



# Oases of Life - Therapy Centers in the Desert

Sowing hope, harvesting resilience

Part 3 of the cycle: [Facets of Restoration](#) (Healing for traumatized people)

By **Brigitte B. Nussbächer**

*When Nir witnessed a terrible terrorist attack in 2016, he decided to dedicate his life to a deeper meaning. He founded therapy farms in the middle of the endless expanse of the Negev Desert, which offer traumatized and at-risk people a refuge - a space where wounds can heal, hearts can learn to trust again, and souls can draw new strength. Thousands have already found new courage to face life. Thousands are still waiting for their chance. Help make hope a reality.*

## Terror in Tel Aviv

It all started with a tragedy. On January 1, 2016, a Palestinians carried out a terrorist attack at the HaSimpta Bar in Tel Aviv, killing two Israelis and wounding 4 others.

Nir, was also there, he remained outwardly unharmed. But when one of the victims died in his arms that terrible day, it was an experience that marked a turning point. He made the decision to follow the voice of his heart and dedicate the rest of his life to social work in the [Negev](#).



Nir Amitai, founder of the therapy centers.

## Sowing Hope

The Rimon Farm, founded in 2021. Private photo



First he founded the [Rimon Farm](#) in 2020 for young people at-risk in the south of Israel, in the Negev, far away from the densely populated urban areas in the center and east of the country. For being a desert, it is incredibly green here. Israel has successfully realized the dream of state founder David Ben Gurion to make the Negev blossom with drip irrigation. To the left of the road, the vineyards are growing, to the right the ears of corn are swaing. A wide sky arches over the land and the noise, stress and hectic pace of the cities are far away. Here you can breathe differently and the tranquility has a soothing effect on the mind.



In 2023, the [Lahav Farm](#) was founded here for people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) - originally planned for around 80 people: Tents, beds, vineyards and vast green hills. They received the land for this from Kibbutz Lahav. But already more than 4,000 people have been treated there since the [Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023](#)! And the need is still enormous. So in 2024, the second farm for post-traumatic therapy was established: the **Shekef Farm**.



[The Lahav Farm. Private photo](#)

Nir's great role model is none other than [David Ben Gurion](#), who already had promising plans for this region, to which he attributed a great deal of potential, 70 years ago. And you can actually sense the pioneering spirit of the founding era on the farms: the will to create something significant here, the cohesion, the vision. As in those days, everyday life here is simple, people live in tents.

The agricultural work demands hard labour, but the reward is new life, which has a healing effect on those affected. Seeing how the little plants grow, how lambs and calves are born, all this is a testimony to the power of renewal and conveys the hope that new confidence can also arise in wounded souls. Working with plants and animals in nature creates a healing connection between body and mind and helps to experience self-efficacy, strengthen self-confidence, create a sense of achievement and regain a feeling of control and hope.



[New life at Lahav Farm. Private photo](#)



[A new vineyard is planted. Private photo](#)

Here, therapy, education and rehabilitation are combined in a unique way: In an inspiring environment, participants experience emotional healing, accompanied by a supportive community. Social skills are strengthened and they are individually supported with tailored programs that also include family and community.



In this way, three essential goals are achieved: healing and empowering people, developing and planting the land, and promoting the Negev region.



Nir says, “We can't afford to stop dreaming,” because living out that dream is the foundation of recovery for so many. They accept anyone who asks into the programs: security, emergency and rescue workers, medical personnel, police, soldiers, victims of terror.

People who have been exposed to extreme stress, who have had to go beyond their limits in the field, who have been traumatized by intense combat experiences, the loss of comrades or injuries, who have difficulty finding their way back to a normal being and are looking for a bridge back to everyday life.

Group therapy at Lahav Farm. Private photo

## Encounter in the Desert Wind



Our visit to Lahav Farm in April 2024. Private photo

Our contact with the Rimon Therapy Centers came about via “[Israel Today](#)”. This is where we learned about this impressive work. Now we have finally got to know these oases of hope personally. We were fascinated by the landscape, the atmosphere and the interaction among each other from the very first minute. Nir, the founder; Tal, the Resource Development Coordinator and Hemia, a



psychiatrist, come together with us in the “open-air kitchen” of the Lahav Farm. All around us, green expanses, silence, a light breeze caressing our cheeks.

And sitting at the table with us are people with striking faces, warm eyes and full of intensity. The communication is open, direct and deep. Small talk is not necessary - we have the common goal of helping people who were injured in one way or another by the massacre on October 7. We and they talk about our initiatives since then and feel that we have been allies for a long time - even without knowing each other.



We present our work for Israel. Private photo

It is particularly impressive for us to hear the personal testimony of Gil, a commander, who talks about the difference a few days here on the farm make to his men. Here they can prevent post-traumatic stress, talk to each other in a protected environment, find understanding and recharge their batteries before returning to their everyday lives.

## S. (Name Changed)



Then a man sits down with us. He smiles kindly, but at the same time the smile is heartbreaking. There is warmth in his eyes, but also a cry. We soon find out why. He is someone who is on this farm to slowly heal. He used to live in a kibbutz next to the Gaza Strip. That was a different era for him.

