

A smiling survivor

Having miraculously survived a late-October assassination attempt, Temple Mount activist **Yehudah Glick** and his supporters are upbeat, and stronger than ever in his status as an ‘extremist’ – of faith in human beings, and human rights

• ORIT ARFA

This Hanukka, the Glick family is celebrating the personal miracle of Rabbi Yehudah Glick’s survival of an October 29 assassination attempt.

But if Glick has his way, his survival may pave the way for the type of miracle that a different Yehudah – Judah the Maccabee – secured for the Jewish people over 2,000 years ago: the reinstatement of Jewish sovereignty and worship on the Temple Mount.

A few days before Hanukka, and seven weeks since the shooting outside the Menachem Begin Heritage Center in Jerusalem, the temporary Glick home is filled with a sense of optimism and joy.

“Not a single day goes by that I don’t thank Hashem [God] for the miracles,” Glick says.

Glick’s wife, Yafi, who joins the interview intermittently, says his narrow escape from death prompted an incredulous atheist, interning at Shaare Zedek Medical Center, to remark, “I’m going up to the Temple Mount.”

The Glicks have temporarily moved to the capital from their home in Otniel as Glick heals. Scabs on his hand appear from under the cast on his left arm, and he wears that same pajama top I’ve seen in pictures of him online. His state of mind is upbeat and lively.

“The pajama company should pay me millions of dollars to model,” he jokes as he poses for the camera.

I met Glick this past summer when he gave me a Temple Mount tour in anticipation of a musical parody of Carly Simon’s *Let the River Run* that I filmed, celebrating the Jewish return to Jerusalem. Despite my having sung solo, wearing jeans and a T-shirt – in contravention of Jewish laws of modesty – he promoted it on his active Facebook page and



YEHUDAH GLICK with his parents, recovering in Jerusalem. (Orit Arfa)



GLICK IS wheeled out of the hospital by his wife Yafi and his family on November 24, seven weeks after an assailant put four bullets in his body. (Marc Israel Sellem)

defended me against accusations of impropriety. We've stayed in touch since.

Back then, he conducted himself with the solemn decorum proper to what is Judaism's holiest site – and to the ubiquitous security surveillance. Israel Police, together with plainclothes representatives of the Jordanian Wakf Muslim religious trust, watched his every move. As he described the location of the Temple's Holy of Holies inside the Dome of the Rock, a group of Muslim men formed a prayer quorum beside him, drowning out his explanations with Muslim chants, some of which – Glick was quick to point out – had Jewish equivalents, like the call to worship the one God.

Now, I get to see Glick's humorous side. "I don't know if you know, but I went through an assassination attempt a few weeks ago," he says, when I ask him how he's doing.

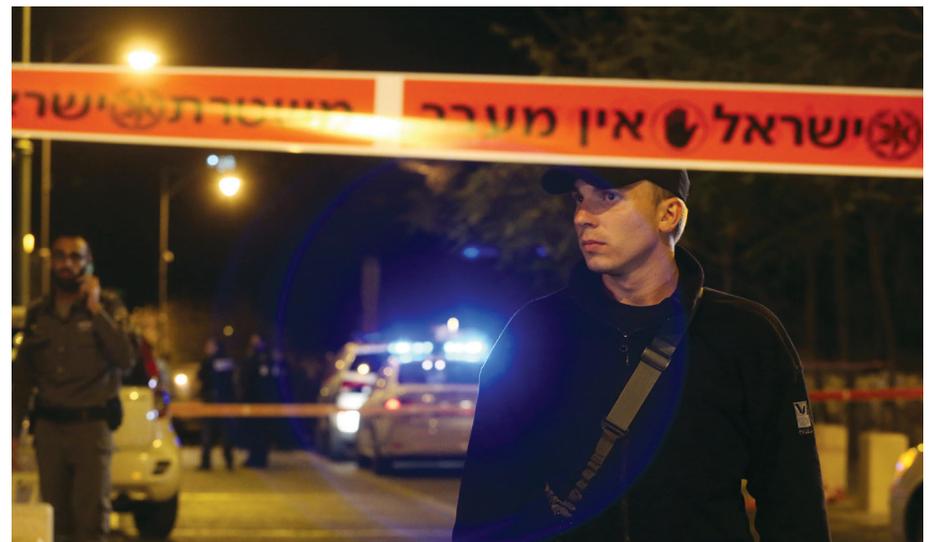
His parents are visiting him from their home in Beersheba, and it's clear Glick

inherited his sense of humor from his father. It's not immediately clear that he inherited from his red-headed parents his signature, flaming red hair; Prof. Shimon Glick's beard is white like Santa Claus, and Brenda wears a wig.

