



ONE VINE for each deceased, each with a small Israeli flag to mark the spot.

YAAKOV HASAN with wife, Sapir, and the four children, including the family's latest addition. (Photos: Yaakov Hasan)

THE VINEYARD was planted with the assistance of Simha Lehaim.

THE VINEYARD OF HOPE



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

After the world turned over and living hell arrived to the Negev on Oct. 7, Yaakov Hasan was interviewed a few days later.

On camera, he was visibly disturbed by what he had seen with his own eyes. He struggled to relate what he had experienced. He was still shell-shocked, and no words could convey the grief inside.

However, as he spoke, the spirit of this impressive young man came to the fore. He became stronger as he finished the interview, saying: "Mark my words, I will plant a vineyard in the name of those who perished. Just wait and see."

Sure enough, he fulfilled his commitment, and the vineyard is now putting its young roots into the sandy soil of the Negev. The roots of the vine dig deep, especially in the desert in search of moisture. This hardy plant will yield fruit for decades. There is no greater statement of taking ownership of a place than planting a vineyard.

The story of Oct. 7 is still being told. There were numerous individuals who stood tall, showing incredible bravery and a commitment to their communities and their fellow men. Many are unsung heroes who may never receive credit for what they did. The incredible stories are still coming out. Every news cycle, we hear of new stories of heroes.

Normal, ordinary people did outstanding things and proved to be giants in the circumstances thrust upon them by the savages of Hamas. At the time of reckoning, they will stand on the very highest pedestal of honor and valor. Yaakov Hasan is such a person.

Hasan is a son of Shuva, a religious moshav in the northwest Negev. It was founded in 1950 by Jews from North Africa.

While Hasan was saying his early morning prayers, the festival of Simchat Torah was transformed into the Oct. 7 massacre. Hasan saw the chaos firsthand. There was the noise, the color of the sky, and the smell of shock and fear, which turned to terror.

He remembers the wild shooting in all directions and was not initially sure who was shooting at whom. The confusion. The burnt bodies. The stench of death. A decapitated baby shocked him to the core. He was in the midst of a nightmare which would not disappear when he woke up.

He witnessed the unspeakable, and as he explained what he saw, you could see he was haunted by the memory. He struggled with words as the images juggled in his mind.

This is someone who will be scarred forever. He will never get over what he witnessed... like so many ordinary people who became unwitting extras in the Oct. 7 drama. Whatever happens that is good in life, there will always be black corners that leap out to haunt them when their guard is down.

On that black day Hasan saved his family, taking them to his parents in Jerusalem, but some sense of responsibility propelled him to go back without a second thought. He immediately returned to the fray to fight and be part of the defense. He rescued many.

In the following days he retrieved many dead bodies, which were brought to a Jewish burial due to his efforts. As such, he not only saw but felt the scale of the slaughter, and it seared the unshakable memory deep into his very being.

HASAN IS an agriculturist, and he already had two vineyards. At the age of 17, he planted his first with Muscat Hamburg and Cabernet Sauvignon. In 2014, he planted another one of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Syrah.

On May 26, Lag Ba'omer, as promised, he planted

the memorial vineyard at Shuva with 2,000 vines. This time, the vines were Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Syrah, and Petit Verdot.

The event was a joint venture of Simha Lehaim, Hashomer Hachadash, and Hasan.

Simha Lehaim is a nonprofit organization founded by immigrants from France. It contacted Hasan early





VOLUNTEERS
PLANT the vines of
Kerem Leheim, the
Vineyard of Life.

HASAN AND
his father, Meir,
greet volunteers
from Hashomer
Hahadash.
(Hashomer Hahadash)

on, was immediately interested in his proposal, kept in contact along the way, and supported the project from the word go. Without its support, this noble idea simply would not have happened.

Hashomer Hachadash is well known for its holy work in bringing youngsters to appreciate the importance of working the land. It promotes *avoda ivrit*, Jewish labor. It flooded Shuva with young volunteers, first to assist preparing the land before planting, and then to help with the planting of the vines.

There is a great deal of work involved in clearing and cleaning the land before planting a vineyard. Then there is the planting. It is precise, hard work but extremely inspiring and rewarding. However, for most of the work, you need to be bent over or on your haunches. Those with a bad back need not apply!

Hasan gives Simha Leheim and Hashomer Hachadash all the credit for enabling him to fulfill his vision.

