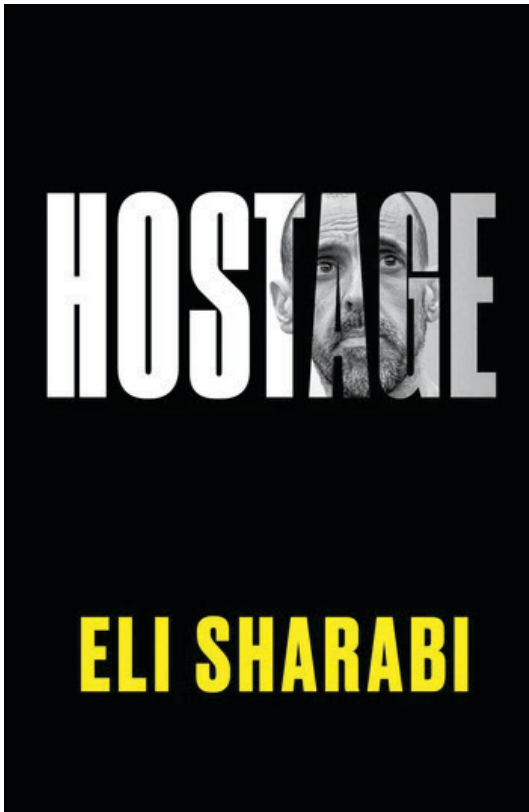




HOSTAGE

by Eli Sharabi



Sharabi, Eli. Hostage. Harper Influence (HarperCollins), 2025.

A Reader's Guide by Rebecca Starr,

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Eli Sharabi's book, *Hostage*, is a recounting of his time in captivity after being kidnapped on October 7, 2023 from his home in Kibbutz Be'eri. Sharabi writes the story of his imprisonment from the day of his abduction through the 491 days that he was in Hamas captivity. Throughout the book, Sharabi brings multiple themes to the surface for the reader to consider.

Survival

"I never looked at death as an option. I always chose life."

Sharabi's outlook throughout his time in captivity was singularly focused on his goal of survival. What tools did he employ to keep this goal in front of mind? How did his orientation as a survivor, as opposed to a victim, help him navigate his impossible circumstances?

Faith and Tradition

"And every Friday night, we do Kiddush. No matter what we've been through during the week, what fights we did or didn't have, whatever our frustrations or sorrow or pains, we gather in silence. The four of us. We listen to Elia, holding a cup of water in both hands, reading in a trembling quiet voice."

The power of Jewish tradition and ritual brings Sharabi and his fellow hostages great comfort during their time in captivity. Relying on Jewish tradition, prayer, and their personal connection to God is a consistent source of comfort for each of them. How does Sharabi connect to his faith throughout his captivity and use it

■ The Captors

“Slowly, I start to study them. Bit by bit, I learn everything. With the keen senses of a man focused on survival, I smell, I watch, I feel. The Cleaner, the Mask, the father and sons speak in short, terse, detached, suspicious sentences.”

Throughout the book, Sharabi humanizes his captors by giving them names and describing their individual characteristics. He even sympathizes with them at times and works to understand their motivations, structures, and orientations. What does his complicated connection to his Hamas captors do to help him survive, and how does his relationship to them evolve?

■ Hope and Memory

“I’m glad I didn’t know they were dead. Because thinking I would return to them is what kept me going.”

During Sharabi’s 491 days in captivity, he did not know if his wife and two daughters were alive or dead. The thought that they were alive gave him the strength to keep going. Focusing on hope and positive memories of the past helped Sharabi survive. What do you think about the power of memory as a tool for survival?

■ Bearing Witness

“The story must come out quickly, so that the world will understand what life is like inside captivity. Once they do, they will not be able to remain indifferent.”

Eli Sharabi notes that he felt an obligation to share his story in written form quickly after his release so that the world could know the reality of the situation of the hostages still in Gaza and for the world to know the horrors of their experiences. What is the responsibility of those who survived captivity in Gaza as witnesses and victims when it comes to sharing their experiences? What is our obligation as we bear witness as readers of their words?

NOTES:

■ For Further Conversation

After October 7, many creative artists from across Israel produced beautiful and powerful poems, songs, and visual renderings meant to capture the emotions and sentiments of the time. The following poem, written by Iris Eliyah Cohen walks the reader through the complexity of feelings felt by many in a post October 7 reality. It is entitled, “For Weeks I’ve Been Bleeding Poems.” It was translated by Jonathan Paradise.

While reading the words, ask yourself what feelings the writer was trying to convey and why the poem’s connection to the act of writing and recording memory and history is so powerful.

“For Weeks I’ve Been Bleeding Poems”

I name the file “sorrow”

I delete

Name it “October”

Change it to “7”

Replace it with “chasm”

Change to “chasms”

Name it “hell-like”

I name it “hope”

Command the computer to remember

It responds “saving hope”

For more poetry, please see the 2024 book, *Shiva: Poems of October 7*, edited by Rachel Korazim, Michael Bohnen, and Heather Silverman published in 2024 by The Institute for Jewish Research and Publications.

NOTES:

■ *This impactful community-read program is offered in partnership with JLearn, the Cultural Arts Department of The J Detroit, and Jewish Federation of Detroit.*