

This reading honours Ofir Libstein (z"l) and Dr. Shoshan Haran

This year the Haggadah passage, ve-hi she'amda, rises from the page like never before:

"It is not only one person or nation that has stood against us to destroy us, but rather in each generation, they stand against us to destroy us. But the Holy One rescues us from their hand."

Survival is miraculous. Few ancient nations survive to this day. Elie Wiesel spoke of the Jewish survival instinct in his 1986 Nobel Peace Prize speech. His words reverberate today:

"Since I am a Jew profoundly rooted in my people's memory and tradition, my first response is to Jewish fears, Jewish needs, Jewish crises. For I belong to a traumatized generation, one that experienced the abandonment and solitude of our people. It would be unnatural for me not to make Jewish priorities my own".

"But other [priorities] are important to me. Human suffering anywhere concerns men and women everywhere. There is so much to be done, there is so much that can be done... one person of integrity, can make a difference, a difference of life and death."

Elie Wiesel's words offer a possible answer to a question buried in ve-hi she'amda.

FOR WHAT DO WE SURVIVE?

Not just for survival's sake, but to be a person and a nation of integrity in the world. To make Jewish priorities our own AND to alleviate human suffering wherever we can.

This Pesach, we honour those Israelis who walk proudly in both worlds, devoting their lives to important environmental and climate issues. Like Ofir Libstein (z"l), Head of Sha'ar Ha-Negev Regional Council, who advocated for solar and battery infrastructure along the Gaza border communities, to keep the power on during crises and reduce polluting emissions in response to climate change. Ofir was murdered by Hamas defending his town, Kfar Aza, on Oct 7th. We honour his memory.

And we honour Dr. Shoshan Haran, an Israeli agricultural expert whose seed development techniques have provided vegetables to 7.7 million people across Africa. Dr. Haran was abducted from her home in Kibbutz Be'eri on October 7th and held hostage for 50 days in Gaza. She is now thankfully free.

These are just two of the countless contributions of the Jewish people to the urgent task of reducing pollution, strengthening food systems, improving water quality and much more.

Despite growing attacks on our integrity worldwide, the Jewish people respond, not only by surviving, but thriving. By embodying the Jewish and human values that Elie Wiesel championed his entire life.

Inspired by the work of Ofir and Dr. Haran we ask: In what ways will you honour your survival this year?