

Saturday night in Jerusalem, March 2, 2002, Liora Tedgi became a victim of terror. A bomb placed by a Palestinian ripped into the hundreds of Jews returning from Sabbath services. Eleven Jews were killed, fifty-one injured. Liora, pregnant with twins, lost both in the attack. Here in the Middle East, "*chutzpa*" can be directed even at God. "God," tiny Liora struck a hard bargain. "You give me another set of twins, I'll take care of your victims."

The deal, it seems, was sweet. Since its establishment in 2002, Ohr Meir U'Bracha, Liora's non-profit Terror Victim's Fund has distributed thousands of weekly food baskets to suffering families, provided psychological and legal aid, delivered winter shoes, clothes and school supplies, baby formula and diapers, electrical appliances, and a kitchen package for brides. There is a Kids' Corner to provide after-school hot meals and aid with homework, and a big brother/sister mentoring program. There are day-trips to the zoo, moonwalks and carnivals. There's also an enormous fundraising burden. Before heading to the office each morning, Liora walks her twin daughters (conceived and born shortly after losing the first set) with identical long braids and blue school uniforms to their school.

Terror's raw taste is not new to the Tedgi family. Liora's father-in-law was wounded by a bomb left at a bus station on the way to pray at the grave of a fourth-century sage. His brother was stabbed by a Palestinian while on duty as a policeman, to the horror of his own Arab friends. Liora's great-uncle Matityahu was fired upon by Palestinian snipers as he was stranded in a doomed convoy bringing food to a besieged Jerusalem in 1948. His brother, Grandpa David, carried the 23-year old on his back to Shaare Tzedek hospital, then suffered a heart attack there as Matityahu died.

In Liora's book of life, altruism calls to those who have suffered. It's the frayed soul that feels the hole in another. "The victims of terror are not only the ones who die," says Liora. "Children are orphaned, parents are disabled, and cannot provide for their remaining family." Her eyes are weary, but the flower on her trademark black hat bobs up at the world. There's a steel determination in her stance, the force that has her scolding the mayor of Ashkelon and Ashdod as they beseech her to include their citizens, cowering in bomb-shelters, in her mercy missions. It's the same force that has her bargaining with God. Her mouth, as she walks past her neighbors or through a roomful of orphans, pours forth a steady flow of blessings, heaped upon whomever she meets. "You should have happiness, peace, good children... But most of all a happy heart."

"I was there too," Liora says. Not only in terror, but in the poverty that stalks many of its broken victims. "As a child, we got food from aid organizations. We didn't know the word spoiled. Complaining was not in our universe. I decided when I'd grow up, I'd give food to people in a dignified manner. At the time I made this decision, my head was just high enough to get poked by the corner of the table. So you can figure out the age." At twelve, Liora jutted out her chin at the director of Shaare Tzedek Hospital, and insisted she wanted to volunteer there after school. "What can a kid do in a hospital?" he asked. "Everything you can't," young Liora replied. He pulled out a white apron with the word "volunteer" embroidered on the chest, and she began distributing food every day after school.

What separates the hurt and bitter person from the hurt and helpful? "I grew up with this. When we had a bit more food, my father designated an old wagon his "Fiat". That was for delivering food to people relatively close to our home. The sturdier wagon was his "Mercedes", which went longer distances to feed people more hungry than us." When Liora's father died, puzzled families suddenly found themselves denied credit in the local grocery. Only with his demise did these families - and his own - discover he'd been paying their bills for years. Ancient Hebrew differentiates between the word "*hesed*", loosely translated as lovingkindness, and "*rahamim*" which is mercy. "*Rahamim*" is a compassion awakened by an external source; the beggar attracts my attention or makes me uncomfortable, so I give. Were he not sprawled with a cup in my path, that money would remain in my pocket. "*Hesed*" on the other hand, is an expansiveness rooted inside. I give because I need to be a giving person. This is how I feel whole. If the beggar's not here today, I'll go look for him. Liora seems to operate on a need to do "*hesed*". Inaction, or egoism, leaves her bewildered.

This drive feeds a unique expertise. In violent emergencies and immovable gloom, people turn to Liora. This author did. During the Second Lebanon War (2006), bombs were falling in the north, but we in Jerusalem were untouched. It was eerie. We ached to help our brothers up there, but what could we do? So we ran to Liora. No problem. She'd bamboozled an empty school building rent-free from its owner ("*You want to talk about money? This is war! Talk to me after.*") and set up a makeshift dormitory for families to escape the bombing. We ran to her, "Liora! How can we help?" Stirring a pot of soup the size of a bathtub in the midst of this bizarre slumber party, she told us gravely, "These families have no towels." So I ran up and down the street in search, knowing I could save the world with thirty towels. Liora made it sound glorious.

She's not selfish with the high she gets from helping others. To this five-foot dynamo with lipstick, the greatest giving is allowing others to share the thrill. Neighbors are invited - repeatedly and graciously - to get into the food-packing party each Thursday. A carnival for victims is extended to the neighborhood children; we all eat cotton candy together. Cognoscenti from New York and LA know: a bat mitzvah with meaning is a trip to Israel, and a day volunteering with the Terror Victim's Fund (small bat mitzvah party included). The post-bat mitzvah set braid challah with Liora, and become fans forever. Liora marvels at the second-dimension chesed emanating from her office: "Do you know how many shidduchim have come about through the Fund?" Photos of happy couples on the wall include volunteers, former victims, and friends of the Fund.

Liora's organization receives no funding from the government; she is the queen of her staff of volunteers. She does respond to desperate mayors and municipalities, begging her to bring their town's children out of sweltering bomb shelters, and into Jerusalem for a day of wholesome fun. "It's good they call," she says, "because we can help more people. On the other hand, it's more money we don't have." This summer, she's scrambling for funds to take bomb-wary children to the Biblical Zoo, to jump on moonwalks and laugh at a clown.

Her compassion is sharply cut within the fences of Mideast politics. She is no peace-touting flower child. "An Arab injured in a "*pigua*" (Hebrew for terrorist attack) gets much more from the Israeli government than a Jew. They [the Palestinians] have twenty-eight nations to go to. We have only one. It's easy for

someone who never suffered an attack to call for peace. They [the Palestinians] don't want it. You can't change basic human nature."

Do the brokenness, the bills, the absent parents and ragged youth not make Liora weary? Depressed? That flowered hat keeps moving forward, inviting her neighbors and donors to celebrate a moment with her victim-children. "As long as God gave me another day – that's a gift, I must be happy. That's an opportunity to help one more person. There's a lot to do."

www.terror-victims.org.il