**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey listeners, it's Mishy. So today we're going to do something a bit different. We're going to be sharing a conversation I had last week with my friend Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove of Park Avenue synagogue in New York. I was a guest on their podcast. So in a way, this is my Wartime Diary. I shared a bunch of stories from the past six weeks, some you might have heard in various different episodes: others definitely not. But before we begin, I just want to say that today is giving Tuesday, and that we really need your support. As you all probably know, almost as soon as the war began, we pivoted our entire operation, and launched our Wartime Diaries series, in which we bring you voices we're hearing among and around us. Voices that try to capture slivers of life right now. These episodes reach the largest number of listeners we've ever known. And we're so touched by the outpouring of love you're sending our way. Of the countless messages and emails we've received, two that have stayed with me have been from a listener in Australia who said that wartime Diaries has been a quote: “A real lifeboat in an ocean of grief.” And from a listener in the States who wrote that our episodes have quote: “Helped crack my heart open again.” So if you to feel that in some small way we've helped you get through these terrible weeks. If our episodes have given you some comfort, or relief, or understanding, please go to our website, Israelstory.org and help us continue doing what we do. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts, and may we all know quiet and calm days to come. Okay, here from the Park Avenue Synagogue Podcast is the conversation I had with Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove.

**Elliot Cosgrove:** Welcome, you are listening to the Park Avenue Synagogue Podcast and this is Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove. It is wonderful to welcome you to Park Avenue Synagogue Podcast. It is great to have a friend and one of the most important voices out of Israel, the anthologizer of our time, of the Israeli experience: Dr. Mishy Harman.

Mishy is the co-founder and host of Israel Story, the most listened to Jewish and Israeli podcast in the world. It's a show which Ira Glass calls the Israeli This American Life and has hundreds of thousands of listeners in 194 countries around the world. Mishy, welcome to the Park Avenue Synagogue Podcast.

**Mishy Harman:** Thank you so much. Thank you so much, Elliot. It's a real honor and not pleasure these days, but I'm glad that we're able to speak.

**Elliot Cosgrove:** Well Mishy thank you, and you are a friend. You've been at Park Avenue synagogue. This is a lifelong dream to have you of all people on our modest podcast effort. But unfortunately as you say it's not a good time.

I sort of came of age on podcasts listening to Israel Story. And I listened to it in one and a half times in English, and to *leshaper et haivrit sheli* (improve my Hebrew), to improve my Hebrew, I listened to it on, you know, point seven speed in Hebrew. And it was my way of having like a *shulchan Ivrit* that I would keep my Hebrew up. And this long form of journalism has really sustained me over the years. And I encourage everyone to listen to Israel Story in good times.

And then during the judicial reform, you pivoted and you started telling stories of the signatories and their descendants of the founding document Megillat Ha’atzmaut of the State of Israel. And now of course, the world is totally different and not for a better reason. And you have pivoted to sort of these postcards, these slivers of life in Wartime Diaries. And I'm wondering if you could tell me about how you've pivoted right now and why you've pivoted as you have right now.

**Mishy Harman:** Of course, well, you know on October 6, 1973, my father, who passed away this year, was sick at home and he didn't go to synagogue that day. And my mother who was a new immigrant from New York and had two little babies at home, came back from shul, and at 2pm the sirens began, and my father, the Israeli, said to her: “Oh, don't worry, Dorothy, it's probably just kids on the rooftop who set off an alarm.” And 50 years and a day later, my wife Federica woke me up on October 7th 2023, to the sound of alarms, and I said the exact same sentence to her that my father had said 50 years earlier. But of course it wasn't in either case, unfortunately, kids playing on rooftops and setting off alarms. And it was very clear very quickly that everything had changed. And that in an unimaginable way, the story of Israel had taken a dark, dark turn. And of course we've cycled through many, many different emotions since that terrible day of October 7th, from shock and disbelief, to fear, to anger, to resilience, to inspiration. But very, very quickly on that first day, as everyone was scrambling to understand how they could fill a role in helping, it was clear to me that given this platform that we've created of Israel Story, which has a certain reach, we should be trying to shine a light on what life is like here, and what different lives are like here. What it's like to be a mom at home with four little kids and husband who is in *miluim* (reserves) and no *gan* (nursery); or what it's like to be a family, God forbid, of someone who was killed; or someone who was kidnapped; or of someone who goes to the frontline to play music for soldiers; or chefs who are cooking meals; and what it's like to be a Bedouin leader whose brother- in-law is a hostage in Gaza but whose entire family lives in Gaza and is being bombarded by the Israeli Air Force; or what it's like to have friendships with people in Gaza. And we've started releasing these daily episodes, which as you said are short postcards that try to give a sense of what the experience here is like. And I think that's important, especially in these times where there's, unfortunately so many strong and polarizing opinions about Israel—for people to be able to get a sense of what life is actually like here.

