

# A War of Young People: Voices and Perspectives from Emerging Israeli Leaders

First-Person Accounts From Young Israelis  
October 2023 to February 2024



THE  
BRONFMAN  
FELLOWSHIP



# INTRODUCTION

**In these distressing times,** as we wade through a flood of images and news and often don't know whom to trust, it is crucially important to hear the honest, unfiltered accounts of those who are directly impacted by the war. Since October 7, The Brönfman Fellowship has been compiling first-person accounts written by young Israelis who are Fellows and alumni of our Israeli program, Amitei Bronfman. In addition to sharing their experiences with our community, we have partnered with *The Forward*, the Jewish news outlet, to amplify their voices and help to demonstrate the complexity and multi-faceted nature of Israeli society to a wider audience.

**THIS BOOKLET CONTAINS 17 FIRST-PERSON ACCOUNTS WRITTEN BY YOUNG ISRAELIS BETWEEN OCTOBER 17, 2023 AND FEBRUARY 11, 2024.**

Full of pain, anxiety, and grief, they are also testaments to the strength of young Israelis and to the hopes they have for their future.







OCTOBER 17, 2023

# Adi Dardikman '11

29 years old

**My name is Adi Dardikman.** I am a clinical psychology student at Tel Aviv University. In normal times, I spend most of my time on my academic studies and at an internship at a mental health clinic in Jaffa, working as a research assistant. On the horrible day when the war began, I was in Greece, which was supposed to be the start of our wedding week. [Adi is engaged to be married to Max Weiss, an American alum from 2011 whom she first met during their Bronfman mifgash.] Instead, we woke up to a dark and unimaginable reality.

Our flight that evening was canceled, and we spent the early days of the war in Athens, glued to the news.

On Tuesday evening I landed in Israel and by Wednesday I had already joined my friends from my clinical psychology studies at Kfar Maccabiah Hotel, one of the hotels hosting families from the south and the Otef Gaza. Kfar Maccabiah turned into a temporary city, filled with volunteers, activities, and food; a point of light in the midst of a great darkness. Thanks to a community full of determination, we integrated into the mental health system operation on-site. We helped bring order to the chaos and organize the dozens of independent therapists who arrived at the location. We made sure that each therapist had the appropriate qualifications, facilitated efficient documentation, and organized communication between the hotel guests and the therapists. In the four days we were there, over 100 therapy sessions were conducted.

Once official government bodies finally took responsibility for managing the mental health situation, I actively began looking for other hotels with fewer volunteers, where we could bring a bit of the light we experienced at Kfar Maccabiah. In recent days, my fellow students and I went to Sea Tower Hotel in Tel Aviv, which also hosts families from the south. We set up a children's club and even managed to collect donations of art supplies and games. The situation on the ground

changes every day, and we assess where we are needed and where children and parents would greatly appreciate a few hours of distraction and relief.

In recent days, I experienced the spirit of Israeli volunteerism up close. While it can be difficult to find a place to volunteer because many are already filled with other good-hearted people, our

post seeking donations for children's games received dozens of responses within less than an hour (we ended up having to turn some of them away). Because of this immediate response from so many, when requesting assistance or volunteers, every inquiry becomes irrelevant within hours. **But what amazed me most of all was not just the willingness to help but the ability of the Israeli public, organizations, and private citizens to stand on their own two feet even in times of crisis, to organize independently, and to fill all the gaps and vacuums created by the shock and by the government's slow response. Our strength as a community and as a nation gives me a lot of hope in the midst of great pain. ■**

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and as a nation gives me  
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OCTOBER 17, 2023

## Paz Bendek '13

27 years old

**Hi, I am Paz from 2013.** Normally, I am a high school teacher of History and Biblical Studies. This year I am also serving as one of the *manchim* (facilitators) for the Israeli Amitim group, alongside the remarkable Nurit.

Last Saturday morning, I awoke in my home in Jerusalem to the wailing sirens signaling a rocket attack. Soon it became apparent that my aunt and uncle, who live in Kibbutz Kfar Aza near the Gaza border, were under a serious terrorist attack. My aunt miraculously survived, rescued after 26 hours of hiding, some of the time in a closet, while Hamas terrorists ravaged her home and fired indiscriminately. **Tragically, my uncle, who had left the house just minutes before the attack, was found dead in his car near the Kibbutz gate. We await the return of his body for a proper burial.**

The past week has been primarily devoted to supporting and comforting my aunt and cousins, who are dealing with shock and grief. With her house destroyed, my aunt has found refuge in my parents' home, where our extended family has gathered to support each other.

Simultaneously, my brother has been drafted, and I am waiting for my own call, which could come at any moment. Nurit and I contacted all the Amitim to ensure their safety. Hearing their voices provided a much needed morale boost. We plan to meet them all in a Zoom session this week. I also connect with my high school students on Zoom daily, to ensure their well-being and maintain a sense of routine amidst the chaos.

**Amidst these challenges, what gives me hope is witnessing the deep involvement of the Amitim, who are in 12th grade. Many of them are actively participating in diverse initiatives, aiding evacuated**

**residents, preparing hot meals for soldiers, and providing essential equipment. Their dedication inspires me and strengthens my belief in the goodness of the young people in our country, even in the face of serious adversity. ■**

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OCTOBER 25, 2023

## Tali Griksharts '19

21 years old

**On Saturday morning,** October 7th, I was with my family on a vacation in Lithuania. After nearly four months of traveling on my own in the United States after completing my army service, I was reunited with my family for a vacation. The deep relaxation during traveling helped me clarify my goals for this year. I was supposed to move into a new apartment in Tel Aviv that I had just signed a lease for and I was starting flight attendant training.

Everything seemed very certain and promising after two years of military service.

On that Saturday morning, one of my friends wrote to me, "let me know when you realize there's a war, and give me a call." I couldn't believe what I was reading, what I was seeing.

I read that they took over a unit in Gaza, conducted a massacre in all the kibbutzim, and the army was nowhere to be found. We knew we would return to Israel, and I knew I would return to the reserves. After returning to Israel, I sat and watched the news all day. I couldn't function. Sometimes I went out in the city and sat with friends. We watched Joe Biden's speech and we were moved. We hugged a friend who fell apart in our arms after burying her partner.

The feeling of destruction and helplessness burned within me. The anger. On the fifth day of the war, I was called to reserve duty, and I went to one of the bases in the south. I helped there for a few days, and then they told me that I had to go to the unit next to the Gaza border to assist them. My role was to instruct on a specific system, a very important one. I went, frightened... I passed by the area where the massacre

in R'eim happened. I looked at the body of a terrorist, blood in the bathroom. **I never imagined in my worst nightmares that I would be in a place where 260 people were murdered and others were kidnapped to Gaza. I documented what I saw.**

The emotional detachment accompanied me in the daily work. We met people who told us about what happened in the unit, how they hid when the terrorists arrived.