"He was always a character," Prof. Glick says of his son. Earlier this year, Prof. Glick, as dean emeritus of the Faculty of Health Sciences at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, received the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Bonei Zion Prize, granted to Western immigrants for outstanding contribution to the Jewish state. He and his wife immigrated to Israel from Brooklyn when Glick Jr. was eight.

"Now, my claim to fame is that I'm Yehudah's father."

Glick's parents remember him as a mischievous, funny and giving child – a "wise guy." By way of example, Prof. Glick tells the story of when Brenda complained about Yehudah's dirty shirt. "He said: 'It's 1 percent dirty and



A POLICEMAN stands at the cordoned-off area where Yehudah Glick was shot on October 29 in Jerusalem. (Marc Israel Sellem)

99% clean. That's pretty good!"

Now, it turns out, Glick has unwittingly outsmarted the man who wanted him dead. Physically, he's about 20% wounded, and 80% healthy. Pretty good. Actually, very good considering four bullets – fired point-blank – missed every essential organ, limb, vein, artery and nerve. He's expected to fully recover in half a year, provided he dutifully completes physical therapy.

But not far into the interview, Glick lies down on the sofa, weary, and conducts the rest of our conversation vertically, snuggled in a blanket. He puts his humor on hold as he discusses what he remembers of the night he was shot, and what it means for the political, religious and spiritual future of the Temple Mount.

WHEN THE helmeted assailant pulled up on a motorcycle outside the Begin Center on that Wednesday night, Glick didn't notice the gun. He assumed he was someone who wanted to discuss his work advocating for Jewish freedom of worship on the Temple Mount, the subject of his talk at the conference that had just wrapped up.

"I didn't have any pain, and I didn't feel I was in any position of death or danger," he says of the moment after he was shot. "But my friend who was right next to me yelled out, 'Rabbi Yehudah, don't go! We need you.' Then I realized, maybe I'm in some kind of danger."

When he woke up from an induced 10-day coma, he figured only two days had passed. "My first recollection was Friday night. My son was standing there in my bed singing Shabbat songs to me."

He was shocked to learn he had been unconscious for 10 days.

As head of the Haliba organization for Jewish freedom on the Temple Mount and a public face of a growing Temple Mount advocacy movement, Glick had been a target of Muslim extremists for some time.

"We worried about this all the time," his mother says. "We knew it was coming."

But they didn't try to stop him. "He's

a big boy," his father adds.

As he underwent multiple surgeries, Glick garnered headlines the world over. His attempted murder ignited more discussion and debate on Jewish political, civil and religious rights on the Temple Mount – more than his persistent visits ever did. Some media outlets were quick to label Glick a "far-Right activist" (*The Guardian*) and "agitator" (*The New York Times*), much to the chagrin of his supporters.

Glick prefers "human rights activist," but he wasn't bothered by the press coverage he managed to read.

"Actually, I was pretty positively surprised by some of the articles I read," Glick says. "I think the press, whatever I read, was sympathetic, even 'pro' my activities. I think they gave a true picture."

After Israel captured the Temple Mount during the Six Day War, the Israeli political establishment, in consultation with the rabbinic establishment, maintained the Wakf's administrative control of the Mount, or "Noble Sanctuary" to Muslims, while asserting Israeli security control. Al-Aksa Mosque, situated on the grounds, is considered the third-holiest site in Islam. Jewish visitors can ascend through one gate at limited hours, while Muslims have full access from 11 gates; police prohibit Jews from uttering prayers or carrying any religious objects on the Mount.

Over the years, Jewish visitation to the Mount has progressed towards the mainstream, no longer relegated to a fringe group seeking to detonate the Dome of the Rock. While the Chief Rabbinate forbids ascension on religious grounds, prominent rabbis are increasingly taking the lenient view that Temple Mount visitation is permissible, provided that Jews follow the ritual preparations, including immersion in a mikve.

