



In an exclusive to Mishpacha, Jonathan and Esther Pollard talk about being married in the face of life imprisonment, about marital harmony and commitment, about justice, and about unconditional love.

MARRIAGE

MADE IN PRISON

by Rachel Ginsberg

Jonathan Pollard is in his twenty-second year of imprisonment in a US prison, while new pants and shirts hang freshly pressed for him in a closet in Jerusalem. In a small room in the center of the city, Esther Pollard is waiting for her husband to walk through the door at any moment.

When Esther married the world's most famous spy in a secret halachic ceremony in Butner Prison in 1993, she never imagined that fourteen years later, she'd still be waiting to build a home with him in Israel and live as husband and wife.

"Every day that he is not yet free, every morning that I wake up and he's still not here, I'm shocked. Yet it is his strength that keeps me going," she says.

Pollard, a civilian intelligence analyst who worked for the US Navy in the 1980s, was convicted of one count of passing classified information to an ally — Israel — without intent to harm the United States. The median sentence for such a crime is two to four years in prison. Pollard never stood trial. Instead, at the request of both the US and Israel, he entered a plea bargain, which spared both countries from a long, expensive, and potentially embarrassing trial. Pollard fulfilled his end of the plea agreement, and even signed a confession detailing the spying activities he carried out on behalf of Israel. Yet in violation of the plea bargain, Pollard was sentenced to life imprisonment, with a recommendation that he never be paroled.

ENCOURAGING WORDS Esther Pollard, nee Zeitz, a special education teacher originally from Montreal, actually met Jonathan in 1971 when they were both teenagers on Israeli youth programs. They would sit and have discussions about their mutual love for the land and people of Israel, but each returned to home — he to South Bend, Indiana, and she to Montreal — and they forgot about each other.

In 1990, Esther was in Israel for the summer, working as an intern at Israel's Ministry of Justice and teaching English at Hebrew University. By that time Jonathan had already been incarcerated in solitary confinement for five years. Someone handed her a printed letter which urged people to write to Jonathan Pollard in prison, saying that he derives great comfort from this.

"I always kept extra aerograms in my purse, so I wrote him a letter. I knew nothing about the case. I had no idea of who he was, or what he had done, only that he was a Yid in trouble and that he needed some *chizuk*, so I dashed off a few words of encouragement. It never even occurred to me that this was my old youth group friend," Esther recalls. "Jonathan told me that when he received my letter, he had only three stamps left from his monthly allotment, and a pile of waiting correspondence. He said he knew he had to answer my letter, and used two of his last three stamps for it."

Pollard sent Esther two envelopes; one was an informational package and the other a personal letter. "I read the information first and therefore expected when I opened the personal letter that it would be full of bitterness and anger. It was just the opposite! Jonathan's letter was full of his love and devotion to the Land and the people of Israel. It touched me to the core."

"I was always lonely until he came into my life. I never lacked for friends and companionship, but I always felt something was missing. As soon as Jonathan showed up, we recognized that we were soul mates. I always prayed that I would recognize my *bashert*."

WEDDING BEHIND BARS Their relationship was reborn in 1990, and in 1993 they married in a secret ceremony, performed by a rabbi, according to halachah. Yet, to this day, the couple has never been allowed private time alone.

"It wasn't the vision of a fantasy wedding day, but on the cosmic level, I knew my soul was bound to Jonathan's."

What did she think she was getting into with this marriage? Did she imagine the separation would be so long, that these years of her life would be sacrificed for him?

"What did I think? I didn't. I knew Jonathan worked for Israel and that Israel was responsible for him and that Israel was obliged to seek his immediate release. He had already been imprisoned for five years when we started out, and I knew the median sentence was two to four years. I knew we were already in overtime. I, like everyone else, assumed that sooner or later Israel was going to step up to the plate and bring him home. No one in his wildest dreams ever thought the abandonment would go on for twenty-two years."

HOW LONG IS LIFE?

After twenty-two years, why is Jonathan Pollard still in languishing in prison?

As a civilian naval intelligence analyst in the 1980s, Pollard discovered that information vital to Israel's security was being withheld by the US. This information included Syrian, Iraqi, Libyan, and Iranian nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare capabilities being developed for use against Israel. Under a 1983 Memorandum of Understanding between the US and Israel, America was obligated to pass this information to the Jewish state, but Israel was being "punished" for the 1981 bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor.

