

# A letter to my precious daughter



THE DOCTOR IS IN  
DR. BATYA L. LUDMAN

**M**y dearest daughter,  
I suspect, my dearest daughter, that you may actually never see this letter. You simply will not have the energy or time to sit long enough to read it. That is okay, my love, as some day, God willing, after the war, I will share the contents with you if they still feel relevant.

It is not my habit to brag about my children – their good deeds speak for themselves – but, at this moment, more than three months into the war, I am in awe. When your husband, our beloved son-in-law, was first called up, donned his uniform, and left on October 7, more than 100 days ago, to fight for our country, you became the relentlessly dedicated commander of your own home front. And you did so in ways I could never have anticipated.

*Aizo gibora*, what a hero you are! Who could ever have imagined or known what that would mean on that Simchat Torah day and onwards until today, which now seems like so very long ago? You, along with all the other amazing women in this country, are true heroes.

Night after night, day after day, and throughout all hours of the day and night, you have singlehandedly held down the fort. Up several hours a night with young kids, grabbing them during a siren and running to the safe room, fighting high fevers and illnesses, trips to the doctor, and even the emergency room, you still managed to work and take care of your own patients most days once childcare resumed. How did you do it? Where did you manage to find the strength?

When I would ask you that, you'd look me straight in the eye, even as one child or another would cling to your leg, and you would say, "Ima, what choice do I have? I have no other choice." When I saw the exhaustion on your face, you'd remind me of how hard conditions must be in Gaza, and in the five minutes of spare time you may have had for yourself, you spent it trying to organize supplies for your husband's unit.

Throughout this very difficult time, there was one conversation you and I never ever had. While I could always talk to you about anything, the one conversation we could not go to was one around your husband's safety. I often wondered if you, like me, were up at night praying with such earnestness that all would be okay. That he would go in, and he would come out, physically and psychologically unharmed. I knew that he would never be the same. How could he be? None of us are.

I often wondered how much you thought about this or if you could ever allow yourself to go "there" – to those thoughts and fears with no resolution that rob you of the precious sleep you rarely got. Just one time, you briefly alluded to those "thoughts" – and not your two precious little boys – that kept you up that night.

Sometimes, you shared with me that you found it hard to be patient with your kids, with me, and with other things. If I had no bandwidth for more than my family and my clients, I often wondered where you found the energy to calmly explain why one of your children had to do what you were asking.

I DON'T think you saw it or gave yourself much credit for finding the incredibly patient side of yourself in a sea of trying simply to survive. So often, you told me that you were in survival mode, but you did not convey that to the kids. How you even managed to buy new shoes for the children, order groceries, fold the endless laundry, and more, escaped me. The conversations Abba and I had with you had to be kept short. Already operating on negative time, we did not want to make it harder for you.

Nonetheless, we often did! We asked questions, even when there were no real answers. We often shared a common language, and I knew that asking "What's new?" or hearing your thoughts unless you volunteered them would not be helpful. I tried not to even ask you, my baby, if you were okay because often I could not really give you whatever it was you might need besides a meal, a short nap, or help picking up a child from kindergarten. After all, we live almost an hour away from each other.

Even coming to us for Shabbat takes so much energy. How do you pack a car with two young children, one too small to walk, with a stroller, a suitcase, and a bit more, with only two hands? And worse, how do you unpack with two sleeping kids in the car in the cold, dark night under the threat of sirens, without asking someone to come to help you? You can't exactly leave a one-year-old or a three-year-old alone in the apartment – and it is so hard to have to ask for help. Yes, the wives of the reservists are without a doubt the unsung heroes of this war.



'SINCE OCT. 7, you have been the relentlessly dedicated commander of the home front.' (Felix Prado/Unsplash)

You certainly have had your share of challenges over the years. We never know how our children will react to adversity. Will they fall apart or will they find strength? And where will that strength come from?

It is so hard to handle uncertainty with no access to basic information such as "Is my husband okay?" and believe in the saying "No news is good news," day after day. Is your strength from your family, your religious beliefs, or simply your need to focus on the present – putting one foot in front of the other?

I can only say that your energy gives strength to Abba and me. If you can manage, then we surely must as well. As we often heard in the late evening that you had not yet even been able to find time to eat or shower, prepare for work the next day, or have the laundry and apartment as you'd like, we'd make plans to come to try and help out a bit. Along with your in-laws who were amazing, we still knew that often you would be stuck in the trenches alone. You barely had time to talk to your girlfriends, whose husbands were also called up.

YOU SEEMED so happy for others, with not a hint of jealousy if their partners got out for even a short visit. And yes, when your husband got out for a day, sadly, it was often while you were at work, but you did not complain. You dealt with the disruption in precarious routines with great appreciation, even if the children had to deal with saying goodbye all over again. Your gratitude to him, to us, and to others was remarkable.

Sometimes, I wondered how much news you actually heard or how much you knew. Then I discovered that we were each trying to protect the other. One week you knew of five soldiers who were killed, and you stretched yourself beyond thin, even when you were so sick, to try and get to a funeral or *shiva*. Each person's loss is their own, and one cannot compare, but I always sensed that you manage to see the positive whenever possible. Our hearts go out to the young women, be they mothers, wives, or girlfriends, who have had to endure so much.

How do you shut it off? How do you sleep when at least one child wants to be with you in bed and the other is up several times a night? How do you explain that Abba is helping to protect the country when he cries because all he wants is for him to be home? How do you explain that after one day at home, he has to leave? How do you get through the day when Abba is the hero and can do no wrong and your kids will at times act as if you can do no right? How do you get through your day other than being on autopilot?

So, my daughter, like you, I have put myself on a need-to-know basis. If I need to hear something, you will tell me. If you are upset, I am here for you; and when you lack patience with me because you are running on empty, I will try even harder to be there for you.

And I continue to pray. I pray that he is safe, or at least to hear that he is safe, warm, dry, and okay. I pray that he gets out soon, even for a day. I pray that every terrorist gets what he deserves and that we find and destroy every tunnel before I hear that one night they set up camp and slept next to a tunnel opening.

I pray that you, my beloved daughter, have the continued strength to get through this and that you don't have to schlep two little ones to a safe room. I pray that you are resilient enough to bounce back and that your children are young enough not to remember these very difficult days. I pray that everyone stays healthy and that the home front will once again be filled with unbridled laughter and fun.

I breathe a heavy sigh as I acknowledge how we have been through so much, and in trying to be in this moment I remind myself that everyone is in the new "okay, not okay" mode of existence for now. We will win the war and the small battles. We must. We have no choice.

If women ran the entire battlefield and not mostly the home front, I have a feeling that this war would have ended already. In the meantime, women – be you wives, mothers, or both – you are the unsung heroines, and we salute you for your strength and courage and so much more.

I love you, my daughter, so much and wish that I could have protected you from all of this. Instead, you have managed to give me strength. May we merit to see much better days very soon.

Ima

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