

# Israel's Blueprint for a Revival of the West



Saul Singer and Dan Senor write in [\*The Free Press\*](#):

On October 7, it was as though Israel's awesome military power had disappeared for twelve hours. The institutions charged with the most basic duty of any state—to protect its citizens—failed in the worst way possible.

Into the breach stepped ordinary Israelis.

Israelis like retired general Noam Tibon, 61, who drove south with just a pistol. His son Amir, a journalist for the newspaper *Haaretz*, was trapped in a safe room with his wife and his two young daughters in their home at Kibbutz Nahal Oz, surrounded by terrorists they could hear just outside. Amir, who speaks Arabic, said later, "I understood the situation and

prepared to die.” On his way to save Amir, Noam and his wife Gali saved two fleeing concertgoers. Noam then joined some IDF commandos who were fighting in another kibbutz, drove two wounded soldiers to safety, and turned back south on foot. Noam was picked up by another retired general, Israel Ziv, 66, who dropped him off at Amir’s kibbutz. For an hour, Noam engaged in door-to-door combat. Finally, after ten hours in the safe room, one of Amir’s daughters said, “Grandpa is here.”

Yair Golan, 61, a retired general who had been passed over for IDF chief of staff because of his left-wing views, also grabbed his uniform and a gun and headed south. On the way, he received a text from his sister with the location of three young people hiding in the fields near the [music festival](#) where hundreds were being slaughtered; he single-handedly rescued them and many others.

The 25-year-old woman who is the security coordinator of Kibbutz Nir Am, Inbal Rabin-Lieberman, managed to mobilize 12 residents in time to fight off terrorists, who did not succeed in entering the kibbutz. All of Nir Am’s residents were saved.

Stories are circulating of Israeli Arab drivers, like [Ismail Alkrenawi](#), who together with his relatives risked their lives to save other Israelis under siege in Kibbutz Be’eri. “Our conscience did not allow us to leave them there under fire,” said Alkrenawi.

These are but a handful of similar stories of profound yet everyday heroism that have emerged so far from those hellish hours.

For those who have been paying attention to Israel over the past year, perhaps this solidarity, selflessness, and sacrifice comes as a surprise. For ten months, the country has been torn apart in what can be described as a cold civil war over the government’s attempt to [neutralize the power](#) of the

Supreme Court.

But if Israel failed to imagine Hamas's depravity, it also failed to imagine—or perhaps had lost sight of—the goodness of its own people.

In the wake of unimaginable trauma, the people of Israel revealed greater unity and resilience than anyone—not least themselves—could have anticipated. In this hidden societal strength lie not only the seeds of Israel's revival, but a blueprint for the revival of the West.

What are those strengths?

## **Solidarity**

[Rabbi Jonathan Sacks](#), the late chief rabbi of the UK, once related a conversation he had with the British historian Paul Johnson. Johnson, a Catholic, wrote [A History of the Jews](#)—a definitive history of the Jewish people—approaching his subject as an outsider. Sacks asked Johnson: What struck him most about Judaism as he was writing his book?

“There have been, in the course of history, societies that emphasized the individual—like the secular West today,” Johnson [told](#) Sacks. “And there have been others that placed weight on the collective.” Judaism, Johnson continued, managed to give “equal weight to individual rights and collective responsibility.” This balancing act was “a reason why the Jews were able to keep their cohesion in the face of intolerable pressures.”

There is a word in Hebrew for this ethic that doesn't exist in English: *gibush*.

*Gibush* is both an act—bonding with an informal group or team—and an ideal that Israelis inhale from a young age: from youth scouts (which most young Israelis participate in), to classrooms (where creating a sense of cohesiveness in homeroom

classes is no less important than educational objectives), to the pre-army gap year community service programs, and most intensely, in military service itself.

The horizon that Israelis work toward as they grow up is not getting into the best university but serving in the best army units. While hyper-competitive pressures on U.S. elites creates a one-against-all dynamic, in Israel it's almost the opposite: some of the most prestigious units are the most difficult and dangerous—to be accepted, being a team player is more important than individual skill.

The fact that being part of defending one's country is a life stage for everyone—not something that other people do for you—gives Israelis a sense of ownership, belonging, and a feeling of being a link in a generational chain. Young Israelis are conscious that their parents and grandparents served so they could have a state and know that now it's their turn.

It was this wellspring of solidarity, combined with a culture of service, that has burst forth in the month since October 7.

The IDF assumed that not all reservists called up would report for duty—reservists have jobs and families, often with young children, and many are often living or traveling overseas. But in some units, about [120 percent](#) of the reservists showed up, meaning many who came were not even called.