In a 1999 interview, Angelo Codevilla, a senior staff member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, related: "I was in the committee hearing room when Bobby Ray Inman [deputy director of the CIA] came in and told us how outraged he was that Israel had destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor. He told us that the US was engaged in a 'sophisticated and very successful effort' to turn Saddam Hussein into a pillar of American foreign policy in the Middle East. The Israelis, in their blundering ways, as he put it, had misunderstood Saddam Hussein. They had figured this nuclear reactor posed a danger of Saddam building nuclear weapons. Our CIA knew better than that, and was outraged. As a result, Inman was unilaterally cutting off the flow of US intelligence to the Israelis."

Pollard was never indicted for compromising codes, agents, or military plans, nor was he accused or convicted of treason. He was indicted on one count of passing classified information to an ally, without intent to harm the United States.

So why did Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger say that no one caused greater harm to national security than Pollard, and later said he wished Pollard had been shot? [Prior to his death, Weinberger admitted that the Pollard case had been a "relatively minor matter" but that it had been blown out of all proportion to serve another agenda.]

Some analysts speculate that Weinberger's personal financial interests in Iraq as chairman of the Bechtel group might have led him to blame Pollard for the Soviet spy fiasco, in which the entire American spy network in the Soviet Union was decimated when someone named names, and more than forty intelligence operatives were captured or killed. Weinberger and other American officials blamed Pollard for directly or indirectly passing on the information that led to this debacle, but such a catastrophe could never be made public. No one could be allowed to know that American intelligence went blind behind the Iron Curtain.

The crime for which Pollard was indicted carried a maximum sentence of ten years and median jail time of two to four years. Furthermore, Pollard was never tried, but instead entered a plea bargain with the agreement of the US and Israel. But minutes before the sentencing, Weinberger passed a secret memo to the judge, and Pollard was shocked to discover that he had been sentenced to life.

Only in 1994 did the truth about the spy fiasco begin to emerge. It was Aldrich Ames, a high-ranking CIA bureau chief and Russian mole, who sold out American agents to the Russians for cash. Then, in 2001, it was discovered that senior FBI Special Agent Robert Hansen betrayed the rest of the agents that Ames left out. Ironically, Ames actually participated in writing the damage assessment for Pollard which was submitted to the sentencing judge. Ames shifted the blame for his own activities onto Pollard.

Ames and Hansen are behind bars. Saddam Hussein was hanged. Weinberger is dead.

Why hasn't Pollard had a retrial, or been granted presidential clemency or a pardon? Why hasn't Israel, who granted Pollard citizenship in 1998, officially requested his release?

Pollard supporters say it's no longer about Pollard the man, it's about Pollard the concept. "Jonathan has been and continues to be a convenient tool for calling into question the reliability of Israel as an ally and the loyalty of American Jews," says Esther Pollard. "His prolonged incarceration is also used by pro-Arabists in government to reassure the oil-rich Arab allies. They point to Jonathan and say, 'See, we aren't as close to the Israelis as you think. We don't trust them. They spy on us. And when we catch one, look what we do to him.'"

"We married secretly as a personal, private way of affirming our faith in Hashem and the future He had planned for us. We went public with our marriage about six months later, when it was necessary for me to speak on behalf of Jonathan. I never wanted to speak for Jonathan. I wanted to be the one behind the scenes who just loved him and kept him strong. But there was no choice. Those who were representing Jonathan at that time were not faithfully presenting his case on the outside. I think they were being controlled and influenced by the Mossad, whose goal was not to release Jonathan, but to silence him."

THE PAIN OF SLANDER When news of their marriage became public, Esther faced a barrage of hostility from a cynical media and Pollard's detractors who called its legitimacy into question and suggested political opportunism.

Still, Esther, a highly articulate, presentable woman, modestly dressed with a stylish wig, is uncontestedly Jonathan's strongest advocate and ally.

"I realized early on that he was totally cut off from information and very vulnerable, so I knew that any relationship had to be totally honest in terms of making sure that Jonathan always knew what was really going on and was always in command of the facts. This earned me a lot of enemies, who wanted to control him by controlling how much information he was given."

"The slander is so painful," says Esther, who battled cancer alone in 1999. She calls their marriage "an oasis of unconditional love in a sea of lies and corruption. Truth is what our relationship is about; it's the foundation. Otherwise it couldn't endure under such stressful, dreadful conditions for so many years. Despite all the hardships placed upon us, despite all the privations of simple gestures all couples enjoy, Jonathan has made me feel like the most loved, valued, and treasured woman in the world."

Jonathan shared his own thoughts on his marriage which he relayed in a message to **Mishpacha** from his prison cell in Butner, North Carolina.