Now, I'm on a 24 hours "recharge" day in Tel Aviv. The return to normal life, the understanding that I have a choice, to continue my regular life, to live in my apartment, and try to work in a safe place instead of going to the most dangerous place in the country.

Instead of walking cautiously to avoid mortar shells, instead of helping in the effort to recover the bodies, instead of hearing from soldiers that they are afraid to die in Gaza.

But now, when I am faced with whether to stay in Tel Aviv for another day or go, I can't help but answer the call. You see, I'm helping the commanders. The commanders responsible for the lives of my friends who are currently in the field, some in the reserves, some in the regular army. The voice calling me says to protect them. **There's a saying that goes: "We need to ask ourselves what the world demands of us at this moment." At this moment, the world demands that I leave everything and go to the front line. ■**



NOVEMBER 3, 2023

## Gaia Zano '23

17 years old

Since the start of the war, I have primarily tried to keep myself busy. I volunteer. Today in Israel, everywhere you look there's a place to help out, and a line of people who want to lend a hand. I continue to study, because in the area where I live there aren't, at the moment, missiles. I work out [exercise], because that helps my anxiety, and I bury myself in Twitter, listen, read, and become irritated by the nonsense of people for whom the connection between themselves and the war is completely random.

A thought that always accompanies me in recent weeks is of that of one of my friends who is at the front, who was inducted into combat duty last year. On the morning of October 7th, she was on her base near Gaza. They [the terrorists] didn't gain control of her base, but she lost friends, people with whom she worked. **My friend, perhaps the best person I know, is awesome, friendly, full of sensitivity and compassion. She is being forced to see horrors; she is being forced to fight and to protect herself and others. For my friend, it doesn't matter what happens now—she won't return as the same person at the end of the war. The loss of innocence, which she and the entire state experienced collectively, is the thing that I have been mourning since the start of the war.**

Israel is currently in mourning. It feels like wherever you look, you see death. My school has lost seven alumni since the start of the war. Each person who was murdered was so good, so full of life. ■

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NOVEMBER 3, 2023

## Shaked Kramer '23

17 years old

**The war caught us all** off guard. Five missiles fell on my town, damaging houses and cars, but luckily no one here was harmed. The sirens, the noises of planes and missiles falling (we call this the “booms”), and grief: this has accompanied us all every day since October 7th. We have felt helpless because of this horrible situation, so we did and are still doing our best to try and contribute to the war effort.

*“For my part, I started a WhatsApp group for teens in my small town who want to volunteer, and it quickly grew to around 500 members.*

*In this group, we visit the elderly, and mainly connect people who need babysitters, dog sitters, help in agriculture, or a helping hand around the house, to teens that want to help, and we don't charge for it.”*

**For my part, I started a WhatsApp group for teens in my small town who want to volunteer, and it quickly grew to around 500 members. In this group, we visit the elderly, and mainly connect people who need babysitters, dog sitters, help in agriculture, or a helping hand around the house, to teens that want to help, and we don't charge for it.** On top of all that, a friend and I organized a food donation program for soldiers, and we ended up sending them about 70 boxes filled with hot, hearty, nutritious meals. We've also been baking cakes and pastries for families with members serving in the army, reserves, or police force. But even with all these good deeds, things are still so hard... Two weeks ago, my father volunteered for the army. Suddenly, from being in the position of baking cakes for other families, my family was receiving them. The change was weird and felt unbelievable. I considered stopping volunteering and doing more to help my mother with the responsibilities at home but decided to try and combine the two.

As a result, last week my friends and I organized activities for the kids in the shelters at our school. It's a way to ease the load on parents during these tough times. At my school, Keshet High School in Mazkeret BatyaBatia, we have been having Zoom meetings with people all over the world to try and explain to them what we are going through. All these acts of kindness not only lighten the load, but they also show the incredible strength of unity. ■



NOVEMBER 17, 2023

## Irit Feingold '06

34 years old

I closed my eyes and I remembered that on Friday, the day before the very nature of our lives changed, we went to the beach.

After a week of nights that weren't nights, I closed my eyes and I remembered us at the beach.

I remembered the feeling of slick shards of seashells on the soles of my feet with every step that we walked. I remembered the weight of the sand that Ayala-Almaz, my daughter, took from the shallow water and spread on my arms and thighs. I remembered the whisper of the waves and the quiet hush that took over everything when I dove into the water as the three of us entered the depths. I remembered the deep sigh that escaped from me when I saw David and Ayala-Almaz coming out of the water, sitting themselves down on the blanket that we spread out and gobbling up watermelon covered in sand. I remembered the pleasant sun of early October that caressed me and helped me believe that maybe there's some order to my private universe. I remembered all of this and, finally, I succeeded in sleeping.

I've already succeeded in managing without David for a month; he's in the reserves and I am succeeding at managing. There are so many around me who have worse situations than I do, so the proportion [of my burden] or guilt helps me to hold on most of the time. My time during the days moves in small, if extreme, movements. I am solely responsible for Ayala-Almaz now, and every decision that I make feels like it's life or death. Usually, I hope that she'll make the decision instead of me. "So, we'll make hot porridge? Yes! You wouldn't prefer a pancake? Yes! So, yes to a pancake? No! So, back to porridge? Porr...no...porr." In the end, she throws it all on the floor anyway. "And what do you say to the idea of going back home to sleep? Even if there's no shelter? You'll forgive me if there's a siren and we don't have any place to hide?" I'm not even able to mention the real fear of sleeping alone at home after October 7th.

The need to cry the cries of the hostages burns within me. Since this mess began, I haven't been able to get to the tent encampment protest in Tel Aviv, and when I heard that there was a demonstration in Jerusalem, I felt compelled to go. It wasn't pleasant for me to ask my mother to watch Ayelet-Almaz again, so I decided to bring her with me.

We got there at the end of a packed day, but she became so curious about the event. We stood on the side of the first crowd, Reform rabbis made Havdalah, and it was nice to hear the voices and to feel part of something spiritual. At some point, Ayala-Almaz saw the poster with the photos of all thirty kidnapped children. Photos of faces, one next to another.

"Oy! *Dim! Dim!*" [part of the word for children, "*yeladim*"]. She pointed at the poster and waved her hands excitedly!! I kissed her forehead and said to her that we'll all be happy to meet the children. "*Dim! Dim! Come!*" She put her hands up and signaled them to come to her. "*Dim! Take mah-mah!*" [baby talk for 'pacifier' in Hebrew]. She took her pacifier out of her mouth and pointed it towards the photos. I kissed her again and told her that she is a kind child and a good friend.

