

The Hero's Dilemma: Am I Actually Sacrificing Myself?

1. From the story of Thomas Hand, whose 8-year-old daughter, Emily, was taken hostage and then freed after 49 days.

[Background: The night before the massacre, Emily slept over at her friend Hila Rotem's house. In the morning, when the terrorists entered Kibbutz Be'eri, cellular service ceased and Thomas had no way to contact her. Thomas had no idea what happened to his daughter on that horrible day. Only after a few days did Thomas find out that his Emily had been kidnapped and taken to Gaza.]

In the meantime, I arm myself and try to make a plan. I have a gun, about thirty bullets, and two knives as well; one of them is quite long. I try and work out how to get out, how to run over to Raaya's place to get Emily out of there and hide her away. I open the window a tiny bit, just to see what's happening outside, and right away, boom! Two shots at the wall of my house. I quickly close the window, and it hits me that if I go outside, I might simply die within one second.

I think about how Emily lost her mother at the age of three. I won't let it happen again; I won't let her lose her father as well. So at this point I start debating which risk to take. Should I run over to Emily, risking her losing me? Or should I let her stay in the safe room with Raaya and Hila and hope for the best?

At this point I leave the safe room and get settled in the kitchen with my loaded gun. I'm ready for anything, for any terrorist that may come.

I didn't want to hide like a mouse. At about ten-thirty, Emily sends me a message, asking if I'm in the safe room, and I answer, "Yes." I don't want her to know that I'm in the kitchen, I want her to stay calm. And right then, my phone battery dies. The electricity in our neighborhood went out. That was the last I heard from Emily that day. It was terrible.

I was in the kitchen for some time. I was dying of thirst. The sink was just a meter away, but I didn't dare get up to drink – what would happen if they walked in that very moment? I have to stay focused! And that was it: I stayed there for sixteen hours, together with Johnsey and Schnitzel, on a low chair in the kitchen. I didn't get up to drink, I didn't get up to eat, and I didn't go to the bathroom. I just sat there with my loaded gun until they came to rescue me. I swore to myself that I'd make it, that I'd survive, so that Emily wouldn't lose me.

From One Day in October: Forty Heroes, Forty Stories, pages 355–356

2. From the story of Gali Eilon (15 years old), from Kibbutz Kfar Aza

[Background: Gali was in the safe room when the horrible massacre was taking place in the kibbutz. At some point, soldiers came to her house. Unfortunately, they were not able to rescue her because of the intense fighting that was taking place outside her home. Despite most of the cellular network being down, Gali suddenly realized that she still had cellular service on her phone.]

For some reason, I was the only one in my family who still had cell service there. And the soldiers went along with me. So I wrote on the kibbutz WhatsApp group: If there are terrorists where you are or if anyone is wounded, send me your location! I also sent a voice message, and a soldier also recorded a voice message

introducing himself, so that people knew they could trust us and that he can help and that it was safe to send us information.

Then people started sending me updates about more and more people who were wounded, and more and

more terrorists, and I started gathering all the information. I sent the soldiers maps of the kibbutz and showed them on the map where everything was happening, where the fighting was, where the terrorists were, where the wounded were, and the soldiers passed all the information on to their guys, who sent troops to help the casualties.

Some of the messages were brutal. Some people wrote, "They're shooting me," "They're burning down my house!" There were a lot of casualties. I passed on a lot of locations. I tried to send the soldiers to where they were needed. They basically conducted the whole battle for the kibbutz from my grandma's house. I must have sat with them for two hours. I tried to help as much as I could. An article that came out about it later said I was like an operations officer.

In the meantime the hours go by, another hour and another hour, and night falls, and no one comes. I see on WhatsApp that some of my friends were rescued, but we're still there in the safe room. I consider for a moment whether I should ask the soldiers to come rescue us – but then I saw that there was fighting going on in a neighborhood called "The Young Generation," so we sent the soldiers there. It was a tough decision. But we did what we had to do.

At one point, we suddenly hear explosions coming closer, and we hear terrorists coming in, and we hear them trying to open the door, and they're screaming "Allahu Akbar!" and my battery is dying, I'm down to one percent, and I write to the soldier who was with us before that there are terrorists at the door and that he

should send forces because they're trying to come in and we're scared. Suddenly there was a crazy explosion outside, the house simply shook, and I was sure that that was it – I'm going to die. I texted my mom that I love her. And I closed my eyes and waited for it all to end.