Critics often view advocacy-driven visitation to the Mount as a provocation – a match lighting a powder keg – as witnessed in the upsurge of violence in the capital in recent weeks. Glick rejects the notion that he provokes >>



GLICK POINTS to a sign at the entrance to the Mughrabi Bridge in December 2013. The sign says that it is against Jewish law to ascend the Temple Mount. (Marc Israel Sellem)

violence, but admits to being a certain type of “extremist.”

“I’m very extreme in my faith in human beings, in human rights. These are things I received in my DNA from my parents. I’m extreme in my open-mindedness to different opinions.”

He had invited Aviv Tatarsky, a researcher at Ir Amim, to provide a counterpoint to his talk the night of his at-

tempted assassination. Ir Amim is an NGO whose tagline is commitment to “an equitable and stable Jerusalem with an agreed political future.”

“Yehudah called me on the spot to say a few words,” Tatarsky said via email. “I wasn’t invited formally, didn’t have time to prepare and spoke briefly.” A year-and-a-half ago, Glick was invited to speak on a panel at Ir Amim’s own conference.

“I was shocked when I heard Yehudah Glick was shot,” Tatarsky wrote. “It should go without saying that regardless of what Mr. Glick wants to happen on the Temple Mount, there is no justification for violence.”

He believes Israeli policy should

take into account flare-ups that may occur due to Mount activity. “But first and foremost, we need to consider the violence that we are responsible for. Changing the status quo on the Temple Mount without the agreement of the Palestinians and while the occupation in the West Bank stays in place falls under the category of ‘systematic violence’: violence done by the state.”

The Mount, he said, must be considered in the context of the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict. “Therefore, currently it is a political issue to be solved through negotiations, and not a human rights issue. The issues of sovereignty and prayer are not two separate issues for the Temple movements either: National feelings are fueling the movements.

“Only 18 months ago, they decided that in order to gain public support, they need to hide those agendas and focus on the issue of prayer,” Tatarsky writes.

Glick plainly states his desire for Israeli sovereignty over the Temple Mount, but as a means towards religious freedom. Israel is the only Middle Eastern country with a track record of religious tolerance.

“Our goal is to get as many Jews and non-Jews onto the Temple Mount, and to get into a position of freedom of prayer for all there. Jews should be part of the natural view of the Mount, and the Mount should be a center of religious tolerance worldwide and a house of prayer for all nations.”

GLICK IS longing to go back to the Temple Mount, but he must wait until he fully recovers and police grant him permission.

He has a turbulent history with Israel Police. In the last year, he staged two hunger strikes to protest a police ban barring his entry to the Mount; he brought suits against discriminatory police practice in the Supreme Court and won; he was awarded NIS 30,000 in damages for two wrongful arrests. But the courts recently rejected an appeal to lift the ban barring his entry, following what he said was a false charge filed by a Muslim woman accusing him of pushing her, causing her to break her arm.

“The Temple Mount is the center of my life; it’s the heart of my heart, the heart of my nation. But I must say that my major goal in life is not Yehudah Glick going on the Mount, but hundreds of thousands of Jews going on the Mount.”

Which raises the question: How has the assassination attempt affected the resolve of his colleagues and supporters? Was this a tipping point that will allow him to realize his dream – or curb it?

Glick’s colleague, Rabbi Chaim Richman, international director of the Temple Institute, which Glick headed from 2005 to 2009, has not veered



A MAN wearing a kippa is seen standing in front of the Dome of the Rock. (INSET) Sarah Lucret (left) is circled along with another visitor to the Temple Mount, singled out in an Arabic-language Facebook group as provocateurs. (Marc Israel Sellem, Facebook)

from his regular twice-weekly visits to the Mount, despite his being a target of radical Muslim groups. As a precaution, he walks around armed. The Temple Institute's mission is to prepare for the Third Temple in part by recreating Temple vessels and drawing architectural blueprints; education about the Temple grounds figures in his work.

"It's an attempt to right a historical wrong that has several generations of Israelis being taught by the secular and religious establishment that we have no connection to this place," he says in a telephone interview. He views increased Muslim ire as a by-product of the mainstreaming of Jewish ascension.

Richman contends that rebuilding the Third Temple isn't an "extreme agenda" but the agenda of mainstream Judaism, reflected in Jewish liturgy's daily prayers for Jerusalem.