At the same time, I felt tremendous distress. I understood that I had exposed her to too much. That suddenly the pressure of recent weeks, the fears and worries that surrounded me had faces and significance. She figured out the puzzle. Now she understands.

**We left and I was sure that she would doze off in the car in a second, but the whole drive, she wept bitterly. At first, I thought that maybe that's how all of the children in Gaza are crying now. But after a few moments, I understood that she was crying the cries of the mothers. My daughter has a special soul; I need to protect her more. ■**





NOVEMBER 17, 2023

# Peleg Bar On '17

23 years old

A month has passed since October 7, but it feels like much longer. On the other hand, I feel like only a moment has passed—the days are jumbled together into a blurry stain.

And despite that, after a month, a kind of emergency routine begins: **We make plans, knowing that any moment they might change—because of a telephone conversation from a partner that informs you that he was granted a surprise leave [to come home], or God forbid because of a bad notification, or simply because, by mistake, you see a horrifying video clip that sticks with you, and now you don't have the strength to leave your bed.**

I went back home to live with my parents. My husband has been on reserve duty since Simchat Torah. I pass my time between reserve duty in the Tel Aviv military base and visits with my partner's family (both my sisters-in-law live there now, each of them alone with a small child), and the rest of the time I try to fill with small activities that give me strength: meeting up with friends, writing, and going out for walks in the community.

This week on Monday, I was at my cousin's bris [ritual circumcision]. His father is on reserve duty now, he came out on leave for the birth and on the evening after the bris he already had to return to the army. The bris was held on a gorgeous farm. I met up with my extended family and all of us in a celebratory and unburdened mood. We were excited to see the new baby and emotional about the name that they chose: Neta Oz [seedling of strength, "Oz" specifically references the communities near Gaza that were targeted on October 7th]. All of the men at the bris were walking around with their guns, some of them also wearing uniforms—they just got out and they were already about to return [to their bases].

When they sat to eat after the bris, my aunt told the story of a friend of hers from a kibbutz in the Gaza Envelope, who survived hell and started to describe what she'd been through, and my uncle signaled to her to stop, and whispered to her that this wasn't the time [for that story]. It turns out that some of the guests who sat with us at the same table were themselves survivors of Kfar Aza.

We returned from the bris with air in our souls, full of the beauty of the farm, with the sweetness of family, and in wonder at the new life.

That same night, I saw in my friend's Instagram story that the soldier who I heard was killed this morning in Gaza is her brother-in-law. It scared me a lot. She's my age; like me, both her husband and brothers-in-law are conscripted, we're so similar! It suddenly turns out that this name, that in my head and my heart had joined the endless list of people killed since October 7th, to which I'd almost become indifferent: he's someone's brother-in-law, the brother-in-law of someone who could have been me.

A few moments later, it was publicized that the soldier Ori Megidish was freed through military action and Instagram stories filled with photos of her, with emotional words, joy and pride.

I don't know how to explain why this, specifically, suddenly broke me.

Everything is so mixed up together. After October 7th, it will take a long time until we'll be able to once again be happy with truly all of our hearts. Now, even what makes us happy is so diluted with sadness.

On the very same night that the entire country is celebrating a small, miraculous victory, one family just got awful news. At the same time as lives are beginning, so many lives are ending. I don't know what's truer—all of this death or the throbbing life. And sometimes it's so hard to hold both of them at once.

It's true, there's still beauty in the world, babies like our Neta Oz are still born, I'm still holding tightly onto the love of my partner, to our life. But I sometimes feel like holding tightly to one another is closing our eyes to the horror and suffering, to the hurt and broken hearts, to the cries of the families of the hostages. Sometimes I feel guilty for my desire to make things better for myself, this desire that compels me to close my eyes briefly, and to just pray that I never endure the suffering of those suffering now.

The mind works overtime; pressure in the chest does not relent. When I am successful, I try to focus only on what is happening now: on my breath, to inhale, to hold it, and then to release. I focus on the knowledge of what is correct now: my partner being in a safe space; my coffee; my mother's hug; my nephew's sweet baby scent.

**It's all true: the death and the life, the evil and the beauty. But I don't have time to involve myself with it now, now I'm just living, day after day, moment following moment. ■**



NOVEMBER 24, 2023

## Tamar Shalem '10

30 years old

If you ask me how I am now, then, in all likelihood, I'll answer, "Fine" in an optimistic manner, quietly and tersely, and I'll pull my shoulders up.

But the truth is that nothing is fine. For a month now, I've been raising my son Kedem alone, because my partner is at the Lebanon border. Yes, war is taking place there now, also—not a tense calm and not intermittent rockets, but actual war.

Between moments of anxiety and worry about my partner (and my brother-in-law, my cousin, my husband's nephew and more and more people who are situated at the front and about whom I worry all the time), the national mourning also bursts out; really it is omnipresent. There are days when the mourning is so heavy that it's impossible to breathe. The air is physically so dense and tough that it's impossible to expand the lungs to take a breath, not even a very small one. Because the human evil spread out over the land and consumed every piece of good, of beauty, and of quiet. And how can we possibly ever go back to being anything like we were before that terrible Shabbat?

A week and a half ago, my close friend was notified that his father-in-law and mother-in-law's bodies were identified among the killed in Kfar Aza. Yes, you're reading that correctly: it took more than two and a half weeks to locate and identify their bodies. And, yes, there are still tens of bodies that have not yet been identified. When I went to offer condolences to my friend and his wife on their personal loss, I couldn't find any words of comfort.

Because I, myself, don't find any points of hope or light amidst the great darkness. Thus, I am so not fine.

There are certain moments when I succeed in laughing and smiling, mostly thanks to my child who still doesn't understand anything but manages to light up my world. But then I look at him and understand that he is not yet two years old, but it's been a month since he saw his father. Not to mention that he doesn't sleep in his bed and

doesn't play with his friends, because we relocated to live with my parents since that Shabbat. And then I remember that it's nothing and inconsequential. It's nonsense. We're alive and that's what's important! Everything else shrinks and disappears compared to that. But again, there's no air. It's impossible to breathe.

**The hardest thing to recognize is that our lives will never be the same again. Everything changed. Forever.** There's no more security, not even inside my house. The only thing I can think about is how I would block the door if terrorists tried to burst in. And that's only the tip of the iceberg of the new fears that have been created inside me since that dark Shabbat.

If only it were wrapped up in one Shabbat! But we've been at war for a month already, and we don't know how long it will continue, the other costs it will exact from us, and how we'll come out on the other side of it. I remember in the first week, I thought to myself that certainly, my partner will return by Kedem's birthday in January and we'll celebrate it together. We will make a big, festive party. Yet suddenly I'm uncertain that it will happen.

