

# A Journey to Israel

From Solidarity to Medical Cooperation

25-31 October 2026



Meeting Michal Maayan during the visit: discussing ties between Iranian and Jewish communities abroad.

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A travel report for the Patriotic Doctors of Iran

Personal experiences, meetings and a proposal for educational cooperation

## About This Travelogue

This travelogue is my account of a journey to Israel from 25 to 31 October 2026, undertaken to build connections between Iranian and Israeli doctors and strengthen cooperation between Iranian and Jewish communities abroad.

The account of the meetings was written up to Friday 30 October. In this edition, the return on Saturday 31 October is presented as the planned journey home, in accordance with the boarding passes. What I describe concerning a future educational course is a proposal arising from conversations during this visit; implementation requires final coordination.

This booklet brings together 54 relevant, non-duplicate photographs. Images of the meetings and visits appear alongside the narrative. Photographs of the framed pictures, books and documents in Dr Daniel Dana's home appear in a separate section devoted to my host's archive. They are mementoes of his past, photographed during this journey.

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# 1. Why I Came to Israel

My decision to travel to Israel, as part of my involvement with the Patriotic Doctors of Iran, began with a clear question: how can solidarity between Iranians and Israelis become a practical, lasting relationship that benefits people? For me, as a trauma surgeon, the answer lies in bringing together mutual understanding, education and the protection of human life. I wanted to see things for myself, have conversations and find a way for Iranian and Israeli colleagues to work together in a way that could make a difference in real life.

In my view, the political circumstances of recent years have brought many freedom-seeking Iranians and the people of Israel closer together. The Iranian people have paid a heavy price in their struggle to free themselves from the Islamic Republic, and the killings of 8 and 9 January 2026 once again demonstrated the depth of that suffering. Israel, too, has faced threats from the Islamic Republic and its proxy groups. The tragedy of 7 October 2023, which according to published reports left approximately 1,200 people dead [2], confronted Israeli society with renewed urgency over security and the need to counter violent Islamist extremism.

This growing closeness also has a tangible meaning for Iranians abroad. Iranians who carry the Lion and Sun tricolour and the Israeli flag in support of freedom and friendship between the two nations may face threats and attacks; Jewish communities in Europe also face threats. I believe that getting to know one another, preparing for emergencies and developing the ability to help can form part of our shared response. Yet the relationship I seek goes beyond a common threat. Friendship must continue to have meaning once that threat has passed: in medicine, education, culture, development and the creation of a future in which people can plan for better lives. It was with this in mind that I came to Israel on 25 October.

## 2. Sunday 25 October: Arrival and My First Evening in Jerusalem

My journey began at Manchester Airport. I left my car in the airport car park, took the bus to the terminal and flew via Munich to Ben Gurion Airport. Before travelling, I had submitted an application for electronic travel authorisation through the ETA-IL system [1] and assumed that the necessary checks had been completed. With that expectation, I had not anticipated a further assessment on arrival lasting more than two hours.

At the airport, I was directed to a passport control desk. They asked where I had been born, and I answered: Iran. They then asked about my visits to Iran. I explained that I had left twenty-eight years earlier and had not returned during that time. I also spoke about my views and my reasons for travelling, explaining that I was a friend of Israel and had come to build contacts and cooperation. Their response was courteous: they understood what I was saying, but felt that further checks were necessary. I sat down and waited. About two and a half hours later, they respectfully informed me that I was permitted to enter.

Dr Daniel Dana was waiting outside: a fellow Iranian whom I had not known closely or for very long before this journey, but whose hospitality began from that moment. That evening, we took the train together from the airport to Jerusalem. From the central station, we travelled by tram towards City Hall and his home. He lives in the city centre, close to the Old City of Jerusalem, the Western Wall, Al-Aqsa Mosque and a collection of historic places whose names I had heard for years. We took a short walk that evening and had a light meal. After the wait at the airport, the journey had now become a calm, face-to-face conversation.



### 3. Monday 26 October: Discussing Peace and Discovering the City

On Monday morning, Professor Fenton, a scholar of language and Jewish studies, came to visit us. Our conversation was brief, but it raised an important question: did Iranians have a problem with the Abraham Accords? My answer was that, for Iranians who seek peace, development and normal relations with the world, closer ties between the peoples of the region could be a valuable opportunity. We discussed the region's ancient connections and the possibility of Iranians joining this path. For me, the name of an accord acquires significance when it is backed by a real determination to coexist and cooperate.

