

# To the Israeli Soldiers Contemplating Suicide

You are not beyond redemption. The fact that you are reading these words while feeling what you feel is proof that your soul is still alive — and that it is crying out to be healed.

I am not here to excuse anything that has happened in Gaza. I am writing because I have read the suicide notes left by some of your comrades. Almost every note says the same thing: “I discovered I’m capable of things I didn’t think a human being could do.” That means they still had a human soul left in them. And that means **you are not beyond redemption either**. They died holding the truth. You can live long enough to speak it.

In the Jewish world, one sentence is repeated more than almost any other:

“**There is never, ever any despair in the world.**” (*Likutei Moharan II:78*)

Not even after the worst sin imaginable.

King David arranged the murder of a loyal soldier so he could marry the man’s wife – yet when he cried out in repentance he became the ancestor of the Messiah. King Menashe filled Jerusalem with innocent blood – yet when he repented from prison, the gates of teshuvah opened wide. The only thing that truly locks those gates is the act that removes you from the world before the journey is finished.

I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse — therefore choose life.

Deuteronomy 30:19

Hashem is not waiting for your death. Hashem is waiting for your return. Don’t silence yourself and hand the war machine one more victory tonight.

## The Five Steps of Teshuvah (Return)

Jewish tradition teaches that genuine teshuvah — repentance, return — has five steps. Each one is difficult. Each one is a way of choosing life again.

1. **Recognition** of the wrong. The pain crushing you right now — that unbearable clarity — is already this step.
2. **Regret**. The tears you fight to hold back are this step.
3. **Confession**. First privately before God — “*I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not conceal my guilt*” (Psalm 32:5) — and later before others or even a court if crimes were committed.

4. **Resolution.** A firm decision never to repeat the sin, no matter the pressure. *“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him.”* (Isaiah 55:7)
5. **Repair.** Wherever possible, to make amends — *tikkun*, restoration. That may mean supporting the widows and orphans whose breadwinners are gone, using your voice to stop the machine, testifying when the time is right.

The fifth step will cost you everything you thought was your life — friends, family, perhaps your entire social world. The Talmud warns, *“Great is repentance, for it reaches up to the Throne of Glory”* (Yoma 86a). Real teshuvah is as hard as death — but it is not death. It is life.

Teshuvah is not an escape from consequences. It is the decision to face them — to live long enough to stop the chain of harm that began with your own hands. Suicide ends the story where the harm keeps spreading; repentance keeps you alive so you can begin to repair what was broken. The purpose of this letter is not to protect you from judgment, but to prevent the next act of destruction — to turn the will to die into the will to protect life, to testify, to rebuild. The pain that makes you want to disappear can become the very strength that keeps others alive.

## The Same Road Exists in Islam

And here is something that may surprise you: Islam — the faith of most of those who have suffered — teaches almost the same process of *tawbah*, return.

**“Say: O My servants who have transgressed against themselves! Do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Truly, He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.”** (*Qur’an 39:53*)

**“Except for those who repent, believe, and do righteous deeds — for them Allah will replace their evil deeds with good ones.”** (*Qur’an 25:70*)

Many religious Palestinians know these verses by heart. If they saw a former soldier walk this road for years — confessing publicly, repairing quietly, living differently — many would recognize the sincerity. Their own scripture commands them to.

## Shared Humanity

There is a single line that appears, almost word for word, in both the Talmud and the Qur’an:

Whoever saves a single life, it is as though he saved an entire world.  
Sanhedrin 37a; Qur’an 5:32

By choosing to stay alive, by turning against the machinery of destruction, you become one of the grains of sand that will jam its gears. That is the highest form of teshuvah imaginable — one that saves worlds.

# If the Thoughts Are Too Loud Tonight

Take one small, safe step — instead of the final one.

- **Breaking the Silence** Encrypted, confidential, nonjudgmental. Many say the first moment they could breathe again was when they finally told the truth.
- **Combatants for Peace** Israeli and Palestinian ex-fighters working together for reconciliation. Many have wept there, asked forgiveness face to face, and begun to live again.
- **Mesarvot** an Israeli refusenik network that provides concrete support for soldiers who decide they cannot serve in the occupied territories again.
- **Independent therapy:** BetterHelp.com or Open Path Collective
- **In immediate danger:** Call Israel's civilian crisis line **Eran — 1201**, or use [eran.org.il/chat](https://eran.org.il/chat)

None of these paths are easy. All are harder than death. That is exactly why they are the only paths that count as *teshuvah*.

There is a small but growing number of cases—still far too few—where Israeli veterans have begun quiet, long-term restitution work: funding medical care for Gaza children they know were harmed during their service, anonymously donating salaries, publicly testifying when safe, or simply refusing call-up orders and accepting the consequences. Every single one of them says the same thing: the guilt did not disappear, but it stopped growing, and for the first time they felt they were no longer adding to the harm.

▮ The gates of repentance are never closed.  
Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:24

To anyone reading this who once wore the uniform and cannot look in the mirror anymore: The fact that you are still tormented is the proof that the image of God in you is not dead. Please stay. The road back is brutal, but it is real, and there are people—on both sides of the wall—who have walked it and will walk with you. You are not alone. Choose life. Choose repair. Choose to live and to testify — so that others may live.