And it's impossible to breathe. And nothing is fine. And what of the young children who were kidnapped? No, no, I must not think of them. That's a danger zone. There, it's not just that there isn't air—there, one also can't sleep, or eat, or function at all.

This is my life. I don't know if it will ever look different, and if so, how it will be. I can only hope that I'll be able to, once again, feel the faith that I had before, that there can be good here. ■

*"The hardest thing to recognize is that our lives will never be the same again. Everything changed. Forever."*





DECEMBER 8, 2023

## Cana Galpeein '18

22 years old

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.

*“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.”*

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. ■**



DECEMBER 15, 2023

## Shira Rosenak '10

30 years old

**My name is Shira Rosenak**, a Bronfman Fellow from 2010. I appreciate the opportunity to write a little bit and share what is going on in these times.

October 7th shook our very foundations. Banal terms received a new, frightening, threatening meaning: Home. Family. Holiday. Morning. A heavy shadow hovers over everything. Not just terms relating to our personal lives; also communal terms also lost their familiar meaning in this earthquake: Leadership. Army. Education. The breakdown of our public sector led to the flowering of civil initiatives, and I was blessed with the opportunity to be part of one of them.

In normal times, I am the Youth Coordinator at Beit Avi Chai in Jerusalem. Our main work is in experiential-cultural education, which draws inspiration from the treasure trove of Jewish- Israeli culture. One week after October 7th, when Jerusalem was in the process of absorbing thousands of teenagers without a sufficient educational response, the educational staff at Beit Avi Chai welcomed teenagers staying at the hotel across the street to a learning center that was set up in the building. The learning center began as a place to take a break, to breathe and gain strength, and slowly turned into a school framework, with the Ministry of Education now involved in managing the school. School days include lessons from the highest quality teachers (experienced staff, some of whom are retirees who were called upon to return to teaching in a reality where many teachers have been enlisted, and there is a very serious shortage of teachers), as well as experiential workshops led by Beit Avi Chai (carpentry, karate, baking, art, theater – spaces for creativity, for physical work, and for multi-disciplinary expression). **Around 40 teenagers, who were evacuated from the communities around Gaza almost two months ago, come to this learning center each day for four hours that are a break from the hotel and the intensity of life crowded into rooms without privacy.**

Learning together, the personal relationship to each student, the experiential break times that give space for personal expression – all of these enable the teenagers to have a little stability in the midst of an unstable reality. The students who come here were not integrated into the Jerusalem educational frameworks for a variety of reasons. I feel like we are in a bit of an educational laboratory, establishing a school that is adapted precisely to the characteristics of a shifting reality with all of its challenges:

*“Around 40 teenagers, who were evacuated from the communities around Gaza almost two months ago, come to this learning center each day for four hours that are a break from the hotel and the intensity of life crowded into rooms without privacy.”*

**How is it possible to encourage routine learning during this time of unbearable loss of friends and family and classmates who are hostages in Gaza?**

How do we relate to expressions of control and power from students who have lost control of their lives?

How do we relate to smartphones in a class of teenagers for whom a smartphone represents existential security, because smartphones warn them of the need to go to a safe room within seconds?

How do we bring parents back into the educational picture of their children, in situations where the parents have lost their livelihood, their homes, and their families, when living at a hotel, without home or stability, often leads to the breakdown of parental authority?

The teenagers who come here are amazing. They are brave and love life, and they are restoring a sense of control and stability to their lives, taking advantage of any opening that reality allows them. It is a privilege to be part of a team working on this crucial task – creating a beneficial educational routine in a temporary reality.

A concluding note: Coincidentally (or perhaps not), in our team of volunteers there are another three Bronfmanim [alumni of The Bronfman Fellowship] – Ariella Green '19, Shira Benbanji '20, and Maayan Hayim Alexander '22. The Bronfman togetherness shows up in an unexpected place. Our small community within this situation enables us to have a shared educational language and values and a different kind of togetherness. It is special for a random group of alumni from different years, who share a connection that is beyond age and cohort, to act together. ■





DECEMBER 15, 2023

## Rona Gerzon '19

21 years old

**In the last month and a half**, since October 7th, I have had feelings and experiences that are new to me. I never thought I would hear about such horrors. I never imagined that these kinds of events would be etched in my heart at such a young age. I could not have imagined I would feel such a great concern for people whom I never met, but I feel so close to.

Since Simchat Torah, I have slowly gotten back to my routine. At first, each day was different. My friends and I volunteered in different projects and agricultural work. But with time, I went back to work, while at the same time everything that happened is always in my head.

I want to share with you a particular moment from my daily life. One day, I went to Tel Aviv, to the place where the families of the hostages are gathered, because I wanted to express my support as much as possible. I sat there, and I held pictures of three children who were hostages, all from the same family – the Brodutch family, who were taken captive with their mother to Gaza, while their father remained in Israel. Suddenly, two men arrived and stood in front of me, looking at the pictures. One of them began to cry, and only after several minutes did I understand that it was the children's father, Avichai. He said a few words to me and laughed, "They will kill me when they come back and see their pictures everywhere." I felt like my heart was totally crushed - from worry, from pain, from

looking him in the eyes and seeing his helplessness. Today, this morning, when I am writing about this moment, is the morning after Avichai's children and wife were freed from captivity and returned to him, after 51 days of pain and anxiety. And my heart is with all of the people who have not yet been reunited with their families.

I am full of anxiety regarding the situation of my dear friends from Bronfman – such sensitive, gentle, good-hearted men, who are fighting evil, who are fighting with tremendous self-sacrifice in Gaza, already for a long time. I miss them so much. I am also full of worry for all of the hostages who have not yet returned to us, to my great sadness. May they all return already.

I want to pray and ask whoever is able to join me in prayer – for the souls of the survivors of the massacre on the kibbutzim and at the music festival, for the families of the survivors, for the families of the soldiers who have fallen and who have been injured. May we all send them light and love.

*"I also pray that all of us, men and women from all over the world, will soften our hearts, will free ourselves of hatred, and that we will never harden our hearts against the suffering of those who are different from us. I see how much it hurts now to experience the lack of recognition of the pain and suffering that our people are going through. And I know that all people harden their hearts to the pain of the 'other.' But I want to pray that it will be different."*

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JANUARY 5, 2024

# Nurit Barkan-Bocarsly '13

27 years old

**Hello, my name is Nurit; I am 27 years old** and I live in Jerusalem. I am a facilitator for Amitei Bronfman and a history teacher at a high school, which is partially a boarding school, in Jerusalem. I am also doing a master's degree in sociology and anthropology. I was a Bronfman Fellow in 2013.

The reality in Israel today has a deep impact on the personal lives of each one of us, and, of course, on how our Fellowship is run.