I then spoke about the vision of a Cyrus Accord: a broader horizon that includes a free Iran alongside Israel and its Arab neighbours within a regional architecture of peace. I was referring to a path we could work to build, rather than a treaty already concluded. I believe that, despite their differences, the peoples of the region can find shared interests in security, education, health and economic prosperity. Such conversations matter to me because they distinguish Iran from the Islamic Republic and open up the possibility of discussing a different future.

Afterwards, Victor, a French-speaking friend of Dr Dana, became my guide, and we explored different parts of the city together. During this walk, Jerusalem changed for me from a collection of historic names into a living city: a place where layers of history and different beliefs exist alongside everyday life. We visited the Western Wall and spent some time there. Victor's company allowed me to explore the city more comfortably and ask questions about it. Above all, this was a day of discovery: discovering places, and also the perspectives of people whose lives are bound up with this city.

## 4. Tuesday 27 October: At Amit Davidson's Home

On Tuesday, we were invited to the home of my friend and colleague Amit Davidson, a trauma surgeon at Hadassah Hospital. This was an important part of the journey for me because it brought together personal friendship and professional interests. We spent a warm and enjoyable time with Amit and his family. I felt that we could speak to one another with ease and trust, a feeling essential to the beginning of any serious collaboration. The photographs from this visit preserve something of that friendly atmosphere.

Our conversation turned to the possibility of organising a joint course for the Patriotic Doctors of Iran. Amit spoke about colleagues with experience in trauma surgery, including in military settings, whose knowledge and experience could contribute to teaching. We discussed bringing a group of Iranian doctors to Israel, introducing them to Israeli colleagues and sharing experience and skills through a coordinated programme. This first acquaintance could also provide a foundation for future cooperation.

For me, the value of such a course lies in its humanitarian application: preparedness to provide initial care for injured people, an understanding of the limits of one's own abilities, the allocation of responsibilities and coordination in emergencies. Different professional titles and backgrounds become useful when they are translated into clear, practical teaching. In this meeting, I saw the possibility of moving in that direction. The instructors, course content, facilities and timing still need to be determined, but the conversation had moved beyond a general aspiration and had taken the form of a proposal worth pursuing.

## Tuesday: Friendship and Medical Cooperation



At my friend Amit Davidson's home: a warm meeting and a discussion of cooperation in trauma education.

## 5. Wednesday 28 October: Paul Hamburger and Michal Maayan

I was introduced to Paul Hamburger through Dr Shafa Abedi. Paul contacted me and played an effective role in coordinating our meetings. On Wednesday, we met Michal Maayan from Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For me, the importance of this meeting lay in the possibility of connecting individual relationships with broader ties between Iranian and Jewish communities abroad. I wanted to understand how this mutual interest could become an organised, shared programme.

We discussed first-aid training, preparedness for crises and cooperation between Iranians and Jews outside Israel. I explained that, as a trauma surgeon and educator, I would like to contribute in this area. If someone is injured at a gathering or in an incident, the preparedness of the people around them can become very important. My aim is for community groups, alongside getting to know one another better, to learn how to maintain their own safety, seek appropriate assistance and help an injured person within the limits of their training and abilities.

Our discussion included the possibility of developing contacts through embassies, as well as arranging group educational visits to Israel. Michal helped with continuing these contacts and identifying avenues for communication. This meeting showed me that medical cooperation can provide a useful common language for the two communities. We can begin with a small workshop, then prepare material in Persian and English and develop the experience into a programme that can be repeated. For me, success means that, after a meeting ends, communication remains open and responsibility for the next step is clear.



## Wednesday: Connecting Communities



Meeting Michal Maayan during the visit: discussing ties between Iranian and Jewish communities abroad.



## 6. Thursday 29 October: Meeting Moshe Katsav

On Thursday morning, we met Moshe Katsav, a former president of Israel. I spoke about my reasons for travelling, the Patriotic Doctors of Iran and my interest in building closer relationships with Israeli doctors. I wanted these contacts to lead beyond personal acquaintance towards education, the exchange of experience and humanitarian cooperation. We also discussed introductions to people who might be able to help us along this path.

My impression from the conversation was that his companionship and moral support, in a fatherly role, could help strengthen these connections. I record this as a basis for further conversation; the precise form of any cooperation will need to be established through subsequent follow-up. What mattered to me at this stage was the opportunity to present a practical objective directly and draw attention to the contribution Iranian doctors could make.

