

ROMI GONEN

When October 7, 2023 and the University of Judaism of Conservative Judaism received all the names of the hostages taken to Gaza, we were given the names of 2 hostages to pray for – Yarden Roman & Romi Gonen. We set two chairs up on our Bima, wrapped in tallitot, with their names and pictures on poster paper and prayed for their release. Yarden Roman was amongst the 100 released.

Now Romi Gonen has finally returned home, alive and in seemingly reasonable physical health. Her emotional and spiritual journey to wellness and wholeness now begins. We rejoice with the entire Jewish people, in particular those living in the State of Israel, at her safe return.

When we recite the prayer "*Aheinu*," which is the only prayer that we regularly recite in both English and Hebrew. It is a prayer directed specifically to us, not G!d. It reads: "*Brothers and sisters—the whole house of Israel: among us are those in trouble, in captivity. Wherever they are, may G!d be compassionate, and bring them speedily, now, from trauma to fresh air, from darkness to light, and from subjection to redemption. Amen.*"

For Romi our prayers have been fulfilled.

Her father Eitan said his daughter "is sunshine" who loves nothing more than to dance. "She brings light and heat to every place she enters. She will conquer everyone's heart and she will make sure that everyone around her will be very happy and with high energy." We hope that her life will soon be renewed so that she continues to bring light to all.

We are all joyous in her safe return. But our joy is tempered with the knowledge that there are still many more hostages to be released and whether alive or not, we continue to pray for the return of all of them.

We will ask to see if we can get 2 more names of hostages that still remain in captivity and will continue to pray until all are returned.