**Chaya Gilboa:** One evening I…looked at the *hamal* (operation room), it was like 9pm, and one of the huge rooms was filled with Haredi people, and secular, and you saw women were barely dressed, it was really hot, and they were in tank tops and like short pants, and near them Haredi men. And they all literally work together. And no one cares what the other person wear. No one cares if they have a yarmulke on their head, or a tattoo on their arms. It was just…people wanted to do good. I looked at it, and I said: *We could be that place; we could be that place.* We don't need to agree. We don't need to marry each other. We can… coexist. Why do we believe those who say that we should hate each other.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey listeners, it's Mishy. So as you know, during these incredibly difficult days we're trying to bring you voices we're hearing among and around us. These aren't stories, they're just quick conversations, or postcards really, that try to capture slivers of life right now.

Chaya Gilboa has been a dear friend of mine for many years. She's an incredible Talmud teacher, a tireless activist, a flaming redhead, and was, for the last three years the CEO of the Jerusalem Philanthropic Initiatives—which works with local civil society.

On October 11th, Chaya turned 40, but instead of any kind of celebration, she was, no surprise here, leading a team at the Jerusalem *hamal* (operation center), the epicenter of the city's volunteer efforts. Here she is.

**Chaya Gilboa:** Hi Mishy.

**Mishy Harman:** Can you introduce yourself.

**Chaya Gilboa:** Yes. My name is Chaya. I’m from Jerusalem. I grew up in Jerusalem; my family's nine generations in Jerusalem. I was born here in a very different part of the city, an ultra-Orthodox community. Now I live a more secular life in downtown Jerusalem. I have three kids, and I work with civil society in Jerusalem: Palestinians, Israelis, ultra-Orthodox, secular…I try to support their work as an activist

**Mishy Harman:** Can you tell me what your experience of October 7th was like.

**Chaya Gilboa:** We have right across our home, literally a minute walk, there is all the art schools in Jerusalem: the cinema school, the visual art school, and theater school. And they said that they opened a safe place there. So we took the kids and we just left. Because we didn't know at first, we thought: you know, we're going to get people in our home who try to kill us. That was a feeling.

So we went there and there was a bunch of students…it was a beautiful room with a big television and couches. This was the first moment that I realized that something really bad is happening. And it might take longer than I think. But then what happened in the building…that a few people came and they said let's turn this place into a *hamal*, an operation room, and I joined them. And it actually saved me emotionally, and spiritually, because from that moment I was involved in helping others I forgot to be afraid.

**Mishy Harman:** So the *hamal,* the Jerusalem *hamal*, came together very quickly, like a lot of other initiatives, and became sort of a central operation. Can you describe a little bit what it did, what went on there.

**Chaya Gilboa:** So the *hamal* in the first two weeks we had approximately 4,000 volunteers a day. We had 20 different groups, and in each group they did different things: they collected food, they send the food to families, they helped evacuate people from their homes, and they went to *shiva* and funerals. Like there was all kinds of things that were needed, and they took care of it immediately.

**Mishy Harman:** And what did you do?

**Chaya Gilboa:** What I did, I established a small group of volunteers where I raised money to bring people from the south that the government didn't help them at first: from Ashkelon, Netivot, Sderot—and to place in hotels. Within days I raised 2 million shekels, which is a lot, and we help more than 1,500 people from the south to place them in a safe place. And it was an operation. But I knew that's what I need to do, yeah.

**Mishy Harman:** Wow.

**Chaya Gilboa:** I think what really unique that when I start raising money I went to people that I know and that they trust me, and they could easily send money. But there's one guy, I think he lives in between Jerusalem and United States, I'm not even sure, someone gave me his name. And I WhatsApped him and said: “Hey, you don't know me, my name is Chaya (it was the third day of the war). I have 80 families who I need to evacuate right now because many of them have disabled kids.

You know when there is a siren and you are a mother or father to someone who is in a wheelchair, you need to make a fast decision. What do you do? So we decided that these will be the first families who we’ll help. And I needed 100,000 shekel now, right now. So I WhatsApped him and I said: “Do you have any connections? Can you give some of them out?” And he literally said: “How much you need?” And I said: 100,000 shekel or a bit less. And he said: “Okay, I'm sending you on a WhatsApp my credit card from both sides so you can make the transaction, and you have the right to use up to 100,000 without asking me. I don't know you, but I trust you. So if you see a need, and I'm not available, just do it. And I start crying at the office. I couldn't believe; I couldn't believe.

**Mishy Harman:** Wow.

**Chaya Gilboa:** It’s a beautiful story.

**Mishy Harman:** And in a way you were sort of collecting beautiful stories or beautiful moments that you witnessed at the *hamal.*

**Chaya Gilboa:** What I constantly tried to do…I have in my iPhone notes. And I constantly, constantly wrote there moments, small moments of human beauty—I called it, of anonymous people that I encounter. I needed it, for me I needed to remind myself, you know, this war what happen is that we saw the most ugliest place in human being, what happened down south with the Hamas, it was not a war, it was cruelness. And at the same time we saw the most beautiful, generous, kind aspect of humanity. People supported without asking questions: they were so amazing. And I kept asking myself how those two elements can live together: how humanity can be so mean and so kind. So I start collecting stories of kindness because I really needed a reminder that humanity is not only, or not mostly cruelness.

