

News

Happy Tears

By Lauren Sachs

Lauren holds a bachelor's degree in English and Psychology, and a Master's Degree in Social Work, from the University of Michigan. After completing advanced clinical training at Yale University, Lauren worked as a therapist and consultant in a variety of settings. During her time in Jewish Toledo, Lauren has received the Harry Levison Young Leadership Award and the Shining Light Award, and is currently serving as the Chair for the 20th Annual NW Ohio Jewish Book Festival. In addition to her involvement within the local Jewish community, Lauren serves as a volunteer for Hospice of Northwest Ohio. Lauren is also the author of a forthcoming book about her late husband, his joyful approach to life and work as an oncologist, and how examining his life helped her better cope with her grief. To learn more about Lauren's journey and her work on living well after loss, visit www.literally-lauren.com.



Once we leave the gauntlet of the holiday season behind, those who are in grief may feel a sense of reprieve. Knowing they have survived the family gatherings and heightened social pressures of December without their

beloved, mourners can catch their breath for a moment in the New Year. Still, as with so many other aspects of grief, another challenge is just around the corner. February brings with it myriad reminders of love. From roses to cupids and from boxes of chocolate to heart shaped greeting cards, the symbols of love are all around. These images also remind the bereaved in a very palpable way that they are still missing an important piece of their world.

When you lose a spouse or partner, early loss is intensely lonesome. Some would-be supporters mistakenly believe that they can help ease the loneliness and pain by helping the bereaved stay busy with other company and activities. Unfortunately, these attempts are merely a Band-Aid for the deepest sort of wound. The void left by partner loss simply cannot be filled with just any company or activity as the griever is missing not just affection, but also a specific person

who loved them in a distinct, deep, and personal way. Those who are newly bereaved long for the special intimacy they shared with the departed and yearn to once again share time with their person. Therefore, a holiday focused on love can feel especially wrenching.

As we approach Valentine's Day, I have been considering various types of love. Clearly, the love of friends or the love of a parent for a child is quite distinct from our love of community. Moreover, platonic love is vastly different from the most intimate type of romantic love we feel for a partner or spouse. While there is no simple remedy for the loss of our dearest person, I have found that leaning into self-love and self-care can help soften the anguish. Since we feel so much pain during mourning, it makes sense to me that these are habits which can help us as we strive to find a way through the affliction we feel.

Searching for ways to understand love

and loss in my own life, I have done a great deal of introspection over the last few years. Since losing my husband, I have come to realize that giving to others is one of my "love languages." I often express my affection by giving gifts, but it is also important for me to nurture and help others in intangible ways. While I want to honor this part of myself, I have also come to recognize the need for boundaries in this arena. Indeed, no matter how much I find meaning in providing for others, I have discovered that I can only be at my best when I also give to myself. In my opinion, self-nurturance and self-love are especially key to finding our way through the most turbulent times in our lives. This Valentine's Day, I hope you will examine your own love language and find ways to give as much to yourself as you do to others. After all, love - in all its many forms - is a beautiful thing.

Released hostage Emily Damari's injured hand becomes an instant symbol of Israeli defiance

By Philissa Cramer

January 21, 2025 (JTA) — Within hours of her release from captivity in Gaza, Emily Damari's hand had become a new Israeli icon.

Damari was injured on Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas terrorists shot her and took her hostage. It became clear after she was released on the first day of a ceasefire on Sunday that she had lost the ring and middle finger on her left hand.

The clearest evidence came in a photograph released by the Israeli government, and later confirmed by pictures her family shared, showing Damari video chatting with her brother and father. In it, she was smiling as she showed off her hand, which was bandaged, with her thumb, index and pinky fingers visible.

Soon, supporters had added bandages to the "rock on" emoji, which uses the same configuration of fingers, to transform Damari's injury into a symbol of defiance. Damari's mother, Mandy, added the emoji to her handle on the social network X, and posted a photo with her daughter grinning while displaying the wounded hand.

The most widely circulated version was made by Aviad Amergi, an Israeli sneaker artist, who posted it on Instagram along with the words, "A great small victory." His followers quickly requested that he turn it into a sticker for WhatsApp, the messaging platform that is massively popular in Israel, where it soon circulated widely.

Others adapted Damari's gesture as well. A drawing of Damari's hands demonstrating the Jewish priestly blessing circulated online, with words from the biblical benediction: "May God bless you and keep you." The drawing was attributed to Moshe Shapira, a Jerusalem artist and architect, whose son Aner was killed on Oct. 7 after saving the lives of others.

The Israeli soccer player Ohad Hazut made the sign with his hands after a win on Monday, writing on Instagram, "An important victory."

Together, the symbol is emerging as a companion to "We Will Dance Again," the refrain adopted by survivors of the Nova music festival massacre, as a show of resilience for Israelis traumatized by Oct. 7. It also joins the yellow ribbon, which



The image of Emily Damari's wounded hand has been repurposed by Israeli artists as a symbol of resilience. (IDF Spokesperson/Photo illustration)

has become a ubiquitous symbol of advocacy for the hostages.

"There are many symbols of victory, this is my symbol," tweeted the Israeli artist Nemo Shiff alongside several renditions of Damari's hand. "For me, it symbolizes survival and bravery against all odds."

Some — including Lihi Lapid, the writer who is the wife of Yair Lapid, the Israeli parliamentary opposition leader — have also noted that the configuration of Damari's

remaining fingers is the same as the sign for "I love you" in American Sign Language.

Damari herself channeled both interpretations in her first Instagram post after returning to Israel. "'Love, love, love,'" she posted, in a video visible to her friends and family but soon shared much more widely. "I have returned to my beloved life." She ended her post with the "rock on" emoji.