Eli Sharabi, born to a mixed Moroccan and Yemenite family, came to Be'eri as a 16 year old teen "yeled chotz" (outside child). Thousands of outside children, each for his/her own reasons and family situation, were sent to or chose to go to kibbutzim at various ages to live with kibbutz children in order to complete their education. Amos Oz was probably the most famous "yeled chotz" when he convinced his father to allow him to go to Kibbutz Hulda for ideological as well as personal reasons.

From its earliest years, Kibbutz Be'eri made a special effort to absorb these "outside" children believing that education should organically grow out of the kibbutz society and its values while recognizing that the kibbutz needed these outside children to increase the size of its classes in order to justify their support by the government. The idealistic members of Be'eri felt a strong Zionist obligation to absorb children who weren't succeeding in their educational framework elsewhere in Israel. Many of these "outsiders" who were informally adopted by kibbutz and brought up in classes with kibbutz-born children chose to return to the kibbutz after their army service and become part of the kibbutz community.

Eli Sharabi became part of KIbbutz Be'eri and as he matured became Kibbutz Treasurer and a central figure in the financial management of Be'eri. He married Lianne, a volunteer from Great Britain, who came to the kibbutz to experience its different way of life. They would often visit Lianne's family in Britain during the Christmas season.

Eli was torn from his home on October 7, 2023, leaving his wife and daughters behind. Released after 491 days in captivity, Eli worked tirelessly all over the world for the return of the remaining hostages and wrote the fastest selling Israeli best seller "Hostage", describing in brutal detail what he and other hostages underwent.

Eli's first experience in Gaza was facing a hate-maddened crowd who would have torn him apart on the spot and killed him were it not, ironically, for the protection of his Hamas captors, who were instructed to keep him alive as a human bargaining chip for future negotiations to free Palestinian prisoners. He was taken secretly to a private home of a well-to-do Gazan family (aside from the father, he was not allowed to see the mother and children of the family) where, as a speaker of Arabic, he could overhear conversations and learned a little about the family and his primary Hamas guards.

HOSTAGE, by Eli Sharabi

Review by Yoel Magid

“Hostage” illuminates Eli’s ability to converse with his captors trying to find some human points of contact in the midst of their humiliating often violent behavior. When the captors learned that he sometimes taught in higher education, their respect for education changed, for a short while, their treatment of this Israeli enemy.. The hostages nicknamed their captors according to physical characteristics — The Mask, Smiley, Round, Square, Triangle — recognizing some human quality amidst their inhuman viciousness and cruelty.

Eli’s difficult to read series of horror stories recounts those seemingly interminable days under insufferable conditions. The overwhelming stench of sweating, filthy, shackled hostages who were only allowed to shower with a pail of water once every several weeks, the meager rations of mostly biscuits and dried pita that had to be shared, the overflowing toilet, worms, poor air, unpredictable spurts of kicking and beating depending on each captor’s mood, sharing one pair of slippers to go to the primitive toilet, being forced to stand naked and wait to use the toilet. Hamas reduced the rations even more after Israeli minister Ben Gvir ordered Israeli prisons to limit Palestinian prisoners to one meal daily. The reader can only wonder how anyone could survive these conditions for so long.

Survival depended on a will to survive. The group of four got to know each other’s pre-October 7 lives and families as well as their own personal histories. On Shabbat the group even shared a dirty cup of water and crumbs of dried pita they saved to bless the wine and challah of Shabbat turning pain-filled time into Jewish time. Prayer became a necessary routine of sanity and identity.

Unlike some hostages held elsewhere with TV or radio near-by, Eli’s group had little access to any news — aside from the sounds of bombing. They gathered what they could from the captors laughing and eating in an adjacent tunnel room and depended on the generosity of an extra pita

being thrown into their tiny cell. Once, only once, a captor took Eli's filthy stinking shirt and washed it for him.

After being released to the Red Cross and the IDF, a social worker told Eli that his mother and sister were waiting to greet him…he immediately understood that his wife and daughters, whose memory helped him survive, were no longer alive.

"Hostage" is not an easy book to read. It is one man's memory of surviving 491 days of horror and will remain a vivid all-too-describable testimony of cruelty and survival.