And then in addition to that, we also recognized our entire project is predicated on the premise that sharing your story empowers you and empowers the people around you. And you are able to recognize the humanity in people once you hear their story. So we've also started in parallel something which you listeners around the world are not hearing. But these are storytelling events in Hebrew for people who have been evacuated from their homes, or for soldiers, or for people who are injured, or for people whose partners are away in the army, to share stories. And these are intimate things— we're not recording them—people are just sharing their stories. And I feel that there's a lot of strength in that as well.

**Elliot Cosgrove:** Right, in a way, it's a classic Jewish model, right. When you walk into a shiva house, you're not supposed to ask the mourner for anything other than to share a memory, to share a story. And that act, whereas it doesn't alleviate someone's pain, it lets the person in pain know that somehow they're not alone—this fundamental human need to be heard.

**Mishy Harman:** Absolutely.

**Elliot Cosgrove:** And in a sense, your effort right now; it's your own *melacha* (work); it's your own activism. It's your own response, because so many of these stories that you're sharing in the Wartime Diaries are people who are saying: “We're traumatized, but we're not paralyzed,” whether we are cooking or working in setting up a school in a Dead Sea hotel, or picking fruit or getting politically engaged. There's just a sense of mobilization, which is actually extraordinary given where Israel was before October 7th.

**Mishy Harman:** Absolutely. I mean I think you hit the nail on the head Elliot, because look, I mean you know, we talk about October 7th as this moment where everything changed, and it really did, right. But let's also remember what was going on here before. Israel was tearing at the seams. People with very, very different visions of what this place should look like were fighting out basically an ideological war about the future of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. And I think that it's very difficult to find silver linings in a situation where so many people on both sides are losing their lives. It really is. But as people have said time and again, the power of civil society in Israel that has stepped in where governmental agencies have failed, where elected leadership has failed, is tremendous. And it shows something I think very deep about who we are. And if we can harness that energy, and that generosity—I'll tell you a tiny anecdote that crystallized that for me, it's an episode that we actually aired last night. Everyone's obviously now in a sort of spirit of generosity and volunteerism here, right. And we were telling the story of one woman who worked at the Jerusalem *hamal* (operation center), which was sort of the epicenter of volunteer activity in Jerusalem. And she had secured a donation of 20 laptop computers for children from the kibbutzim that were hit hard near Gaza, in Otef Aza (Gaza envelope). And she gave 10 to Kfar Aza and ten to Be’eri and people from those communities came and picked them up. And as they were loading up the computers into the cars, the Ethiopian security guard of the *hamal* was looking on. So this woman, Chaya Gilboa, went to speak to him. And he said to her: “You know, my son is the first one in our extended family who is going to go to the university. And I'm working double shifts here and I have another second job too in order to try to save up enough money to buy a computer for him because he needs a computer when he starts college. And if you by any chance in one of the future shipments have one computer that's leftover, if by any chance you could give it to my son, that would be tremendous.” And Chaya stopped in her place and called the car to come back and said: “We're going to give nine computers to the kids of Be’eri, and I'm going to take one computer, and I'm going to give it to this Ethiopian man who is the first person in his family to go to university.” And she did. And it's this moment that sort of for me crystallizes this thing. Because you know,when you're in this mode of being mission oriented towards specific things you forget that there's needs all over the place. And, I don't know there's something just so beautiful about being able to harness this spirit of generosity that we're all feeling now and expand it into society. And I hope, hope, hope that we can lead our lives and model our society in the years to come in that spirit.

**Elliot Cosgrove:** That’s a beautiful story. I want to pivot to a totally different side of it, which is, as I've said to my congregation on multiple occasions, the first foundational and final word of my theology is that every human being is created in God's image, which means that we affirm Israel's right to self defense, to bring the hostages home, and the right of the IDF to do what it needs to do. And we also mourn and grieve over the loss of innocent Palestinian lives, as beholden as they are to the iron grip of Hamas. And I've spent much of my time trying to distinguish between Palestinians and Hamas terrorists. And so I'm wondering, is there a capacity either in your listenership in Israel, or in the diaspora, the English speaking world, to hear those human stories, to hear the stories of Palestinians? Have you been able to tap into that?

