



*‘My son is not in the
hands of Hamas—
He Is in
The Hands of
Hashem.’*

With unshakable faith, the strength of a mother, and acts of holiness, Julie Kuperstein—mother of Bar Avraham, who was abducted by Hamas on October 7—continues her journey of hope, prayer, and tireless action for the return of her son and all the hostages. Nechami Turkoff, Chabad *shlucha* in Cholon, Israel, sat down with Julie for an honest conversation about standing strong in the face of trials; the power of Shabbos; a *tefillin* initiative that has changed lives around the world; and the unwavering *bitachon* that still stands strong even after more than 600 days.

Julie, tell us about Bar. What kind of person is he?

Bar is an exceptional soul. He's 22 years old, the eldest of five siblings. From a young age, he's always been the one to help everyone—his friends, his army buddies, and his family.

My husband Tal was severely injured four years ago while responding to a call on his motorcycle as a United Hatzalah volunteer. He became disabled. Bar stepped in in an incredible way. He was only 17 when he became the sole provider for our family, working three jobs while still in high school and preparing for army service.

Bar isn't just physically strong—he's emotionally mature far beyond his years. He took on the role of a father, and sometimes a mother, bearing tremendous responsibility without anyone asking him to. He's full of pure kindness, always putting others before himself. He volunteers with every organization possible.

What was your last conversation with Bar before October 7?

It was Friday afternoon, right before Shabbat and Simchat Torah. Bar called to wish me *Shabbat Shalom* and *Chag Same'ach*. Then he said something that filled my heart with joy: "Mom, I want to tell you something. I decided not to travel this Shabbat. I was supposed to work, but I won't go. They arranged an apartment for us here."

You have to understand—Bar struggled with keeping Shabbat because he wanted to help support our family after Tal's accident. I gently encouraged him about Shabbat, but recently I

stopped pushing. I wanted him to find his own way. So when it came entirely from him, I was overjoyed. Sadly, that was our last conversation. For now.

What happened on October 7? How did you learn that Bar was among the hostages?

Saturday morning, Simchat Torah—it was supposed to be a day of joy. I clearly remember the night before. My six-year-

which turned out to be a blessing. The children had the chance to enjoy them.

The way we found out... it's every mother's nightmare. Through my husband's foreign caretaker, we got word of a blurry video in which someone resembling Bar appeared. I tried to deny it: "It's not Bar. No way." But then a clearer video arrived. There was no denying those blue eyes, that sweet expression of my eldest son, that strong frame. In that moment, I knew the awful truth: It was my Bar.

I screamed like I never had before—everyone in the building knew something terrible had happened. For hours, I refused to calm down. And rightly so—there is no comfort for a mother who sees her son in captivity.

You received a terrifying phone call from someone who claimed to be a Hamas terrorist. Would you tell us about that?

I was at the home of my friend Riki Siton, who has accompanied me throughout this journey and was even chosen to light a torch at Israel's Independence Day ceremony. The phone rang. A man with a heavy Iranian accent, speaking decent Hebrew, introduced himself as a Hamas terrorist. He started threatening me, saying things like, "Do you want to see your Bar again?" He accused me of not doing enough to free my son and demanded I protest against the Israeli government for not making more concessions to the terrorists.

For a moment, fear gripped me. But then, almost without thinking, I found myself saying: "You know, my Bar is not in your hands. He's only in the Hands of the Creator. And you too are in the



Kuperstein family before Tal's accident and before October 7.

old son Yonatan ran among 11 Torah scrolls, kissing each one. I watched from above, on the balcony, melting with happiness, kissing his tiny hands that touched the holy scrolls. I kissed them 11 times—one kiss for each Torah.

We had prepared and handed out the traditional Simchat Torah candy bags the night before instead of in the morning,

I screamed like I never had before—everyone in the building knew something terrible had happened.

Hands of the Creator.”

There was silence. The terrorist was confused—he hadn’t expected that response. Then he said something I’ll never forget: “*Kol hakavod, lady.*” Even he recognized the truth in what I said.

Those words—“Bar is not in the hands of Hamas; he is in the Hands of Hashem”—became your motto. Where did it come from?

From the very first day, even before that call, that was my belief, my *emunah* in Hashem and my *bitachon* that we will be reunited.

I became religious on my own 14 years ago, without my family’s support. I deal with my husband’s disability, do my best to raise our five children, and that sentence has accompanied me all the way. I share it with every hostage family: The hostages are not in the hands of Hamas, only in the Hands of Hashem.

You’ve channeled your faith into extraordinary activism. Tell us about the projects you’ve initiated.

When I first learned about Bar’s abduction, I spent days crying. But then I realized—sitting and crying isn’t what G-d wants. I had to do something. Early in the war, I met Riki Siton from Ayelet HaShachar¹, who refused to let me give up and pushed me into action. Together, we created several meaningful projects.

The “*Tefillin for Every Hostage*” project began when someone donated a pair of *tefillin* in Bar’s merit. Riki suggested finding someone to put them on daily for Bar. When we publicized this, we got over 90 responses! Holocaust survivors, secular Jews, young people—they all wanted to don *tefillin* for Bar. We expanded the project so that every hostage is paired with someone who puts on *tefillin* for them daily.