On October 8th, we began to understand the situation we were facing. At the time, I was visiting my partner's family in New York, and I called the Amitim (Israeli Fellows), some of whom were on vacations around the world. Very quickly, we heard that all of the Amitim were okay, but many of them had family members who were enlisted to serve in the army, and friends, acquaintances, and relatives who were injured. Among the staff, as well, we have family and friends who were in the line of fire, and some of us have experienced losses.

I returned to Israel that week. I already knew that Israel had experienced a collective crisis on that previous Shabbat, but as soon as I arrived, I understood just how much Israel had changed. Near home in Jerusalem there are many hotels, all of which were full of displaced people from the north and the south. Suddenly, overnight, I became the neighbor of people who had experienced being in the line of fire. A student of mine, who attends the boarding school where I work, is now living in one of the hotels. **Through my conversations with him about his life, and my limited interaction with others who now live in this hotel, I realized that there is a big gap in Israeli society today between those who have a home and a sense of security, and those whose home has become a dangerous place.**

My encounters with my neighbors in the hotels made me understand that, as facilitators for Bronfman, although we always try to show sensitivity even under normal circumstances, now we have to sharpen that sensitivity even further. For some of the Fellows, their homes have become a borderland, or at least close to the border. In general, for the Fellows, the borders have been crossed between the sense of protection with which they lived their lives until now, to an uncertain reality where they do not have control.

In preparation for the Bronfman seminar that was planned for Hanukkah, we thought a lot about how to make the best possible environment in these horrifying times, and how we could be most responsive to people's needs. Through our conversations with the Amitim about their experiences now, we understood that in their personal lives, the Fellows are busy with volunteering in various different frameworks. Therefore, we changed the topic of the seminar and decided to really focus on issues of, and approaches to, choosing to take responsibility. As the Fellows have to decide next year what they will do when they finish high school, this topic is relevant even aside from the current reality.

One of the seminar sessions was with former MK (Knesset Member) Nira Shafek from Kfar Azza. She told of her responsibility to rebuild her community, as well as Israeli society as a whole. She spoke honestly and sensitively about her sense of responsibility. In addition, we met people who feel responsible for totally different aspects of Israeli society and have different approaches to the idea of responsibility. We discussed responsibility to the Torah, to the environment, to the relationship of Jews and Palestinians as neighbors, and to Israeli society in general. We learned texts on the topic of "The poor of your city have priority," and asked the Fellows: What is your city? In what spaces is it important to you to act?

Throughout the seminar, I thought a lot about what my "city" is and what my responsibilities are. As someone who sees herself as invested in and responsible to Israeli society, I feel that there is a lot of work to do to improve it today: gaps between different kinds of peripheries and different kinds of centers, between different sectors, and decisions to make regarding crucial issues of Israeli identity and our relationship with our neighbors.

I feel like one of the most difficult things that I must do today is to hold on to my hope. **Hope for a better reality here seems like almost a radical concept — faith that through hard work and open, honest dialogue we can overcome the challenges facing our divided Israeli society and succeed in changing life in Israel. For me, the meeting between the Amitim was moving and life-affirming.** It reminded me why I hold on to my hope for change in Israeli society. Although there is a lot of work to be done, this is a struggle where I have many partners. ■





JANUARY 5, 2024

## Naama Verter '23

17 years old

From the start of the war on the seventh of October, my home, like many homes in Israel, went through a change. Both my parents were enlisted to reserve service in the army, and at home remained the small group of just my two young brothers and I, who were not enlisted. We are very proud of our parents, and we appreciate their investment and their willingness to contribute to the army and to the country during this time of crisis. We do our best to support them from afar and to be a strong home front for them.

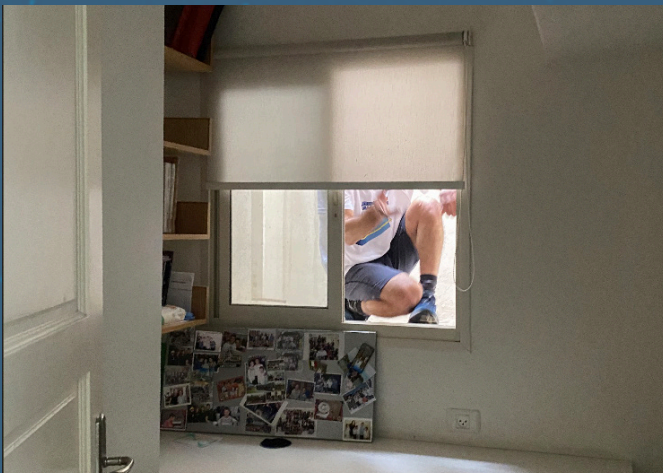
There are moments that we break down, but our belief that this war is just and our pride in their important contribution makes up for everything. We have a supportive family and community. It is nice to feel that people are looking out for us, and that we are loved and taken care of from every direction.

**These two photos (see below) were taken two weeks apart. When I looked at them next to each other, I saw that they represent two opposing poles. One represents routine, and everything that is normal and expected, and the other represents everything that is not.**

In the first photo, which looks like it was staged but was taken completely by chance, my father is

breaking into the window of my older brother's room. The situation itself is strange; why would someone enter his house through the window rather than the door? His face is not visible in the picture. In a certain way, this picture represents the atmosphere in my house during this period. Nothing is conventional. My parents are at home only part of the time, and even when they are physically present, their thoughts sometimes wander to other, far-off places. So their minds are not really present. Their presence itself is not routine or consistent, hence entering the house through the window and not the door.

The second picture is taken at a café where I sat together with my friends. For a moment, everything was normal again. We sat together on a Jerusalem autumn morning, we drank coffee, and we ate breakfast, while having a pleasant conversation about next year and our experiences over the past week. Escapism from this crazy time. Breakfast was once again just breakfast, and coffee was once again just coffee. For a moment, everything seemed to be normal again. May we return to many more moments like this, when this becomes the routine once again. ■





JANUARY 12, 2024

## Alma Klemes '16

25 years old

**My name is Alma Klemes. I am 25 years old,** and I am a student at Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, studying visual communication. I was born in Moshav Mata and grew up in Jerusalem, where I still live now.

The truth is that something happened that I never imagined would happen to me. In recent years, I had spent a lot of time thinking deeply about and developing my political opinions. I succeeded in distancing myself enough that I was able to get a good perspective on what is going on here, in this land where we live. Jerusalem is a place where the conflict becomes intimate. I grew up in a Jewish-Arab school, and I did national service instead of the army. In general, I chose much of my path a bit in opposition to what I saw as generally accepted. I was comfortable in my ideology. I protested everything. I blamed everyone. And then came the 7th of October.