Throughout the journey, I repeatedly reflected that building relationships requires both personal trust and a network of contacts. A useful introduction can open the way to a conversation with a doctor, educator, host or institution. The result becomes lasting, however, when we also have a clear plan and can explain what we want, what resources we have and what responsibilities we are prepared to accept.

## Thursday: Conversation and New Connections



Meeting Moshe Katsav, a former president of Israel, to discuss developing medical connections.

## 7. Thursday: Southern Israel, Memorials and Kibbutz Alumim

After the morning meeting, we travelled south with Paul and visited kibbutzim and places commemorating the victims of 7 October. During this part of the journey, I encountered traces of violence that were different to seeing it in the news. Damaged vehicles, photographs of victims and signs left from that day each brought part of the event before us. I took photographs to record this encounter, so that what I had seen would not be reduced to a passing reference.

During our meeting with residents of Kibbutz Alumim, we heard about the attack, loss of life, hostage-taking and damage to the region's daily life and economic activities. Damage to cattle and poultry facilities was also discussed. Figures describing the extent of these losses were mentioned during the visit, but for me the central point was clear: violence takes more than human lives; it also attacks a community's homes, work, trust and the order of everyday life. Reconstruction is therefore both a material and a human undertaking.

Alongside this visit, we discussed the possibility of hosting an educational group at Alumim. In our initial conversations, simple accommodation for approximately twenty to thirty people was mentioned. I found the living and accommodation arrangements informal, orderly and suitable for a group programme. I was struck by the possibility of combining education with shared daily life: Iranian and Israeli doctors training in the same setting, while also having opportunities to talk and get to know one another.

On Thursday evening, we also met Professor Mordechai Kedar and discussed the future of Iran-Israel relations and friendship between the two nations. After what I had seen during the day, this conversation had a more tangible meaning for me. We must understand and remember a painful past, but our responsibility does not end there. The next question is what we can do with that understanding to prevent further suffering and build a better relationship.



## Memorials to 7 October



A memorial to the victims of 7 October: flowers, a flag and objects left in remembrance.



Damaged vehicles at the 7 October memorial site.



## Memorials to 7 October



A memorial vehicle, photographs of victims and flags among the damaged vehicles.

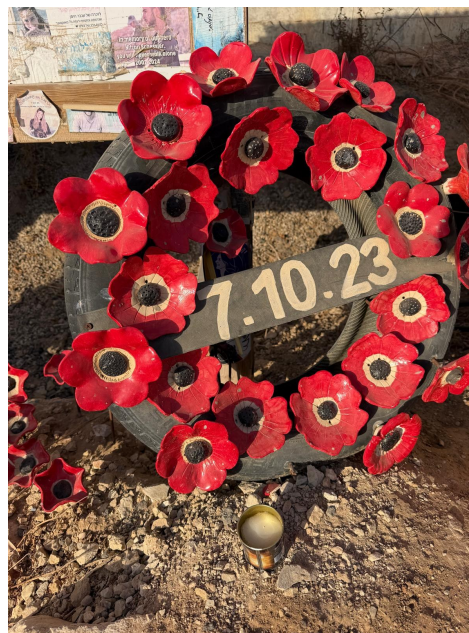


A general view of the memorial area and damaged vehicles.

## Memorials to 7 October



A memorial board for one of the victims; the name and life story remain visible in the original photograph.



Memorial flowers and the date 7 October 2023.



## Memorials to 7 October



A photograph taken among the damaged vehicles at the 7 October memorial.



Another moment at the memorial in the evening light.

## Memorials to 7 October



Another photograph from our evening visit to the memorial.



Beside the regional map during our visit to the damaged-vehicle site.



## Memorials to 7 October



A map of communities around Gaza at the site we visited.



Damage remaining on vehicles at the 7 October memorial site.

## Memorials to 7 October



A memorial vehicle and photographs of victims during the visit to southern Israel.



Details of the memorial and photographs of victims on a damaged vehicle.

## Memorials to 7 October



The regional map at the damaged-vehicle site.



## Re'im: Remembering the Victims



The entrance board at Re'im: a memorial to the victims of 7 October 2023.



Among the photographs and memorials to the victims of 7 October.

## Re'im: Remembering the Victims



A wider view among the memorials to the victims.



## The Kibbutz and Everyday Life



A poultry house visited at the kibbutz: a glimpse of life and production in the region.