They came so fast, and in such numbers, that the military did not have enough food and or equipment for them. The soldiers started texting their families asking for supplies, including everything from phone chargers and socks to high-quality helmets, tourniquets, and bulletproof ceramic vests. Civilian blood drives and relief efforts were so swamped with volunteers they had to scramble to match them with the tremendous needs to be filled.

After the attacks, the IDF was suddenly inundated with ultra-

orthodox Jews—a community that generally does not serve in the army—wanting to enlist. The numbers are growing from a low base, but the surge is real and could be a harbinger of a new relationship between the [haredim](#) and wider Israeli society. As Haredi journalist Yaki Adamker [said](#) after announcing on television that he would enlist after the October 7 massacre, “After all we went through, I asked myself, ‘Where am I? Why can’t I serve?’ Somewhere there was a black hole in me that I had to fill.”

## **The Primacy of Family Life**

Israel is not an easy place to live. In its 75 years of existence it has endured six wars, a campaign of Palestinian suicide bombings, and many other major military operations in the north and south.

Bathing in stress would not seem to be a good recipe for a long life. Yet according to the World Health Organization, [life expectancy in Israel](#) was 82.6 years in 2019. This ranked Israel as the ninth highest in the world, slightly above France, Sweden, Canada, and New Zealand, and a full year above the UK, Germany, Finland, Belgium, and Denmark. On average, Israelis live more than [four years longer](#) than Americans and a decade longer than their wealthy neighbors in Persian Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia.

Israelis are not lonely, and this probably goes far in explaining an extraordinary anomaly: according to the last [UN World Happiness Report](#), Israel is the fourth happiest country in the world.

In perhaps the greatest sign of confidence in the future, Israelis have by far more children than any other wealthy democracy. It is an iron law of demography that as countries become more economically productive, they become less reproductive. There are no exceptions. Every other wealthy democracy is well below the replacement fertility rate of



2.1—the [OECD](#) average is [1.6 children](#) per woman.

But Israel has been at about 3.0 for the last 25 years. And it is not just because of the ultra-orthodox. Having three children is about the norm in secular Tel Aviv, and having four is not uncommon. One television report even claimed that “four is the new three.” (Compare this to Japan, the world’s oldest country, where [more adult diapers](#) than baby diapers are sold each year.)

Israelis not only have larger families but closer ones. While short distances help—you can drive all of Israel, top to bottom, in seven hours—it is not the only reason that three generations of families get together nearly every week on Shabbat. While the world is plagued with a loneliness epidemic and “[deaths of despair](#)”—that is, deaths from [suicide](#), alcohol, and drug abuse—Israel has one of the lowest levels of such deaths in the OECD.

## Meaning over Materialism

“The incredible thing is that the tech CEOs—if they were not drafted themselves— not only personally dropped everything to join the war effort, but also encouraged all their employees to do so,” said [Adi Soffer Teeni](#), the head of Facebook’s Israel development center.

Over 24 hours, beginning the morning of October 7, a team of 20 people from different tech companies [built a system](#) using AI and facial recognition to identify missing people—many of them kidnapped—from videos posted by Hamas on social media. It would have been impossible for the military or the government to have built such a system so quickly.

Tech volunteers also built an app with a “rescue me” button, following the national trauma of thousands of people trapped in safe rooms or hiding in fields waiting for 18 hours or more to be saved. They created the equivalent of an Airbnb system to keep track of empty hotel rooms around the country that

could be used by evacuees in need, and a [volunteer-powered personalized delivery service](#) to get people across the country their meals and medicines.

Some of the top tech CEOs in Israel joined the effort full time. [Eynat Guez](#), the founder and CEO of the hot start-up Papaya Global, was put in charge of creating an airlift of military supplies, such as ceramic flak jackets. Michal Beinisch, another founder, headed up [procurement](#), sourcing supplies from various countries. “Our people were ten times overqualified for what they were doing. If you asked me if it were possible to build a start-up this fast, I would have said no way,” Israeli venture capitalist Gigi Levy-Weiss told us. Imagine if America went to war. Would Silicon Valley’s start-up founders offer themselves up in this way?



Israel is a changed country after October 7. But one of the changes is in the way that these values now permeate even parts of society that had seemed immune to them.

As the Israeli public intellectual Micah Goodman put it, “We’re not supporting the government. We’re not waiting for the government. We’re not waiting for Israel. We *are* Israel.”

The war reporter Sebastian Junger [writes](#) that “Modern society has perfected the art of making people not feel necessary.” The exception to this is modern Israel, where Israelis feel necessary. They take ownership of their fate. They feel they have a personal responsibility in building—and now rebuilding—their country.

While Israel may at this moment look like the last place other countries should emulate, look closer. In Israel’s hidden societal strength lie not only the seeds of Israel’s revival, but a possible blueprint for the revival of the West.