**Mishy Harman:** Can you share a story that stayed with you?

**Chaya Gilboa:** Yes. The Schusterman Foundation actually gave me $5,000. I'm a fellow in one of their programs. And they said: “Do whatever you need [with] this money.” So we start asking, and then we realized that in two kibbutzim that were really damaged…many people died, were killed, and kidnapped, and the houses were burned: Kfar Aza and Be’eri, they needed computers—for the kids to watch movies and for the adults to start working again. So we asked the Schusterman Foundation if we can just buy 20 laptops with it. And they said: “Of course.” And then I sent 10 computers to Kfar Aza, to the kibbutz, with a friend who was born at the kibbutz and he knew exactly who we should give it to…he was really happy.

And then my friend Yuval came to pick up the computers to Be’eri, to Kibbutz Be’eri. And he came with his car, and we like open the trunk and there is 10 boxes of huge computers, great computers. And like each time I took one computer to the truck, one computer to the truck, because it was big and heavy, and we want to make sure that nothing happened to the computer.

And I see when I do it, I see Avshalom his name, he is the security guy that secure the *hamal* those days. He was born in Ethiopia, he moved to Israel, he have many kids, and I know it because we spoke a bit. He's 65, I guess that's how old he is. And he stands at the *hamal* day and night, like protecting us. He's doing double shift as a security guy. And he looked at me, and I see his head like…in a way walking with me, his head like to the car and to the pile of computers. And he doesn't say anything. And then when I put everything in the car, and I close the truck and Yuval start driving, he came to me very embarrassed. And he say: “Chaya, can I ask you a question? My son Avichai, he’s about to start university. He's the first in the family, in the extended family, that will pursue higher education. And there's one thing he needs—a computer—he can’t sit in a class today with notebook, he needs a computer.” And he says, “I work really hard, I do double shift here at the *hamal,* I go after and also work just to raise money to be able to buy a computer to him. So if next time a donor give you a computer and happened to be that you have one extra, would you please give me.” And I said: “Of course. of course.”

And I thought to myself: what is for him to see like a pile of computers…he stood there from the beginning of the war, and his experience was different than mine. I guess he's mostly in a survival mode. And he saw tons, tons of iPhones, computers, you know, mattresses: people donate… massive donations.

And he's taking care of that place and I bet that he saw this, and he you know, he felt that maybe he wish he could get one of that. And then my partner looked at me and say: “Chaya, call Yuval, bring back the car and give him a computer.” And I was like: “Of course, of course.” I'm like, that's what I need to do. So I called Yuval and he came back, and I said: “Yuval…nine instead of ten?” He said: “Yeah, I don't think it's a problem.” So I took one box out and I went to Avshalom and I say: “Here this is a computer to Avichai.” And I took like a pen and I wrote on the box: “To Avichai, this computer is to be a great student, and we all look forward to your success.” And I gave it to him. And he couldn't believe.

He stood there, you know, 65 years old man. He couldn't believe that he made a wish out loud, but he didn't mean, now, he meant, one day if…and he start crying. And then we call his son, and he couldn't speak. He said: “Avichai, Avichai, today when you come home I have something for you. I have a computer for you.” And his son says: “What, no way.” And he says: “Yes, yes, yes.” He couldn't believe. It was such a moment.

You know, I think in wartime sometimes we see so many people, and sometimes there are certain people we don't see. You don't see the security guy that stands day and night at the *hamal* because you have a mission, you need to save people, right. And it was a moment that the world helped me to see him, and I felt really good that Avichai got it. I felt like he also has the right to receive a computer.

And then he left me an amazing message. And every time I had a hard day, when I faced really sad stories, I use just to play the message from Avshalom. It was such a beautiful message because you can hear in his voice that…it's a sound of someone that a miracle happened to him, and there is no miracles those days.

I wake up every morning and I want to see a headline in Ynet that all the captives are back, that's a miracle I want to see, and I don't see it. And I want to see other miracles of people that are better, and I don't see it. There is no miracles. And then it was a small miracle. **Mishy Harman:** Can you play it for us.

**Chaya Gilboa:** Yes, of course. It's in Hebrew, but you know what, part of me even say—you don't even need to translate it, just listen to the music of his words because I think he gives the story.

*(The message in Hebrew)*

**Chaya Gilboa:** So this happened. And then I told to someone who have an organization that supports Ethiopian high education, as an anecdote I told it to him. And he said: “Great, can you just pass me his info. we will be happy to cover his tuition.” So that story I think made me think about the needs that are always there, and we don't tend to see.

**Mishy Harman:** Thanks Chaya. You're a beautiful human being.

**Chaya Gilboa:** *Toda* (thank you).I think we all…