The festive day was a triumph of the human spirit. Life really is stronger than death. But those slaughtered in the Oct. 7 massacre and the ensuing war will not be forgotten. One vine was planted for each soul, with a small Israeli flag alongside. May their memories be a blessing. Each and every one of them.

The president of Simha Leheim, Arielle Bitton, said: "There is no more beautiful way to commemorate those murdered. We are committed to promoting this vision."

The head of the Sdot Negev Regional Council, Tamir Idan, said: "In these days of difficulty and crisis, we planted hope here. Yaakov Hasan is the beautiful face of Israel. From the 7th to 10th, he did not hesitate."

Idan also addressed the bereaved who were present at the planting ceremony. "We have a responsibility to continue the memory of your loved ones. And that is what we are doing today."

As always, there are stories within stories.

Laetitia Lyard, the mother of Sgt. Nathane Lyard, recounted how her son fell on Oct. 7. The only thing he took with him into the fray, apart from obligatory equipment, was a bottle of grape juice and a cup, so he could bless the Shabbat and sanctify the holiday. Soon after, he was killed. How appropriate it is to plant

a vine in his memory.

Nitay Ben Moshe, a volunteer with Hashomer Hachadash, was also one of the bereaved. He lost his brother in the attack and took the lead part in planting vines in his and everyone else's memory.

HASAN IS blessed with five children. The youngest, Emmanuel, was born in April. That gave Yaakov's spirits a much-needed boost.

New life triumphs over death and destruction. This is ultimately the only appropriate answer to those fundamentalist terrorists who celebrate a culture of death. It is this next generation that will be caring for the vineyard in the future.

I asked Hasan why he chose vines, and though I suspected I knew the answer, it was no less moving to hear it. He explained that planting a vine was a claim to the land. Subtext? We are not going anywhere. The vine is a symbol of life. In time, the vines will make wine.

Wine is used in every life-cycle ceremony in Judaism. So, produce from the fruit of the vine will create happiness. That is why we say "*Le'chaim!*" as our toast, which means "To Life!" Of course, the name of the vineyard says it all. It is called Kerem Leheim, the Vineyard of Life.

Hasan is already looking for the right wine-making consultant to nurture the baby through to the production of the first wine. That will be in four years' time, after the *orla* period (*Leviticus* 19:23-25). Afterward, the wine may be aged in oak barrels, so it may take five or six years before you see a wine after planting. It is a long-term process growing vines and making wine, though after the forbidden initial years, production will then be possible every year.

When you write about wine, you live within a wine bubble. In the end, everything relates back to fermented grape juice. Therefore, I was interested to turn the conversation back to wine. I wanted to understand what wine meant to this vineyard owner.

Hasan gave me the best possible spontaneous answer. It was unrehearsed and beautiful. He explained that you don't need to travel abroad to escape from the routine. Merely take a bottle of cold rosé or white wine

with your loved one, and go to the beach or disappear into the countryside... and wine does its thing and helps create magic moments.

We can only wish him many such occasions in the future. He certainly deserves all the moments of tranquility he can grasp.

Hasan's main message to the people of Israel is unity. He is well aware of the divisions between Israelis on October 6. However, after Oct. 7, he realized how futile it is. It took this terrible event to teach him that we really are one people. People rallied together. It is true the government may have been lacking, but the spirit of Israelis has been truly amazing.

It really upsets him to hear about disputes in society after Oct. 7. He said that Hamas was not selective in which Jews they slaughtered and did not first check whether they were religious or secular, Right or Left, Ashkenazi or Sephardi.

He said that if there was something good to come out of the catastrophe, it has taught everyone not only the benefit of being united but also that people of different stripes and tribes can work and succeed together. This togetherness is the strength of the Jewish people.

Just after we met and before we got into the meat of our conversation, Hasan was initially agitated, jabbing his finger at me. He railed at the media, the journalists, and teachers, and told me they all had a job, and it was about time they stepped up. Everyone must take a part in spreading the message, telling the story. Even wine writers.

After five minutes with him, I realized this was not aggression but the overflowing lava of pent-up emotion, which will probably never leave. Therefore, I have recorded his story. He is a hero and a mensch, and I am sure his Vineyard of Hope will make great wine. I hope I have done this *tzaddik* justice. *Hazak u'baruch!* – Be strong and blessed!

The writer is a wine trade veteran and winery insider turned wine writer. He has promoted Israeli wine for 38 years and is known as the 'English voice of Israeli wine.' www.adammontefiore.com