From the distance that I am at now, the 7th of October seems like a small point on the horizon. At first, I woke up in Tel Aviv to the sound of a siren. My partner was determined to get out of bed and quickly run to the public bomb shelter. I was certain that it was just a drill, and I tried to convince him to stay in bed. The second time that we heard the siren, I understood that it was not a drill, and that maybe this morning the missiles really were reaching Tel Aviv.

At 10am, I drove to get my friend that lives close by and does not have a bomb shelter in her building. Afterwards, I made us all shakshuka (an Israeli dish with eggs and tomato sauce), and we watched TV. I felt like the photos I was seeing were taken from a movie, and the people in the photos were actors. Slowly, the shakshuka party broke up, and everyone went home. My partner and I took our bed out of our loft, so that that night, our race to the bomb shelter would be less difficult.

Only three days later, we left our apartment to buy eggs and milk. When we got to the supermarket, the shelves were empty. It was getting close to evening, in a medium-sized supermarket in South Tel Aviv with rotting vegetables, where the sirens had already ceased. Not many people were out on the street, and sometimes we saw unusual sights, such as people who took their dog for a walk wearing a bicycle

helmets, or a couple who left the house with COVID masks, in the spirit of the apocalypse that was happening.

I knew that I would feel most of the weight of the situation only once I finally agreed to go home, to my parent's house on the moshav. I am the oldest child, and I have three younger brothers. One of them was enlisted in the army at this point, and my father had taken him to the army base already, on Shabbat afternoon. Several weeks later, he told us that from the base, they quickly boarded a bus that took them to the Gaza envelope area, where battles were taking place to save the kibbutzim. My brother is shy and introverted, tall and handsome. His presence gives a sense of security. He didn't want to scare my mother with terrifying descriptions of death, so he called home when he could and claimed that his missions were secret.

When his thoughts became overwhelming, he began to share things that he saw and heard, but still with few words. This is my little brother, who serves in a special unit of the army, and we worry for his physical and mental health. When he returned from battle, he spread out all of the many gifts he received – donations that were sent to his battalion. He showed us the laundry bag with a hand-written inscription from the kibbutz that had done his laundry, somewhere in the north where he had been that week. He did not tell us which kibbutz.

In the beginning, my brother who is older than him, but still my younger brother, was not enlisted. When I agreed to come home, my mother told me that on that Shabbat afternoon, while I was making shakshuka, he tried on his red infantry boots, which had been in the car since the day he was released from the army. He also packed his military kit bag, putting in a few light, comfortable clothes, but not a lot, because he assumed that most of the time he would be wearing his army uniform.

Everything was ready, next to the front door of the house, but they didn't call him up to the army reserves. He stayed at home for ten days and tried to force them to enlist him. He called everyone he knew, but the enlistment percentages were too high, so they wouldn't let him go back to the unit that he served in when he was doing his regular service. The



last night that he was home we fought, and I yelled at him, but my heart was also broken. **I thought, how sad it is, that this is what masculinity looks like now, that this is the way his worth is measured, that his effort to prove something could cost him his life.**

The next day, they called him from a different unit and asked him to come to the training base, and he went. We said goodbye on the phone, this time with no yelling, but with sensitive words that I tried to say in a light-hearted tone, so that he would not be alarmed. I told him that I am nothing without him, that he should take care of himself and just himself. He said thank you, and that he had to get out of the car to get gas now. Bye.

Since that day, everything was compressed into one period of time, that was neither a day, nor a week, nor a month. I do not remember what happened each morning, or what was different between Sunday and Friday. Whether I felt a little different each morning, or whether I was able to fall asleep that evening. I spent a lot of time on the sofa imagining horrible stories that seemed tangible and closer than ever before. Every song on the radio seemed to me to be playing at the funeral of one of my brothers. Every news flash seemed like it was the one where they reported on a soldier from Givati in reserve service, who left behind a sister and two brothers, a mother and a father. Life turned into a collection of moments, before and after. Will this be the last moment of my life as I knew it, just one second before my reality would be turned upside down? I could hold on to a good mood only by a thread. My mood would turn bad from a phone call from my mother, who just wanted to know where I was, but my thoughts had already wandered to images of mourning.

Among all the scary things I imagined, I was most scared to imagine my brothers coming home. And one day it simply happened. One brother came home, and the other brother returned to training. A date was set for my return to university. I returned to live in my apartment with roommates in central Jerusalem. My life went back to how it was before, but the fear never left me.

Today, now that my brothers are no longer at the front, I am beginning to think about what my job is in this war. Maybe my job is to protect Israeli culture and civilization, in the civilian part of Israel. Maybe my job is to call for the end of violence, so that everyone's brothers can quickly return home, healthy and whole. I haven't yet decided, but these thoughts come to me all the time, every day.

**I have never felt so much part of the mainstream and at the same time so opposed to it. This position could be seen as an effort to remain on the fence, to feel ambivalence. But it is really not. I feel all the most extreme emotions within me.** On the one hand, I have an urgent feeling that we must defend ourselves, that everyone in Israel deserves to feel safe. On the other hand, I know that there are other answers to these questions, and that violence and destruction is not the only way. That we must also start to listen to what women have to say and suggest, in our efforts to solve this horrible problem that we are in the midst of. I want security, and I also want an original alternative. I refuse to feel part of the mainstream, but I also enjoy every minute of it. ■



*Above: Food Alma cooked for the alumni family she helps through the Reverse Mentoring project.*





JANUARY 21, 2024

## Noa Bellavita '18

23 years old

### My name is Noa Bellavita, and I am 23 years old.

I grew up on Kibbutz Magen in the Gaza envelope. Later, I moved with my family to Kibbutz Sede Nehemia in the north, next to Kiryat Shmona.

Since the war broke out, most of the kibbutzim around us in the Hula Valley have been evacuated by the government. Just our kibbutz and a few others were not officially evacuated – because we are more than five kilometers from the Lebanon border, and that is the line that the government used to determine who would be evacuated and who would not be. However, my kibbutz is only several hundred meters from the five-kilometer line, and all of the people who live there have left. More or less the same thing has happened in all the communities in the area.

Since the beginning of the war, only my father has stayed at home. He can't leave because of his work. My two sisters are also not in their homes. One of them had to go with my mother to Tel Aviv, because her school is not functioning. The other was evacuated from her home in Kibbutz Magen, and she is in the Dead Sea area, with the rest of the people from her kibbutz.

For some time already, I haven't really had any words. Even now, when I try to write, I do not have words. This is not surprising. **In general, for some time now I have felt like a great silence has enveloped me – a total, penetrating, paralyzing silence. The silence has invaded me, and I cannot break it. How can one break a silence like this?**

This silence exists next to, above, and underneath all of the noise. On the surface, the world right now is full of noise. Both at my home in the north, and at Kibbutz Kissufim in the Gaza envelope, where I am now, the noise is never ending. Tanks, artillery, helicopters, shooting from helicopters, interceptions. I have already learned to distinguish between them, and I am almost not frightened.