"The question is how it's going to come about. We teach that it won't come about through confrontation, but it will come about from Jews bringing light in the world that will make the nations of the world ask us to build the Temple."

THIS PAST summer, Glick introduced me to Sarah Lurcat, a member of the non-denominational grassroots movement Students for the Temple Mount, consisting of a diverse group of university students who regularly ascend the Mount.

Lurcat appeared in my music video, easily identifiable by her dirty blonde hair. She shared with me a list of Facebook pages in Arabic that circle her as a target; she filed them as part of her

police complaint.

A master's student in conflict resolution at the Hebrew University, she defines herself as observant while granting herself some religious liberties. She eventually decided to forgo the ritual purification process required to ascend the Temple Mount, believing the justness of the cause trumps such halachic considerations.

Lurcat first visited the Mount a year ago. "When I went up, I saw the humiliating experience for Jews. How they shout at us, don't let us move, don't let us pray. The police surround us... I knew there was a problem here."

She categorizes her struggle as one for democratic values. "We want it to be open to all, as it should be in a democratic country."

The Glick incident has only strengthened her resolve. "Even though it's hard, dangerous and even scary, the movement is just, and someone has to do it." When going out, she periodically looks over her shoulder, trigger-ready for the pepper spray in her purse, pessimistic about police protection. After Glick was shot, she temporarily suspended her Facebook account at the behest of her concerned parents.

Other voices unabashedly call for Jewish sovereignty over the Mount. Women for the Temple, a grassroots movement supported by Glick, was founded to lead workshops and tours for women seeking to ascend, since women follow more specific purification rituals. Member Tziporah Piltz is encouraged by an increased interest in their work following the assassination

attempt. For her, the issue isn't only about freedom of worship; she hopes the Third Temple will eventually replace the Dome of the Rock.

"The holiest place for our nation is occupied by the Muslims. Surely, it can't be both of us will be there. How it will change, I don't know. It's something for God [to decide]."

GLICK HOPES Temple Mount advocates won't be deterred by death threats or the attempt on his life.

"Look, the Arabs didn't like the fact that we established the state. After its establishment, 6,000 soldiers were killed in the War of Independence. Should we cancel the state? You can't give up."

Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld could not comment on specific complaints filed by Temple Mount activists – threats by Arabs against Jews, and vice versa. "A lot of threats have been going around on social media, and those threats are being dealt with," he said. "There are ongoing investigations."

As for the Mount, Israel Police continue to coordinate security with the Wakf to prevent violent incidents. "There's no change whatsoever in terms of status of the Temple Mount."

Recently, two Israeli men tore their garments as a ritual sign of mourning, and were removed from the site. Similarly, a group of Muslim women intent on harassing Jewish visitors was prevented from ascending.

"Israel Police escort visitors on the Temple Mount throughout visits to protect them and prevent any incident, and to respond to any Arab violence on the

site," Rosenfeld said.

But Glick believes police neglect left the door open for his assailant. Hours after the attack, police cornered their main suspect, 32-year-old Islamic Jihad member Moataz Hejazi, who died in a shootout with police.

"They knew I was under threat. Instead of preventing it, in a lot of ways they encouraged it by making me into a demon, by trying to put me in a position where I look like a provocative person."

Hejazi had served 10 years in an Israeli prison for terrorist activity, yet managed to secure a job at the Begin Center's restaurant.

"There's still a joint investigation being carried out by the [Shin Bet's] General Security Service and Israel Police on the attempted assassination of Yehudah Glick," Rosenfeld said.

But could there be a reason for the failed assassination – a higher purpose?

"I'm not a spokesman of God, and I can't say why he saved me," Glick says. "Two things I could say for sure: First, if God forbid I would have been killed, it would have been a very big *hillul Hashem* [desecration of God's name]... the fact that Arabs killed someone whose life is devoted to God's Temple Mount.

"On the other hand, the fact that God saved me – I don't know because of what – it means he still has some mission for me. I can only pray that I will succeed in promoting His cause, what He expects from me."

Visibly tired and in pain, Glick bows out of the interview. "I'm allowed to complain," he offers as his final joke – and last laugh. ■



TOURISTS AND Jewish visitors wait to be cleared by security in order to go up to the Temple Mount. (Marc Israel Sellem)