Fields around the area we visited: a glimpse of agricultural life and work.



## The Kibbutz and Everyday Life



Production facilities and equipment at the site we visited.



A moment of companionship during the outdoor visit.

## The Kibbutz and Everyday Life



A photograph beside the region's agricultural landscape.



Sunset in a communal space at the site we visited.



## The Kibbutz and Everyday Life



Sunset over the landscape and daily life at the site we visited.



A moment of hospitality and food preparation during the visit.



## 8. Friday 30 and Saturday 31 October: Leaving Jerusalem and the Planned Journey Home

On Friday, I said goodbye to Dr Dana's home and to Jerusalem and headed towards the central station. From there, I took a bus to a hotel near Ben Gurion Airport so that I could be ready for my early flight on Saturday morning. After several days of meetings and travelling around, this transfer gave me an opportunity to organise what I had seen and heard and think about the next step.

I am preparing this account on Friday 30 October, before my return flight. The plan for Saturday 31 October is to fly from Ben Gurion to Frankfurt and then Manchester, before returning home to Leeds. The final date in the title of this booklet therefore refers to the scheduled date of my return. The meetings and visits described in these pages are my experiences from the preceding days.

I will take home photographs and memories, but more importantly, several relationships and practical possibilities. I can now tell my colleagues whom I have spoken to, which opportunities for cooperation have been discussed and which proposals are worth following up. This is why I have written this travelogue: so that my individual experience can become shared information and an opportunity for the Patriotic Doctors of Iran.

## Moments from Meetings During the Journey



A photograph taken during one of the meetings on this journey.



A moment of companionship with friends during the visit.



Another moment of companionship with friends during the visit.



A further moment of companionship with friends during the visit.

## 9. My Proposal: Six Days and Five Nights of Cooperation and Discovery

My proposal is to plan a group visit, possibly in January 2027: a journey from Sunday to Friday, comprising six days and five nights. The exact dates, number of participants, instructors and facilities must be coordinated with our hosts. The aim is to bring practical education, an introduction to Israeli society and opportunities for professional conversation together within a coherent programme.

On Sunday, participants would travel from their countries of residence to Ben Gurion Airport and take a minibus to Kibbutz Alumim. I propose staying there on Sunday and Monday nights. The possibility of simple accommodation without an accommodation charge was raised in the initial conversations; capacity and conditions need to be confirmed before the visit is finalised. This setting could be well suited to building relationships within the group and preparing for two days of teaching.

Monday and Tuesday would be devoted to first-aid training and initial care of injured people. We also discussed using volunteers to act as casualties in simulation exercises, including possible cooperation with a local boarding school. If this goes ahead, it must involve the volunteers' consent, coordination with those responsible and arrangements appropriate to their ages. The educational programme should be clear in advance, both to benefit participants and to respect the preparation required of instructors and hosts.

On Tuesday, after completing the training, we would travel to Jerusalem and stay there on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. Wednesday would be set aside for guided visits to historic places. On Thursday morning, we would head to Tel Aviv and spend the day discovering the city and its amenities. After one night there, we would each return to our countries of residence on Friday. This combination would allow time for professional work as well as for getting to know the people with whom we want to build a lasting relationship.



## Proposed Group Itinerary

An initial proposal for January 2027: six days and five nights, from Sunday to Friday. Exact dates, accommodation capacity, instructors and costs will be established following coordination with our hosts.

| Day       | Programme                                                            | Overnight stay |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Sunday    | Arrive at Ben Gurion; travel together by minibus to Kibbutz Alumim.  | Alumim         |
| Monday    | First day of first-aid training and initial care of injured people.  | Alumim         |
| Tuesday   | Second day of training; travel to Jerusalem in the evening.          | Jerusalem      |
| Wednesday | Guided visits to historic sites in Jerusalem.                        | Jerusalem      |
| Thursday  | Travel to Tel Aviv in the morning; sightseeing and a city programme. | Tel Aviv       |
| Friday    | Transfer to Ben Gurion Airport and fly to countries of residence.    | Return         |

Nights: two in Alumim, two in Jerusalem and one in Tel Aviv. Discussions about simple, low-cost accommodation at Alumim do not yet constitute a confirmed booking or a guarantee of free accommodation.

## 10. An Outcome That Must Be Carried Forward

For me, the principal outcome of this journey is that several avenues worth pursuing have become clearer: connections between Iranian and Israeli doctors, the possibility of a joint course in Israel and first-aid education for Iranian and Jewish communities abroad. Each can begin on a modest scale. We do not need everything to be large and complicated at the outset; we need a clear purpose, clear responsibilities and a clear next step.

