

Naveh Shoham
Kibbuz Be'eri

Israel

His Holiness Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
00120, Vatican City

Dear Holy Father,

You have written a letter to all of us here in Israel and, with a little help from my mother, who speaks English, I would like to answer your letter and thank you from the bottom of my heart.

My name is Naveh Shoham, I am an 8-year-old boy from Kibbutz Be'eri which is in the southern part of Israel. One part of my family comes from Germany, and the other from Austria. After my family had to flee from the Nazis, one of my grandfathers was actually born in Argentina like you. He also speaks Spanish.

My great passion is football. I love practicing with my friends, but also with my father, who is called Tal. I used to go to the stadium a lot with my grandfather Avshal. We are fans of Hapoel Beer-Sheva in Israel and I am also an enthusiastic supporter of Manchester United. My grandfather and I used to practice together and attend Hapoel Beer-Sheva's matches. That was our thing. I found out on the internet that you are a passionate supporter of San Lorenzo de Almagro in Argentina. Then you will surely understand the joy I always had with my grandfather at the stadium.

On October 7th, my world was turned upside down: my grandfather was murdered by terrorists and so were my aunt, my disabled uncle and his caregiver. I was kidnapped and taken to Gaza, along with my four-year-old sister Yahel, my mother, my grandmother, my aunt and my cousin. We were held captive for over 50 days. My father was also abducted on that day and he is still held captive there. It has been almost four months now. My heart aches with sadness, I miss my father and fear for

him. I also think about my grandfather a lot. He is gone, I will never hug him and play football with him again and we will never again go to a match together.

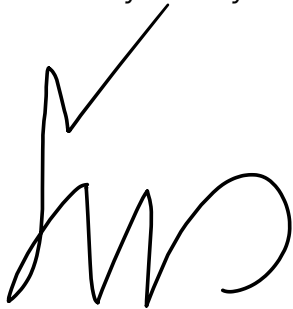
When the war is over and my father is back, I think I will go to a football match at the stadium again. And if I go, I want to buy an extra ticket so that I can have an empty seat for grandfather Avshal next to me. This way, he will be with me at least in my thoughts. I am already saving from my allowance for this. My heart is breaking. I hope so much that my father will be released soon. I hope the world does not forget about him.

I am very grateful that you have reminded people with your letter that my father and many other fathers, mothers, and children are still held as hostages. And you have written that you are praying for their release. I also pray every day. We have a small table in our home that we call our table of hope. Here we light candles and pray for my father's well-being and release. I also drew a comic-book character saying "*I wish my father will come home*". I am sending you a copy of this picture here in my letter.

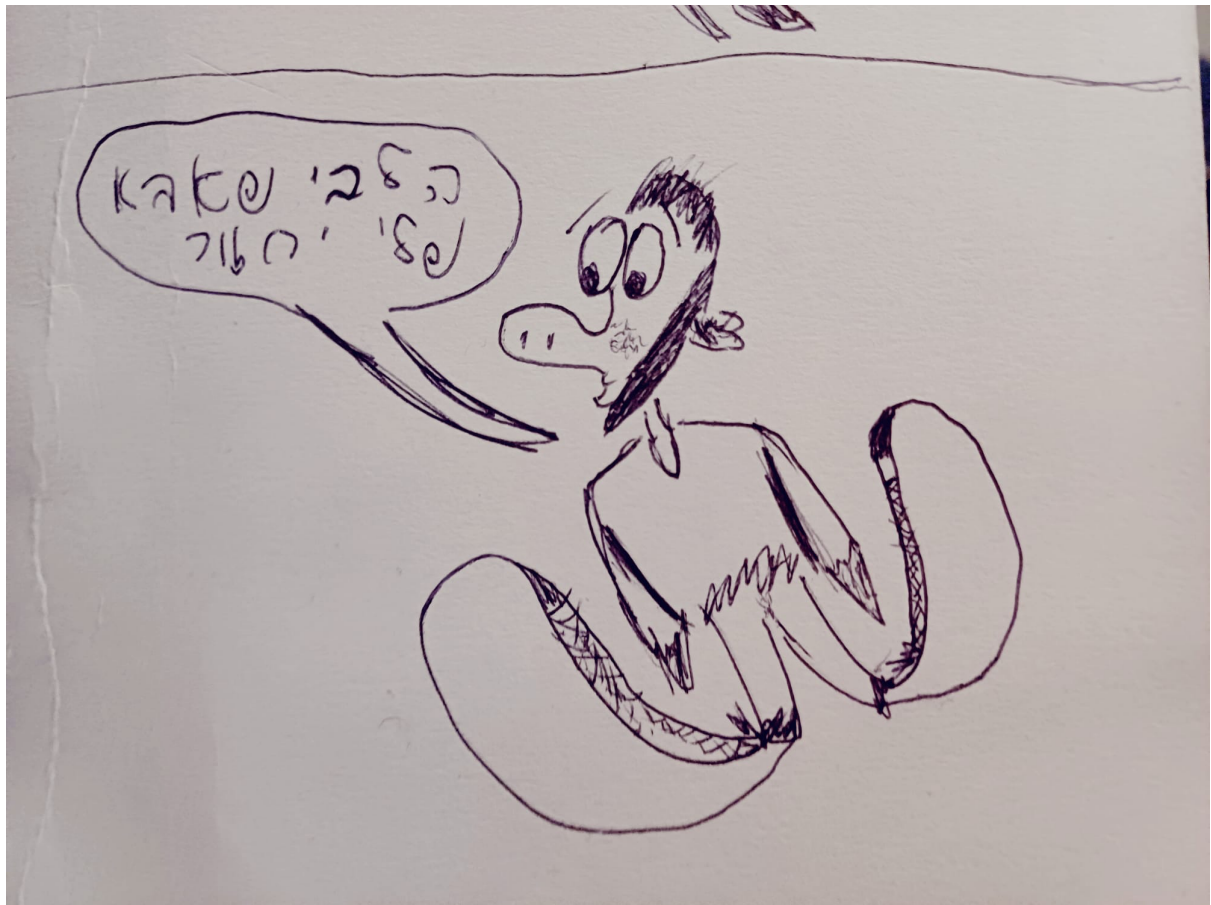
I also often think about the children in Gaza and wish the war would stop. When I was there, I asked my mother if the children in Gaza also play football and if she thinks I can join them. But unfortunately, that was not possible then. But still, I think it would be better if we played football together instead of shooting at each other.

You are a great man. Please continue to work for the release of our families and for peace.

Thank you very much from Israel,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several fluid, connected strokes. The signature is positioned below the text 'Thank you very much from Israel,'.

Naveh



I wish my father will come home