Most of the time, above Gaza, which is around two kilometers away from where I am now, we can see only a cloud of dark, constant soot. On good days, we can see the explosions themselves. Today, we can see the sea. And there is the sound of talking. Really, there is one long, continuous speech on the television and radio stations.

And in the hotels in the Dead Sea and Eilat, where people are evacuated, constant murmurs have replaced the usual gossip in the dining hall – that hostage who is still there – is he still alive? What about his daughter? Who is in Gaza?

What is happening on the Kibbutz? Who is coming to visit today from the local security forces who stayed on the Kibbutz? All of it is meaningless noise, distraction from the silence.

I discovered this silence on my first visit back to Kibbutz Magen, the kibbutz where I grew up in the Gaza envelope, since the war broke out. Abandoned. Seeing the few people walking around there, members of the local security forces and soldiers, made me sad. It reminded me of what was missing. The television that is constantly on at my grandparents' house was off; the house was empty; they are not there. And that silence, silence that no one breaks. What would be the point?

Since that visit, the silence is here all the time. It accompanies me along the concrete barriers that the army has put up in the north, on my way to visit my father at home. There, the silence is perhaps the most hair-raising evidence of the war. The silence overcomes me every time I listen to music; I have almost lost my tolerance for songs. Everything feels wrong. The silence is particularly tangible at Hostage Square in Tel Aviv. A face, a face, a face, a face – still hostages, more and more hostages, and all of them swallowed up in a killing silence, like a tremendous grave. And the grave of Regev, from the kibbutz - silent.

There is really no longer any reason to make noise next to him.

When it is hard, I want to scream from within the silence. The silence feels like a pit from which life cannot grow. And sometimes, when it is a bit easier to breathe, I think that maybe the silence is necessary – it is the world's natural response. And maybe, really, only from within the silence can we continue once again. ■



JANUARY 28, 2024

## Yuval Kadari '13

27 years old

**My name is Yuval Kadari.** I am 27 years old, and originally from Jerusalem. I am studying law at Tel Aviv University. On that black Shabbat, at the time that it all began, I was in Madrid as an exchange student. The evening before, I hosted Israeli and European friends in my apartment for a Shabbat meal. We debated whether to go out to a sunrise party in a forest outside of the city.

Truth be told, at that point in time, I was hoping to discover Spanish culture, to learn a new language, and to bury my head in the sand – ignoring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, my military service, which was really weighing me down, and especially the conflict within the Israeli people that was causing me a lot of confusion and deep unease.

In those days, I felt like Israel was a drowning ship. Not only were we forced to live by the sword and constantly be at war; our worst enemy was ourselves. My only comfort regarding Israel was, and still is, that the whole world is on the edge of the abyss. What a strange comfort and hope... But that is the way it is when, on the one hand, populism is rising and taking over, and, on the other hand, fake news and social media are

*“The day after that, I discovered what existential anxiety really feels like, and how strange it is to be physically safe, in the pleasant sun of the palace gardens of the king in Madrid, and yet feel as if I am persecuted and have no place in the world.”*

swallowing us up; when the world is getting warmer and no one cares, and when at any given moment it is dangerous to be a Jew in the world. This is the way I was living from day to day in Madrid, walking a fine line between a deep desire to run away to a desert island, and pride in being Israeli and really missing home. On that black Shabbat, I was deep in existential thoughts about my identity, and searching for an answer.

On the day that it happened, I was not surprised. I got a terrified phone call from my army commander at 7:00 in the morning. As he was asking me whether I had heard what happened, I turned on the news and understood that the worse possible situation that we had trained for had occurred. I understood that, just as I had thought then when we were training, we faced an impossible, terrible task. But unlike what everyone was saying regarding a failure of intelligence, it was so clear and inevitable that this would happen.

The next day, I found out that Aryeh, who was my soldier in the past and had continued on to become an officer in the unit, was killed. I did not understand how the most evil and dark people in the world can take someone who is so beautiful and so pure.

**The day after that, I discovered what existential anxiety really feels like, and how strange it is to be physically safe, in the pleasant sun of the palace gardens of the king in Madrid, and yet feel as if I am persecuted and have no place in the world.**

Fairly quickly (and not without hesitation), I understood that I was packing up all my dreams in my suitcase and coming back from Spain to serve in the army reserves. But it is important for me to say that I did not do so from a place of courage, heroism, or sense of mission. I came back to Israel because they need me here (even if I am not totally crucial), and because dying is not worse than living with yourself after and regretting that you did not do what you could do. Because my identity is too Israeli for me to be able to escape to some island in Panama and bury my head in the sand. Because even if I think Israel is a bad place to live, for me it is the least bad place in the world right now. Because being together is better than being alone, and at home there are people I love as I never loved anyone else. Because giving of yourself and stepping out of yourself can make this nightmare feel a little less painful and calm the existential anxiety. Because Aryeh was so good, and what happened on that Shabbat was so black and so wrong. ■



FEBRUARY 11, 2024

## Tommer Shani '05

35 years old

**“When he returned, he found his home was locked.”**

**This is the first sentence of the short story “Fernheim” by S.Y. Agnon – a focused and powerful sentence.**

I think this is also the biggest fear of anyone who goes away to army reserve service or on any long mission at times of upheaval like these. The fear that I will return and discover that the things that I invested in building and maintaining, that I invested in physically and emotionally, have perished and were forgotten. The fear of returning to locked doors. Of discovering that my business collapsed, my garden (or field) died, my project was shut down (or given to someone else), the building that was planned will not be built, my social group fell apart...

This sentence has been in my thoughts since around the second week of my army reserve service, along with a number of other sentences that I learned in high school. I was not really worried about a “locked home” in particular, but about this sad, fundamental idea of loss at a time of crisis and absence.

I was called up to the army on Thursday in the first week of the war, and I was released this week, after three and a half months. I serve in a support unit, one that takes care of logistics for army forces in the south. I may still return to my unit this year.

During most of this time, my conditions were relatively comfortable – a base on the home front, a regular bed and a roof over my head, and leave to go home every week almost from the beginning of my service. Still, I was uprooted from my routine; I lost control over my time; and my missions prevented me from sleeping through the night. I was in an environment that was all-encompassing and demanded my commitment.

I am a high school teacher, so substitute teachers took over my “standard” classes. These teachers gave extra hours (sometimes receiving full compensation, but often less). For the classes where I teach in a special program, I had to provide guidance from a distance to teachers who work

with me and are familiar with the general outline of the program, so that they could substitute for me. An initiative that I started with some friends during the COVID-19 pandemic suffered from the sudden absence of most of its staff and volunteers (while others joined or increased their responsibility), and the initiative almost collapsed more than once.