We also set up a prayer tent in Hostage Square in Tel Aviv. Despite it being a

very secular area, we created a space for prayer, Torah learning, and unity among both religious and secular Jews, together. Every Tuesday, thousands come—secular, religious, and ultra-Orthodox—to pray together, sing, support and strengthen the families.

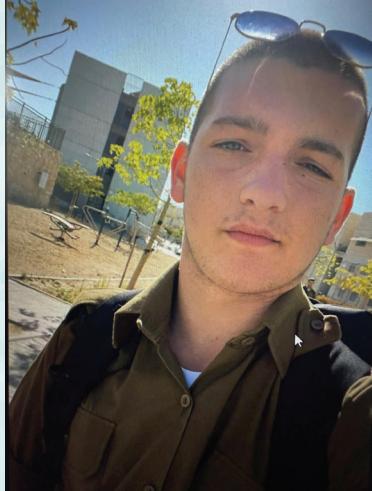
Shabbos has a special significance in your efforts. Can you explain that connection?

That last conversation when Bar told me that he had chosen not to work on Shabbat felt like a message from G-d. When I shared it with Riki the first evening we met, she immediately said, “Let’s do something.” She recorded me making a simple request to the people of Israel—not necessarily to fully observe Shabbat, but to take on something meaningful in honor of Bar and all the hostages.

The response was incredible. Over 3,000 people committed to participating

1. The Ayelet HaShachar organization was founded in 1998 with the aim of bridging the gap between religious and secular Jews, in response to the deep societal divide within Israeli society. Ayelet Hashachar is attentive to every Jew, wherever they may be, and actively promotes *ahavas Yisroel* and *achdus* among all Jews in Israel.

Every day has meaning when I'm doing something. When I'm not active, I sink.



Released hostage Sasha Truponov who got *tefillin* from the *Tefillin* for Every Hostage project that Julie leads.

in Shabbat in some way for Bar's sake. From that came "Shabbat Boutique"—visiting hostage families who aren't as connected to tradition, bringing them Shabbat candles, challah, and warmth.

We brought a Shabbat kit to Orin, Eden Yerushalmi's mother, on Friday afternoon. Four days later, it was confirmed that Eden had been murdered, may Hashem avenge his blood. But during the *shivah*, Orin told us: "See what one Shabbat can do? I kept one Shabbat and was able to bring my daughter to a Jewish burial."

How do you maintain hope after more than 600 days?

Faith in Hashem. Without that I don't know how I would survive. Beyond that, taking action gives me strength. Every day has meaning when I'm doing something. When I'm not active, I sink. I also know that

Hashem runs the world down to the tiniest detail. I've learned that we're here in this world to face trials, and every challenge brings me closer to Torah and *mitzvot*. I've had many trials, but each one only draws me nearer to Hashem, as it says (*Tehillim* 34:19), "*Karov Hashem lenishberei lev*. Hashem is close to the brokenhearted."

I'm just a simple Jewish woman. Even if I said "thank you" from morning to night, it wouldn't be enough gratitude to Hashem. So I accept that these challenges have meaning and purpose, and I need to be there to face them.

What gives Bar strength now?

I believe Bar feels all the love of the people of Israel—not just from his family, but from everyone. The prayers, the merits, the spiritual awakening since this war began... the



The Kuperstein family and many people who are taking part in the *Tefillin* for Every Hostage project. Seated front and center are President Isaac Herzog and his wife, Mrs. Michal Herzog.



Julie brings another pair of *tefillin* to a fellow Jew who is ready to start doing this *mitzvah* daily in the *zchus* of Bar and all the hostages.



Tal Kuperstein, Bar's father, in his wheelchair, holding his son's picture.

WHAT CAN WE DO

as a merit for the return of all the hostages, including Avraham Bar ben Julia?

- Men, encourage and help other Jewish men to put on *tefillin*.
- Women, take in Shabbat early, and encourage and help other Jewish women to light Shabbat candles.
- Encourage and help all Jews to do any *mitzvah* possible, even a few minutes of *limud Torah*, since every spiritual act brings salvation closer.
- Say a chapter of *Tehillim* or a short prayer every day, with intention, from the heart, for the hostages.
- Share a photo, a video, or a few words about your *mitzvah* to bring joy and strength to the families of the hostages. Email Julie and Riki at riki240@gmail.com.

Together we will increase the light, and we will see miracles.

Jewish people are in a different place now. There's been a great spiritual awakening, a closeness, an understanding of why we're here and why this happened. Hashem is speaking to us.

I have no doubt that Bar is close to us, that he feels and is being strengthened by all this. And not just him. All the hostages. ☺

In closing, what would you ask of Jewish readers around the world to do for Bar?

After so much time, life is somewhat returning to normal. That's good. But at the same time, we must not forget. Our children—our brothers—are underground with Hamas. Ask yourselves every day: What did I do today for the hostages?

Every *mitzvah*, every spiritual act, is another dose of strength, another step toward their return. ☺

Tal Kuperstein, father of Bar, in his wheelchair with a poster telling Bar that "the whole nation is waiting and praying for you!"



Bar's picture at the Rebbe's Ohel.