



Yoni's Global Sukkah Placemat and Conversation Starter Yoni's Final Day – by Gideon Black #YonisGlobalSukkah

Yoni Jesner
FOUNDATION

Inspiring young people to do more and care more

On a number of occasions I have shared with people Yoni's inspirational acts on the morning of the bombing that took his life. We visited a shiva house of a friend at which Yoni volunteered to read from the Torah. The reading was Vezot HaBracha - fittingly, the final portion of the Torah. On the way back from the shiva house Yoni sought out a second hand bookshop to return the shopkeepers pen that he had accidentally taken when purchasing some books there a month earlier. Tying up loose ends. Closing circles. The cycle of life.

One other thing stands out from that morning. Our friend Natan Rickman had been with us that morning and as a favor Yoni had done a load of Natan's laundry at our grandma's flat in Jerusalem. After Natan's clothes had finished in the drier Yoni sensed an opportunity for a quick prank. Yoni loved nothing more than good natured clowning around. He mischievously hid behind a doorway with Natan's now warm towel spread wide. As Natan came into the room, Yoni shocked Natan by jumping out from behind the door, smothering him in his towel and cuddle-wrestling him to the ground. Once Natan recovered from the shock, we all collapsed in giggles. And that was Yoni's final act of comedy.

The Sukkah, much like that towel, is meant to serve as a warm cocoon. The Talmud debates whether the Sukkah replicates (a) the huts that the Jews travelled in when in the desert following the Exodus or (b) the clouds of glory that protected them from on high through their journeys in the wilderness. Both opinions are recorded as both are instructive of how we experience protection. Sometimes we feel safe and secure because of our immediate, material surroundings. Other times we feel love and protection from less tangible things, way Above. In that prank Yoni showed his ability to smother someone with close, proximate affection. And every day since, we feel under his protective and loving watch, even though he is way way up high.

Questions:

What is your favorite prank or practical joke from your school or camp days?

The Sukkah is less steady than our houses, yet it serves as a symbol of Divine protection. Why do we need to feel vulnerable to feel protected?

Are there any other areas of your life where you experience G-d's care more directly than others?

At the end of Succot on Shemini Atzeret we recite Yizkor for family members who have passed away, thereby incorporating our loved ones who aren't physically with us into our yomtov. Whether or not you personally recite yizkor, who will you be thinking about this yomtov?



Rabbi Gideon Black is the Director of Professional Recruitment and Leadership Development, Orthodox Union

Born in Glasgow and raised in London, I have now lived in New York for over 9 years. I am blessed with three children - Judah (5), Natan (2) and Maya (6months) and a very patient and talented wife, Aliza! I work as a rabbi, currently focused on recruiting and training young rabbinic talent across North America.

Connection to Yoni: Yoni was my cousin but felt more like a brother!