can't expect to have a productive conversation or learn how to help. It's not recommended to get into a discussion or argument. If you know someone with PTSD, try to learn how to help them on a *trigger-free day* so that when triggers happen, you can function well without asking a lot of questions to the person in distress. And despite all the difficulty—try not to take offense or take anything personally. If I ran away, protect me and make sure I'm in a safe place. If I said something hurtful, try to see it as an expression of distress, not an attempt to hurt. It's hard, but it can save relationships.

Sometimes I need people to believe in me and show me that I have the strength to get up. Much more often, I need help not to criticize myself—not to feel so broken. And I always need people to be aware of how sensitive I am and to try to be considerate, or at least understand, when I react extremely.

If you see yourself in my descriptions—I'm sending a hug and hope I helped normalize things a bit.

If you know someone with PTSD, I hope this helps you be there for them.



Share so more people can learn about the situation of a third of our country.