That was before October 7th. He was originally a civil engineer. Because that didn't fulfill him, he became a farmer and moved to the kibbutz with his wife because there was no better place to raise a family. They were

happy and enjoyed life in the close-knit community. His wife worked as a teacher and their children, who are now 7 and 10 years old, grew up there. Today they are evacuated and live in Kiryat Gat.

At first, he doesn't talk about what he experienced on October 7th. But he talks about how important it is for him to come to Lahav Farm. It's the only place he leaves his home for. Otherwise he avoids it. But he likes to come here 2-3 times a week. This is because he has gained trust in his caregivers, and all these months have shown him that their empathy and their desire to help him are genuine. He was skeptical at first, but to his amazement he has found that someone is always there for him and that the people here support him. That no demands are made of him, that he can set his own pace and doesn't have to hide anything. He realizes that the conversations, the agricultural work and being together with others who have experienced similar things do him good. He is in a small group of people who all suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Here he doesn't have to explain to anyone what it means to have a hard night. No one thinks he's weird here. And that gives him a sense of security and the opportunity to open up. The peace and space here are also healing. And so Lahav Farm has become a refuge for him, a motivation to tackle the next day and get out of bed. His testimony makes the value of the work done here very clear.



## Nir Oz



And then it turns out that he comes from the Kibbutz [Nir Oz](#). This name is like ice on our hearts. Without wanting or planning to, we have met former residents of Nir Oz again and again since October 7th. The first were Smadar and Shlomo. Smadar's brother Avner lived there with his wife Maya and 4 children. Both Avner and Maya were murdered. Maya's body was taken to Gaza.

The devastated Kibbutz Nir Oz mourns many dead. [Private photo](#)

I wrote "[Bring Maya Home Now](#)" and the article went around the world. Then came our [project for the Israeli orphans](#). And again we came into contact with families from Nir Oz: [Sigal, Hadas and their children](#).

When we mention that we have contact with families from there, he immediately wants to know who and it turns out - he knows them all. Maya and Avner were his neighbors, Tamir, Hadas' husband, whose body is still being held in Gaza, was his friend, a very special person whom everyone liked, full of cheerfulness. ([The story of Hadas and Tamir](#)). And Dolev, Sigal's husband "met" Sy on October 7th during the massacre when they were both trying to fight off the terrorists. Dolev helped him in a very difficult situation, which he does not describe in detail.



[Maya & Avner, Private photo](#)



[Tamir, Hada's husband,](#)



[Dolev, Sigal's husband](#)

Sy then barricaded himself in the shelter with his family. He stayed with them because his wife begged him not to go out again when he tried to leave. Today, he is not sure whether he did the right thing. He has the agonizing feeling that he abandoned his friends Tamir and Dolev on that black Shabbat. What is the right thing to do in such a situation, who can judge that, who can say? No one was prepared for this situation. No one ever expected to be attacked by hundreds of terrorists. No one would have thought it possible that the army would only arrive when the bloodbath, the arson, the kidnappings by the terrorists had already been carried out and they had moved on to the next location in search of new victims.

## A Special Courage

Sy and his immediate family survived, but they did not remain unharmed. Sy's father-in-law and many of his friends were brutally murdered, and Nir Oz consists almost entirely of a pile of burnt ruins.



Everything they had dreamed of, everything they had built up, lies in rubble. How do you go on living after that? How can you regain courage or hope? This is what Sy tries to learn on the Lahav Farm.

You can see how difficult it is for him to talk about these issues. He maintains his self-control, but despite his smile, his face twitches and you can feel the unshed tears. The pain and anguish that repeatedly flashes in his eyes speak volumes.

The conversation has become much more intense and deeper than either of us would have thought. The fact that we have been helping the residents of his village for months has apparently lent us authenticity in his eyes and instilled trust in him.

We are shocked, impressed and cannot appreciate his openness highly enough. And when we say goodbye after a few hours, we no longer do so as strangers - but as friends with a warm embrace.

Only later do we realize how difficult it must have been for him to even sit down at a table with us and talk to us. How much overcoming and bravery it took on his part to step out of the shadows of security and face strangers. But his willingness to do so and his honesty made it possible for us to understand the tragedy of Nir Oz even better, but above all to witness the work of Lahav Farm and the success of these therapies in a very concrete way. Because Sy has made great progress here in recent months, which provides an outlook of his recovery and of a future with hope and light - even if he will never forget. And there are thousands more like him, who are learning to live again at this place.

The task that Nir and his co-workers have set themselves is enormous - but the potential outcome is inspiring for everyone involved! They sow, often with tears, trusting that they will reap resilience and a strong future.

Because the aim of these farms is to recreate the ancient, repetitive history of Israel: to rise anew from the ashes and ruin, and to have even more inner strength and courage to face life in the end.



*The goal of the therapy centers: new life.* Photo Shutterstock

***The story of the therapy centers is part of the cycle: [Facets of Restoration](#).***

***[Brigitte Nussbächer and her husband Harald Bottesch](#) regularly visit Israel. Their current focus is on supporting families who were directly affected by the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023: Widows and orphans, traumatized people and evacuees. During their last mission to Israel in April 2025, they again visited those affected and established links with specialist organizations on the ground in order to provide specific, long-term and sustainable help.***

**More articles from Brigitte B. Nussbächer under: [www.arc-to-israel.org/en/artikel](http://www.arc-to-israel.org/en/artikel)**