I want the experience of these courses to become useful educational material: a booklet in Persian and English, clear, short videos and workshops that can be delivered in different cities. These materials should be prepared with the instructors and based on agreed teaching content. Filming should also take place with people's consent, so that participants' trust and dignity are preserved. Such a collection could give solidarity between the two communities an everyday, practical form.

For me, medical ties between Iranians and Israelis are part of a wider view of the future. We can use our professional capabilities to reduce suffering, share knowledge and build trust. Friendship takes root when people have a useful experience of working together. If this journey has helped initiate such an experience, its value will extend beyond a few days' stay and several meetings. It is now our responsibility to turn this possibility into a result through planning, follow-up and shared work.

## 11. Thanks and Closing Reflections

I am grateful to my dear friend Dr Daniel Dana, who hosted me with kindness and generosity. He has lived in Israel for thirty-two years, according to his own account, and devotes time and energy to helping Iranians become acquainted with Israeli society. His home, with its photographs, writings and mementoes of his life, became part of the experience of this journey. I have included photographs of this collection in the booklet so that readers can see something of the setting in which I was welcomed and of his personal world. These archival photographs are records of Dr Dana's life and are distinct from the meetings that took place during this visit.

I thank Paul Hamburger for coordinating meetings, accompanying us and opening doors, and Dr Shafa Abedi for this valuable introduction. I am grateful to Amit Davidson and his family for their warm hospitality, and to Michal Maayan for a constructive conversation and help in continuing our contacts. I also thank Victor, Professor Fenton, Moshe Katsav, Professor Mordechai Kedar and our hosts in southern Israel. Each, in their own way, has contributed to this journey and to my understanding.

This journey gave me an opportunity to pursue my belief in friendship between Iranians and Israelis through conversation and direct experience. Through the photographs and this account, I am sharing what I have seen with my colleagues in the Patriotic Doctors of Iran and proposing that we take the next step together. My hope is that these new connections will lead to better education, lasting cooperation and a more humane relationship: one that serves life and the future of both nations.



## At Dr Dana's Home: My Host's Archive

Dr Dana's home was more than a place to stay. The photographs, books and documents he keeps there offered a window into his long and eventful life. In these pages, I have brought together all the relevant photographs of this collection so that something of the place in which I was welcomed can remain part of the travelogue.

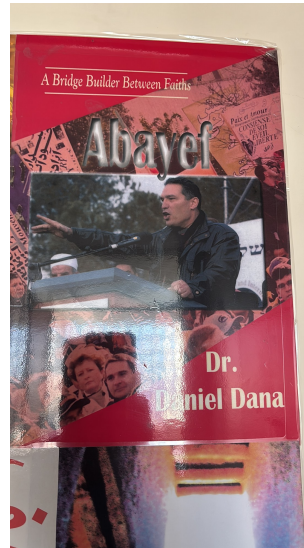
These are my photographs of my host's historical archive. The people and events shown within the frames do not necessarily relate to this visit, and reproducing them does not imply that I met everyone who appears in them.

## Mementoes of My Host's Life

Dr Daniel Dana's historical archive, photographed during this visit



From Dr Daniel Dana's photographic archive: framed photographs of earlier meetings in my host's home.



The cover of Dr Daniel Dana's book Abayef, displayed in his personal collection.



Educational and sporting documents and mementoes in Dr Daniel Dana's home archive.



Portraits and academic mementoes in Dr Daniel Dana's personal collection.

## Mementoes of My Host's Life

Dr Daniel Dana's historical archive, photographed during this visit



Framed photographs of earlier gatherings and meetings in Dr Dana's home.



Part of my host's archive of earlier media work and conversations.



Family photographs and mementoes of Dr Dana's life, displayed in his home.



Family and academic memories in Dr Dana's home archive.



## Mementoes of My Host's Life

Dr Daniel Dana's historical archive, photographed during this visit



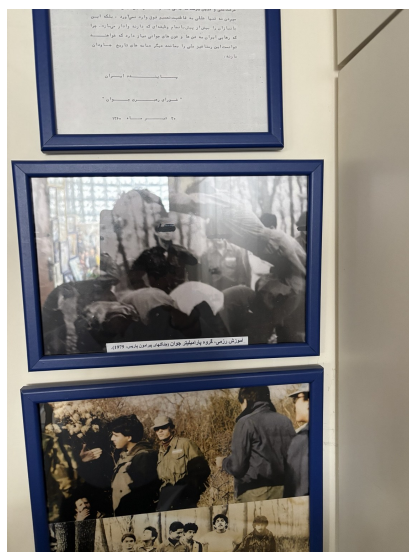
Sporting mementoes in Dr Dana's personal collection.