**Mishy Harman:** Absolutely. So thank you for asking that Elliot. As you know, I share your worldview. And I think that the pain that a mother feels seeing her child executed in front of her eyes in a kibbutz outside of Aza (Gaza), is the same pain that a mother feels when her child is hit by a missile in Khan Yunis. And recognizing that pain and recognizing humanity in others doesn't in any way diminish anything, anything from the pain that we feel for our own people who have lost their lives or whose lives have been upended. And it's a moment where it's very, very difficult.

And a lot of people say, and a lot of my friends say that what happened here is so horrific that they simply don't have enough space in their heart now to also hold the pain of others. And I think that, you know, I don't myself agree with that. But I can understand why people say that. I mean there's a tremendous amount of suffering in the world. And we sort of shield ourselves all the time, I'm not even talking now about the war. There is a tremendous amount of suffering all the time in the world, and we focus on things that are closer to us. And I think that there's something probably very natural and maybe even healthy about doing that. But perhaps if I can, Elliot, I'll just share a short story which I also told on one of the episodes that we've released in this series, so I apologize if someone's already heard this, but my grandparents met in the early 1930s in England. They were both Jews from London. And they met at a formal debate in which my grandfather, Abe, he was debating the woman who would become my grandmother, Zena. And he was the head of the Zionist Student Union at Oxford, and she was the head of the anti-Zionist Student Union at the London School of Economics. And she was an anti-Zionist, or at least a non-Zionist not because she had any particular beef with the idea of a Jewish homeland, but because like many progressive Jews and non-Jews in the years between the war, she did not believe in the concept of nation states, and she was an internationalist. And while I don't know who won that particular debate on that day, suffice to say that my grandfather ultimately won because in 1940 they emigrated together to Palestine, to Jerusalem, and then they spent their entire lives representing, and in the service of the State of Israel. But the reason I tell you this is because my grandmother lived to be 99 years old, and was a very major figure in my life. And she lived across the street from us. And in 2006, I was watching television with her, and it was the Second Lebanon War, and she was already in her mid 90s at the time. And she looked at me and she said: “Look what a strange world we live in. There are beautiful hills north of here that have vegetation and have wildlife and have trees. And we humans have drawn a line in the middle of those hills. And we call one side of that line Lebanon, and we call the other side of that line Israel. And now people from the Lebanese side are launching rockets at people from the Israeli side who in retaliation are shooting missiles and advancing troops into Lebanon, and what is the television actually telling us? The TV is saying that when Moti Cohen from Kiryat Shmona is hurt, when his life is upended, we need to mourn deeply because he's one of our own. And when Ahmed Salman’s life is

upended on the other side of the border, it's not that we have to rejoice, God forbid, no one says that. But we can care a little bit less because he's not one of our own. And then she looked at me and she said, and this was a sentence that has stayed with me ever since and has become sort of a guiding compass for me, she said: “The truth of the matter is that I'm equally sad for both of them, because a person is a person is a person no matter what.” And I think that that's something that's often difficult to hold in our minds and in our hearts, but I think that there's a tremendous amount of truth to that. And I think that recognizing the humanity of civilians, and I completely second your distinction here between murderers, between fanatic murderers who decide to wake up in the morning and commit horrific, horrific acts against other people, and civilian society.

There are many Palestinians who are suffering terribly now, I mean, living in Gaza now is I can't, I can't actually imagine what that's like. And perhaps just by saying that I'm alienating certain people. And I want to be very clear that by saying that I am not in any way diminishing the pain that I or anyone else feels about our own losses, which is horrible. So these are very, very complicated times, and I hope that people that are able to see the humanity in others prevail.

**Elliot Cosgrove:** *Toda* (thank you) Mishy, *toda*. Thank you so much. They are complicated times and you speak about all the emotions, of the shock, of the grief, of the anger, of the circling the wagons, of the empathy for others. I think one of the great, great challenges of this moment is finding a way to hold all those emotions all at once. And I think that by focusing on the human stories the way that Israel Story has pivoted to these diary postcards is an acknowledgment: there's a certain humility and audacity. The humility not to be comprehensive to the range of the human experience, but the audacity to bring that human experience to the fore. And so speaking to you I know is one of many postcards of conversations today. And the good thing about this is that anyone who wants to hear more of the human dimensions, a human story of Israel during war time and please God into the years ahead, to hear the vibrancy and dynamism of Israel in good times, that's all on Israel Story wherever you should find your podcasts. Mishy Harman thank you, thank you, thank you for joining us on Park Avenue Synagogue Podcast.

**Mishy Harman:** Thank you so much Elliot, and thank you for your friendship and for your leadership.