At that point, my mom was at the gas station outside the kibbutz, where they evacuated all survivors. She told me later that everyone there was in shock, that no one seemed like themselves at all. There were soldiers with them there at the gas station, and they heard my mom saying that she was trying to get hold of Gali, that she couldn't find Gali. So they came up to her and asked, "Gali who?" and she explained to them that her daughter Gali is back in the kibbutz with her grandmother. And one of the soldiers jumped up and said, "That's *our* Gali!" and showed her my picture on WhatsApp. And she says, "Yes, that's my daughter."

And he went, "What, she wasn't rescued yet?!" and my mom said, "No!" and they all jumped up – how come nobody rescued Gali? So they sent us a rescue force, urgently. Suddenly we heard loads of shooting, loads of explosions. Shouting in Hebrew. Then infantry soldiers from Givati opened our door. They told us that there were terrorists in the house, and they had to evacuate us quickly so that they could eliminate them. They made us this kind of wall of soldiers, a sort of safe passage so that we could get through; they passed us from soldier to soldier, and I finally get out of the house, and I barely recognize the kibbutz.

*From One Day in October: Forty Heroes,
Forty Stories, pages 46–48*

3. Continuation of the story of Thomas Hand, whose 8-year-old daughter, Emily, was taken hostage and then freed after 49 days.

[On the day that his daughter, Emily, was freed from captivity, Thomas said:]

When I drove to the base where I was supposed to meet Emily, I brought Johnsey, her dog, along with me. I brought him because I wanted Emily to be able to hug someone; I wasn't sure she'd want to hug me. I didn't know how she felt about me. I mean, I'd failed her that day; I was the father who had failed to protect his daughter. And I didn't know how Emily felt about me during all those days in captivity. I was afraid she'd blame me; I was afraid she would be cross with me. After all, on the worst day of her life, I wasn't there for her. But I knew that she definitely wasn't cross with

Johnsey. A dog is pure love. He wasn't the one who'd failed to keep her safe that day.

But when Emily arrived, she ran to me and hugged me. And hugged me, and hugged me, and hugged me. And I hugged her back, and I wept; I hugged her so hard and wept so hard. I've never cried like that my whole life. And on the way, when we were driven from the base to the hospital, I noticed that Emily never took her eyes off me, not even for a moment. And I ask, "Emily, my love, talk to me, tell me what's going through your head," and she says – silently, for fifty days she wasn't allowed to

talk out loud, so she spoke silently and I had to read her lips. I made out the words – “Daddy, I thought you were dead, I thought that they had kidnapped you, I thought that I’d never ever see you again,” and I start crying, and I ask her, “You’re not cross with me?” and Emily doesn’t even understand why I’m asking her that. She

looks at me and mouths the words, “Thank you for not being dead, Daddy. Thank you, Daddy, for being alive.”

From One Day in October: Forty Heroes, Forty Stories, pages 362–363

Guided Questions for “The Hero’s Dilemma”

If you prefer, you can create separate cards for each of these questions.

– Dilemma 1 –

Read section number 1

What was Thomas’s dilemma and what did he decide in the end?

Do you think that Thomas’s decision was correct? Try to imagine yourself in Thomas’s shoes. If you were, God forbid, in his situation, what would you have done?

— Dilemma 2 —

Read section number 2

Gali helped facilitate the rescue of many people while placing her own survival last. This heroic behavior almost tragically cost her her life. What do you think of Gali’s choice to worry about her own survival only after others had been saved?

The ability to place other people’s needs above their own is one of the many features of heroic people. What do you think about this quality? When is this type of self-sacrifice a good thing and when can it be something negative?

— Dilemma 3 —

Read section number 3

From the ending of Thomas and Emily’s story, we learn about the different perspectives of Thomas and Emily. What was bothering Thomas during the days that Emily was in captivity? What was Thomas’s daughter Emily thinking about during her time in Gaza?

Do you think that the story’s ending demonstrates that Thomas solved his dilemma correctly?