

Light a Candle – Wear a Dogtag – Remember the Soldiers

FIRST NIGHT: GILAD SHALIT

This first night of Hanukkah, we have in our thoughts Gilad Shalit, a shy young man who excels in math and science and helps his parents run a Bed & Breakfast in the Galilee. But this ordinary teenager was placed in extraordinary circumstances when he was kidnapped by the terrorist organization Hamas at 5:40 in the morning of June 25, 2006. He is currently being held in the southern Gaza Strip.

Shalit celebrated his 21th birthday in captivity on August 28. Now he is marking yet another celebration – the Festival of Lights – in the custody of terrorists instead of at home where he belongs.

Our thoughts are with his mother Aviva, father Noam, older brother Yoel, and younger sister Hadas.

SECOND NIGHT: EHUD GOLDWASSER

On this second night, we keep in mind Ehud Goldwasser, captured by Hezbollah on July 12, 2006 in an incident that sparked the subsequent war in Lebanon.

He had been married to his wife, Karnit, just 11 months before being shipped off for reserve duty, celebrating Karnit's 30th birthday the week before his departure. Karnit, who was forced to celebrate her one-year wedding anniversary alone, traveled to the United States this fall to raise awareness about the plight of the abducted soldiers and advocate for help in ensuring their release.

Goldwasser, 32, from Nahariya, works in the Technion in environmental engineering. Nicknamed "Udi" by friends and family, Goldwasser lived in South Africa as a teenager. His parents are Shlomo and Mickey.

THIRD NIGHT: ELDAD REGEV

As we light the third candle, we remember Eldad Regev, captured along with Ehud Goldwasser (see "second night") on that fateful date of July 12, 2006.

Eldad Regev, 27, from Kiryat Motzkin, is a law student at Bar Ilan University who also worked for Bezeq. His mother, Tova, passed away when he was in 12th grade. An avid football (soccer) fan, Eldad recently passed a coaching course and watched the last game of the World Cup the day before leaving home for reserve duty.

We have in our thoughts his family, his father Zvi and brothers Benny, Ofer and Eyal.

FOURTH NIGHT: GUY HEVER

On this fourth night, we think of Guy Hever. On August 17, 1997, Guy Hever (born May 30, 1977), a soldier in the Israeli army, was last seen at his army base on the southern Golan Heights. He was dressed in army fatigues and was carrying his weapon, key chain and international military identification papers. The area was searched thoroughly but no trace of him was found.

FIFTH NIGHT: RON ARAD

On this fifth night, we remember Rod Arad, a navigator with the Israeli Air Force who was captured on October 16, 1986 by members of the Islamic fundamentalist Amal militia and later sold into the custody of the Iranian "Revolutionary Guards." He is believed to be held somewhere in Iran.

Ron and his wife Tami have a daughter Yuval, who was only an infant when her father disappeared. Ron was a student at the Technion-Israsel Institute of Technology, where he was pursuing a B.S. degree in chemical engineering and had successfully completed his first year of studies at the time of his capture.

A video featuring Ron Arad speaking for over a minute from a prison cell filmed most probably some time in the late eighties was aired for the first time in Israel on September 6, 2006.

Ron Arad was born in Israel on May 5, 1958, the son of Batya and the late Dov Arad.

SIXTH NIGHT: ZACHARY BAUMEL

On the sixth night, we have in mind Zachary Baumel, a dual Israeli-American citizen, captured by Syrian army forces during the battle of Sultan Yakoub on June 11, 1982.

Reports indicate that Baumel is alive and being held incommunicado by the Syrian government.

Twenty-four years later, Baumel's parents Miriam and Yona are still eagerly awaiting the day when once again they can celebrate Hanukkah with their son.

SEVENTH NIGHT: ZVI FELDMAN

Our seventh candle is for Zvi Feldman, also captured in the battle of Sultan Yakoub (see "sixth night") in 1982.

At the time of his capture, he and his girlfriend were seriously considering marriage.

Feldman's father fled Europe after his entire family was killed in the Holocaust. His mother was a Moroccan immigrant.

EIGHTH NIGHT: YEHUDA KATZ

On the eighth and final night, we recall Yehuda Katz, also captured in the battle of Sultan Yakoub (see "sixth night" and "fifth night.") The son of Holocaust survivors Yosef and Sarah, Katz was a star pupil who spent all his days and nights in the Yeshiva beit midrash and dreamed of one day being a leading Judaic scholar and rabbinic figure.

May all of these soldiers speedily return to their friends, families and countries and celebrate together next Hanukkah.