Truthfully, Fernheim of Agnon did not make up the fear of returning to a locked home. The motif of delayed return – to a home that is different than the one we left – is an ancient element in the hero’s journey. Yet returning to a locked home is a more powerful image than returning to a home full of suitors and a loyal wife (Homer), or to upsetting self-declared heirs and a region that was burnt and despoiled (Tolkien). Perhaps the power of this image comes from the fact that it is expressed in Agnon’s Hebrew. Or perhaps from the fact that in the real world, we do not really need to battle rivals when we return.

“When he returned, he found his home was locked” – a similar but different fear is returning to a totally different reality... not that the project or garden or family totally shut down, but that in three months they changed until they were totally unrecognizable.

In Fernheim, one of the characters describes this as “something changed in the world.” **The truth is that when the world turns upside down, we need to make changes in order to survive. Close relationships need to be rebuilt so that they can hold within them more loneliness and independence. An initiative based on volunteers must become more focused and compact and change its priorities. Parts of the business get mortgaged to secure a loan, with or without interest. The class progresses in learning the material, but according to the pedagogical approach of another teacher** (and this is an opportunity to stop and say thank you to my amazing colleagues at the agricultural high school in Ein Kerem!).

The world never freezes in place. A bird who doesn’t go up and up, falls down. And according to cold calculation, it is clear to us all that it is better to take off than to crash.



Change – however difficult and alienating it is – must happen, in fact, so that the home will not be “found locked” when we return... Still, what we knew and invested in is gone. When we return, the home is not the same home. It is important to say that these changes and ways of coping are almost always rooted in difficulties and rough patches that were there in reality beforehand. We don’t need a twisted love story like Inge and Fernheim’s to understand this.

Of course, the reservists who left for such a long time will certainly return different than they were before. I am not talking about Combat Stress Reaction (shell shock), which is a separate, lengthy discussion, but rather about how everything that we took for granted was deeply shaken up.

Three months of a different reality gives us an opportunity to take a new perspective on life, to ask questions about paths that we have chosen (or not chosen), and to rechoose things that were once part of our routine.

One of the symbolic expressions of Fernheim’s transformation in Agnon’s story is his understanding that his old shoes, “footwear that he said was comfortable,” were “not comfortable” for him anymore.

And so, many of us will probably replace our shoes in this period. Others will make a new choice to wear the same old shoes, and they will be happy in those shoes... Each person will make his own choices, at his own pace.

I must admit, now that I am almost back to routine, that I am worried about a lot fewer “locked homes” greeting me (and maybe I am even actually grateful for a few of them).

But I feel the need to raise awareness of this fear, this deep phenomenon that is a fundamental part of reality. All around us, there are so many people who, when they return home, will not find the same home or business or relationship or work plan that they left behind when they were called up to army reserve service (or when their partner was called up, and they had to devote themselves to getting by moment by moment). If only I could find a way to help all of them.

I do not really have a bottom line to this stream of thought. I am still in my own “moment of return” right now. I am still searching, and I have not yet found...

Maybe the bottom line is appreciating the good – that I am returning from service on a sovereign Jewish army base – and not from captivity in Serbia, like Fernheim was in the story... Maybe it is appreciating my high school literature teacher, who introduced me to this story. Maybe it is simply longing for simpler days, and for choices that I will be satisfied with in the future. ■

*“The truth is that when the world turns upside down, we need to make changes in order to survive. Close relationships need to be rebuilt so that they can hold within them more loneliness and independence. An initiative based on volunteers must become more focused and compact and change its priorities. Parts of the business get mortgaged to secure a loan, with or without interest. The class progresses in learning the material, but according to the pedagogical approach of another teacher.”*

# ABOUT THE BRONFMAN FELLOWSHIP AND AMITEI BRONFMAN



**THE BRONFMAN FELLOWSHIP IS A LIFELONG** network that begins with a dynamic, year-long experience for a diverse group of intellectually adventurous Jewish teens from North America and Israel. Founded in 1987 by the late Edgar M. Bronfman z"l, the Fellowship nurtures talented young people to see the world through a lens broader than their own and to build a more dynamic and pluralistic future. Each year, the Fellowship selects a cohort of 26 North American teens from a wide spectrum of the Jewish community for a transformative Fellowship-year experience, which begins with an immersive summer in Israel and the U.S., followed by monthly virtual meetings and a Winter and Spring Seminar in the U.S. Fellows explore a rich, complex tapestry of Jewish texts and ideas, in conversation with one another and a faculty team of leading rabbis, educators, and artists. Afterwards, Fellows join the 1,500+ members of the Bronfman alumni community, which includes some of today's most exciting Jewish cultural creators, deep thinkers, moral voices, and community builders. The Fellowship continues to amplify the impact alumni have on Jewish life and on broader society through Jewish intellectual programming, intergenerational mentorship, and vibrant discourse in a pluralistic community.

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THE BRONFMAN  
FELLOWSHIP



**AMITEI BRONFMAN IS THE ISRAELI BRANCH** of The Bronfman Fellowship. Launched in 1998, the Amitei Bronfman program consists of a year-long series of educational seminars for a diverse group of 20 Israeli high school students (the Amitim) starting in their junior year and continuing through senior year. The program aims to develop thoughtful young leaders with a sense of social and communal responsibility, and to nurture their ability to engage with others who see the world differently. As part of The Bronfman Fellowship's belief that Israeli and American Jews must learn from and develop meaningful relationships with each other, the Israeli and the North American Fellows spend approximately 10 days together in an immersive seminar during the summer, which generally takes place in Israel. Later in the year, the Amitim travel to the United States to meet again with the American Fellows and to further enhance their understanding of American Jewish life. The 500+ alumni of Amitei Bronfman join the fabric of the Bronfman alumni community, where they continue to exchange ideas and inspire one another to contribute their talents, vision, and creativity to the Jewish community and the world.



Thank you to the many young Israeli members of our community who have shared and who continue to share their stories with us, so that we can better understand their experiences and benefit from their growth at this time.

Most of the stories included here were translated from the Hebrew by Adina Gerver '96 and by Rachael Gelfman Schultz; we are grateful for their time and talent.

Read more stories from October 7th through today at [bit.ly/Bronfman-stories](https://bit.ly/Bronfman-stories). Thank you to **The Forward** for partnering with us to bring these stories to an even wider audience.

**Forward**





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Interested in learning more about how you can help  
cultivate the next generation of Jewish leaders  
in North America and Israel?

**Please contact Laura Liebman at 518-708-9687 or [laura@bronfman.org](mailto:laura@bronfman.org).**