Sporting photographs and books in my host's home.



Books, writings and maritime mementoes in Dr Dana's collection.



Documents and mementoes of the past in Dr Dana's home archive.

## Mementoes of My Host's Life

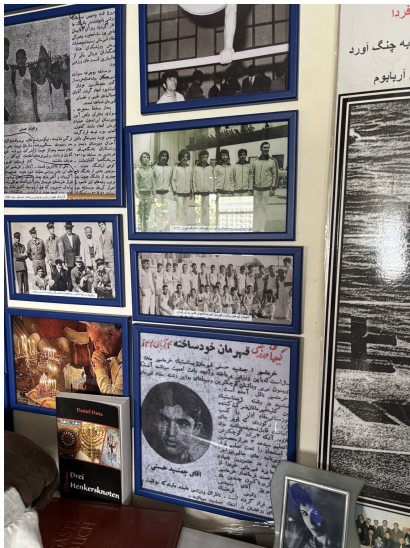
Dr Daniel Dana's historical archive, photographed during this visit



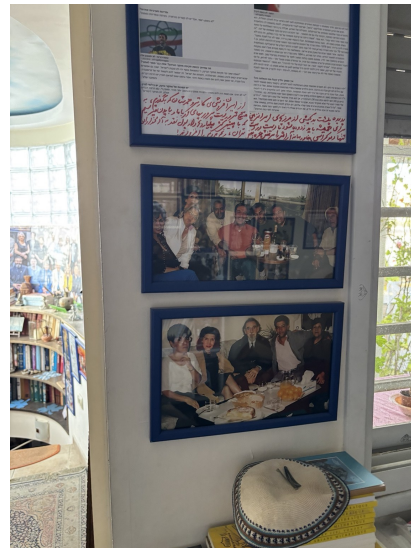
Framed maritime memories and records of my host's earlier life.



Another view of the collection of maritime mementoes.



Sporting archives and books in Dr Dana's home.



Group photographs and mementoes of earlier meetings in my host's home.



## Mementoes of My Host's Life

Dr Daniel Dana's historical archive, photographed during this visit



Family photographs and mementoes of dialogue and friendship.



A collection of earlier media appearances and social activities.



Photographs of Dr Dana's earlier gatherings and meetings.



A framed newspaper feature in my host's personal collection.



# Mementoes of My Host's Life

Dr Daniel Dana's historical archive, photographed during this visit



A page from Dr Dana's newspaper archive.

## Notes on Sources and the Account

1. Entry system: the official portal of Israel's Population and Immigration Authority describes ETA-IL as electronic travel authorisation and distinguishes it from the electronic B2 visa. The system's name in the account has been corrected on that basis.

### Israel Population & Immigration Authority | ETA-IL

2. Overall 7 October figure: Flash Update 100 from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, dated 23 January 2024, reports, citing the Israeli authorities, more than 1,200 people killed in Israel, the vast majority on 7 October. The approximate wording in the text is based on that report; this booklet does not provide detailed casualty figures for individual kibbutzim.

### UN OCHA | Flash Update 100 | 23 January 2024

3. The account: my recollections and explanations on 30 October 2026, together with the travel note saved on 28 October and personal photographs, form the basis for the sequence and description of meetings. Conversations have been paraphrased rather than quoted word for word. The reference to the repression on 8 and 9 January 2026 forms part of the political context and my personal motivation for this journey; I provide no casualty figures for it in this booklet.

4. Return journey: the route from Ben Gurion to Frankfurt and then Manchester has been checked against the boarding passes for 31 October 2026. The onward journey to Leeds is my return to the city where I live. When this edition was prepared, this part of the journey was still ahead of me.

5. Educational proposal: the approximate capacity of twenty to thirty people, possible accommodation and instructors' involvement are the outcome of initial conversations. The Sunday-to-Friday itinerary represents six days and five nights. This travelogue is not a booking document, a course contract or an announcement of formal institutional endorsement.

## Peyman Bakhshayesh | 30 October 2026