

## Ynet article for Memorial day – Translated from Hebrew

### The Soul Died with Pavel. Waiting for Gilad to Tell the Story.

Since Pavel Slutzker died during Gilad Shalit's kidnapping, his parents have been visiting his grave every week and are waiting to hear about his last moments. "We have nothing to live for anymore," said Pavel's cancer-stricken father. "The pain of raising a child and then seeing him buried is indescribable."

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When you enter the Slutzker family's apartment in Be'er Sheva, your attention is immediately drawn to the huge photo of their son, the late [Staff Sergeant Pavel Slutzker](#), which is placed in the commemorative corner that they have set up in his memory. The bereaved parents printed a life-size photo of the son they lost almost three years ago during an incident on the Gaza border, when Gilad Shalit was kidnapped.

When they immigrated to Israel in 1991, the family first settled in Dimona, but then moved to Be'er Sheva a few years ago, since Pavel's father Yevgeny is battling cancer and undergoing numerous treatments at Soroka Hospital. "We moved because we wanted to be closer to the hospital, but now I realize that we did a wise thing because every corner in Dimona, every centimeter, raises another painful memory of my son," the father tells ynet. "We drive to visit him every week at the cemetery, but it has not yet sunk in that he is gone forever. We prepared him for a good life and we tried to live ourselves. We worked hard and saved every cent for him, but our lives ended in an instant. Nothing interests us anymore, my disease has spread, and I have nothing left to live for."

Photo

[Caption] Lydia and Yevgeny Slutzker. "Part of our soul died with him" (photo: Herzl Yossef)

Pavel Slutzker was an especially talented young man, and had already received a scholarship to study Medicine at Ben Gurion University when he graduated from high school. He spoke five languages. "We came to Israel and he adapted very quickly," Slutzker recounts. "He learned the language and excelled in his studies. He had private teachers and studiously learned French and Arabic. It was clear to him that he would study Medicine after the army. Until the last moment, we didn't know that he wanted to go to the Armored Corps and when we worried, he would always calm us down and say that a tank was the safest place in the IDF and there was no chance of him getting hurt. He would say that our tanks were indestructible."

The father recounts that his son loved the army, and just like in civilian life, he had a lot of friends there as well. Gilad Shalit was his best friend. A few days before he was killed, Pavel was on leave at home and his mother Lydia says that he returned to the army with a smile: "We never spoke of death. I also never sensed, until that dark day, that we would hear a knock on our door, and our lives would end. Part of our spirit died with him."

Photo

[Caption] A photo album of Pavel. On the left: Gilad Shalit (photo: Herzl Yossef)

During the Cast Lead Operation, the family was already living in Be'er Sheva, and one of the missiles landed near their home. "It's not clear why the operation ended. The army should have occupied Gaza and be done with it. My son was killed in vain along with other children. They didn't even manage to free Gilad," the father says bitterly. "That boy has been in captivity for three years and the government isn't doing a thing about it. We occasionally speak to Noam and Aviva, and each time it hurts like new. We ask what has been done, and they tell us that nothing has been done. Their son isn't being held in deluxe conditions like the Palestinian prisoners in the Israeli prisons. The poor boy is probably sitting in some hole in the ground and doesn't get to see the light of day.

"We are [waiting for Gilad Shalit](#) like we would for our own son. He was Pavel's best friend in the army, and he talked a lot about him. We also hope that he will remember what happened on that fateful day so that we can get some insight into Pavel's last moments. The entire country is waiting for him to return. It's terrible to say, but we still manage to sleep some nights. Aviva and Noam are much worse off."

### **No Expectations from the State**

The bereaved parents believe that the government must meet Hamas' demands in order to free Shalit, and then immediately change the legislation regarding abducted soldiers: "It's obvious that terrorists with blood on their hands will be set free and will want to harm us again and abduct more soldiers. What isn't clear is why we are keeping them in prison in such luxury conditions. After all, these are terrorists that have killed people and were prepared to die as shahids (martyrs). If potential terrorists knew they would get the death penalty – it would be a better deterrent than being in a prison with three meals a day, studies, and family visits. We and many other families have buried our children and buried ourselves along with them. The pain of raising a child and then seeing him buried is indescribable."

They do not have very high expectations from the state. On the contrary, they are very critical: "Like all bereaved parents, we have sacrificed the most precious thing of all for our country. It pains us tremendously to see how the government behaves. Even though the Operation went well, they decided to discontinue it. Our children were killed, and the only thing that interests them is handing out portfolios and ensuring they get cushy salaries. They don't really care about the country, only about their own personal gain. It's

obvious that another war is imminent, but when you see such despicable government behavior, fewer mothers will send their children to war and fewer children will want to volunteer.”

The recent criticism that has been voiced against the IDF has affected them personally. “How can you criticize the IDF and call it unethical? Look at our son, he wouldn’t have harmed a fly,” says the father. “We also got to know a lot of his friends from the army – they were all amazing kids. There is no army in the world that is more ethical than ours. On the contrary, it needs to be tougher on the terrorists.”

Friends from Pavel’s school and the army continue to visit the family. The father says that it gives them strength. “We see the friends that he grew up with and served with in the army building their lives, and it makes us feel good, but we cannot forget our son.”

Social worker Natasha Koretz, from the Israel Crisis Management Center - SELAH, which helps immigrants in distress, has been helping the family since the day they received the bitter news about their son. In her words, coping with bereavement among immigrants is even more difficult than among the native population. “They do not have friends here that they have known their entire lives, and they find themselves coping with the tragedy alone. Sometimes they also have financial problems that they have to deal with as well.

“My relationship with the Slutzker family was forged on the day of the fateful event, and since then we have been in close contact. They are an extremely intelligent couple that is trying to cope with bereavement through artistic expression and caring for others, like the grandmother who lives with them and their other son.”