

The Four Fallen Sons *of the Arava*

ארבעת הבנים הנופלים של הערבה

On this night, as we sit with our loved ones, we think of the too-many families who are missing members around their Seder table.

The Central Arava, Australia's partnership region in Israel, has lost four of its sons.

The four sons of the Hagaddah remind us that no two children are alike. We wish to recall the individuality of each of the fallen sons of the Arava, and to mourn that all four of them can no longer ask any questions at their families' gatherings. Speak their names and remember the lives that they lived:



Sergeant First Class Ohad Cohen

Ohad, better known as Budi, was raised on Moshav Idan. Outgoing and athletic, he is remembered by all who knew him for his contagious smile. Ohad was a madrich in the local youth movement, and spent a year before his military service in a pluralistic leadership program near the Gaza border on Kibbutz Sufa. In December 2021, he enlisted into Shaldag, a special forces unit of the Israeli Air Force. Throughout the grueling training-- and despite being seriously wounded by a viper bite-- he maintained his lighthearted optimism. On 7 October, a month shy of his 21st birthday, Ohad's unit confronted the terrorist onslaught at Kibbutz Be'eri, where he was killed in battle.

Staff Sergeant Gali Shakotai

Gali was raised on Moshav Tzofar. He loved the desert and found every opportunity to spend time with his friends, and with a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, in the majestic wilderness in which he was raised. Gali had a passion for helping others. After finishing his studies, he spent a year volunteering with at-risk youth in Bat Yam. In October 2021, Gali was drafted into a non-combat position in the IDF and worked hard to be transferred into a combat role, eventually joining an elite unit of the Nahal Brigade. On 7 October, at age 21, Gali was killed defending the Sufa outpost along the Gaza Border.



Staff Sergeant Roie Elias

Roie was raised on Moshav Tzofar. He was an outstanding basketball player, joining the youth ranks of the Elitzur Yavne Basketball Club in Grade 9, and eventually transferring to a boarding school to be able to attend daily practices. Just as he was a valued teammate on the court, Roie is remembered for his selfless orientation towards his community. He enlisted into a combat engineering unit in August 2021. When Israel was attacked, Roie's unit was called into action and he never again returned home. On 23 December was killed in battle in the southern Gaza Strip at age 21. He was buried next to Gali, his close childhood friend.

Major Iftah Shahaar

Iftah moved with his family to Moshav Paran when he was three years old, where he developed a deep love for the quiet beauty of the desert. In 2014, he participated in the Arava Australia Partnership's Youth Delegation to Australia, where he shared that inspiring love for his home country and his home community of the Arava. His warmth and charisma are still remembered by his hosts at Bialik College. Iftah, a born leader, served as a commissioned officer in Shaldag, and was transferred during the war to replace an injured company commander in the Givati Brigade. On 27 February, he was killed in battle in northern Gaza. He was 25 years old.



The four sons of the Arava are a reminder of the individuality of each of the 604 soldiers that have fallen since 7 October, each with their own personality, hopes and beliefs. As are the four sons of the Arava and the Hagaddah, so are we all: we are distinct, with unique answers to different questions. Yet we are united as one family, through thick and thin, through grief and through redemption, on the long march towards freedom.