

## RAISING AWARENESS OF THE HOSTAGES



The attack by Hamas on Israel on 7 October, the subsequent war raging in Gaza and the suffering of so many civilians on both sides, have created complex realities for many of us. We received an invitation from the Board of Deputies to join the 'Adopt A Hostage' scheme in February and we threw our support behind it, adopting Hersh Goldberg-Polin, 23 who is still held captive in Gaza. We decided to add a level to our connection by reaching out to a hostage family who are members of Kol Haneshama Synagogue, a Reform community in Jerusalem. This is part of our long-term approach of building and strengthening our relationships with Progressive Jews throughout Israel.

As part of this relationship-building between the two communities, Rabbi Oded Mazor and Hersh's family joined us live on zoom from Jerusalem during our Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut ceremony, to lead us in the prayer for hostages and give testimony. Subsequently, we have incorporated the prayer into our liturgy. In addition, over a period of two weeks, we had close to 300 members creating our popup art installation dedicated to Israel, the plight of the hostages and messages of hope. Having been displayed in our foyer for the past three weeks, we are now arranging for it to be lovingly dismantled as we move onto the next phase of our campaign. This includes sharing a list of initiatives which will help to raise awareness and continue the fight for the release of hostages. We invite you to read the list and decide if and how you would like to engage (If you wish, you can collect your leaf from the basket in the foyer)

A few words about Hersh – he was enjoying the music at the Nova festival on 7 October and as the attacks from the Hamas terrorists started, he and his friends ran to a bomb shelter. As grenades were thrown into the shelter, they threw them back out. One of these grenades exploded causing Hersh to lose part of his left arm. Hersh is left handed. He was then taken hostage with this significant injury. During Pesach, Hamas released a video of Hersh which was the first sign of life since he was taken. Hersh's parents Rachel and Jon Goldberg-Polin have campaigned tirelessly with courage and dignity across the globe to raise awareness of the cause of the hostages. It was initially hoped that this would be a short-term campaign, but it has become a long-term agenda to ensure the hostage reality and Hersh's release remain in our hearts and minds. Hersh's cousin, Rebecca, spoke to us on Saturday 11 May about the trauma her family, the families of the other hostages and Israel are experiencing right now.

Following, you can find ideas and resources published by Hersh's family to support their campaign.

**Hersh loves music** - this is a list of some of his favourite songs curated on Spotify, play them and enjoy a little dance with your loved ones: [https://open.spotify.com/playlist/08VjbE4RXHCkeBCJVa2Me8?si=uzJ2zR4yT\\_GqlhPOZ4Aspw&pi=e-lwoD7BeCSdqG](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/08VjbE4RXHCkeBCJVa2Me8?si=uzJ2zR4yT_GqlhPOZ4Aspw&pi=e-lwoD7BeCSdqG)

**Hersh loves chocolate chip cookies** - you could bake some using this recipe: Hersh Goldberg-Polin's Favorite Chocolate Chip Cookies - Recipe - Foodish

**Hersh loves to travel** - he had planned a two-year trip around the world, due to start in December 2023. Last summer, Hersh had been to music festivals around Europe. Many of our young people will be travelling this summer and some may also go to music festivals. Please encourage them to hold Hersh with them when they are enjoying new experiences, music and moments of joy. Maybe they could have a yellow item with them as representative of Hersh and the other hostages.

**Hersh loves football** - before Hersh was taken hostage, he was working with an Israeli- Palestinian initiative which was using football to bring Israeli and Palestinian children together. Many of our children play football, their next game could be played with all players wearing a yellow ribbon, to represent Hersh.

**Hersh loves his family** - on Mother's Day, Hersh's mother, Rachel, read out a letter she wrote the evening before he turned three years old. You can hear her read her beautiful and moving letter here: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C63IGF6NBjx/?igsh=MTdsbWNpNGI2cnBpcw==>

Hersh's parents have recently asked that his name is spoken out loud. They have asked that when you next order a coffee and they ask your name, tell them it's Hersh.