"Most people are fixated on the legal aspects of this case, but there is another, even more important aspect that holds many lessons for people in this troubled generation," Pollard explained. "The concept of loyalty, the concept of honor, the concept of being an indistinguishable partner is something inherent in our relationship, and it's a lesson people should take to heart."

"We are taught that a wife is an *ezer k'negdo*, a helpmate to her husband; she

complements and completes him, facilitates his agenda. We also have the concept of *bashert*, two people meant for each other. These concepts don't go far enough in describing my feelings for Esther. She is my *bashert*, but much more than that. She is my *ezer*, but much more than that. She enables me to live this kind of existence with hope for now and for the future."

"Esther allows me to get up every morning in this devastating environment and to feel hope, to know that Hashem gave me a wonderful and loyal wife, and to live each day believing that in the wink of any eye He will bring me home to her."

"Esther is my voice on the outside. She is me. Because, right from the start of our relationship, we talked, we worked on it, and I never felt there was any difference between what Esther was trying to accomplish for me and what I needed her to do for me."

"People might be cynical," Pollard continued, "but if they can't appreciate the kind of devotion we have for each other, it means they are lacking something in their own life, and I would want them to use our relationship as a motivation for loving their own spouse a lot more than they do."

Esther says that not only is their relationship a miracle, but really, the entire Jonathan Pollard case is one big miracle.

"The very first miracle is Jonathan's physical survival. The original plan was that he was either supposed to be killed or kill himself out of despair. Both the Americans and the Israelis wanted him dead. He was taken from his hearing (he never had a trial) to Springfield, Illinois where he was put in a prison hospital for the criminally insane. His clothes and glasses were taken away, and he was dumped into an empty cell with nothing but a hard slab of stone to sleep on, at freezing temperatures which is supposed to prevent the inmates from moving too much and making too much noise. Once a month the security people would come from Washington, throw a blanket over him so as not to be troubled by his nakedness, and tell him the only way out is to finger other Jews. They wanted names of co-conspirators, and they came with lists of prominent Jews."

Pollard was arrested in 1985 together with his first wife Anne. When the Israelis realized arrest was imminent, he was told to seek refuge in the Israeli embassy in Washington. But when the Pollards turned up there, they were thrown out, into the waiting arms of the FBI.

After a year Pollard was moved to the Marion maximum security prison in

Illinois where he spent the next nearly seven years in solitary confinement, buried in a dungeon cell three stories underground, behind thirteen locks and keys. When he got to the prison entrance, the marshal put a gun to his head and told him to turn around and face the outside. "Take a good look, because this is the last time you'll ever see the outside world," he told Pollard. "Next time you come out it will be feet first."

Esther Pollard believes the punishment was coordinated with the advice of the Israeli Mossad who, looking at Jonathan's character profile, believed he would never survive in solitary. He was supposed to have killed himself, but he didn't. He was supposed to have given up hope, but he didn't.

After seven years of incarceration, Pollard was transferred to Butner, North Carolina, an open population facility. Within a week he was visited by a Mossad agent who relayed the message that if he cared about Israel he would kill himself and solve the problem. The agent even offered to help.

PRISON LIFE It's no secret that Pollard did *teshuvah* in prison and became Torah observant. In spite of the fact that he is not supplied with kosher food or many ritual items in prison, Pollard manages to keep kosher by living on tuna and crackers and other items which he buys from the prison canteen.

"He keeps halachah, but always at a tremendous cost to himself," says Esther. "He is allowed some items such as *tefillin*, one pair of *tzitzit* which aren't allowed to get worn out, and a *yarmulke*. *Lulav* and *esrog*, or a *menorah*? Forget it. He works cleaning toilets because it permits him to avoid Shabbat desecration."

Esther Pollard says that Jonathan's physical survival is a primary miracle, but no less important is the miracle of his spiritual survival, his ability to give, to love, and to hope after twenty-two years of torture and failing health.

Others who have been in contact with him over the last two decades agree that his devotion and ability to give with fullness of heart have prevented him from becoming bitter and cynical. "On my first visit to him years ago, I thought I would be the noble one and give him encouragement," said a former Knesset aide. "Instead I was the one who came out encouraged." Pollard is particular about giving charity regularly, even from his limited funds.

Former Sephardi Chief Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu has personally



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adopted the Pollards, and in fact it was he who had a vision of their *shidduch*. He visited Jonathan in the bowels of Marion in 1991, and told Jonathan he had a vision of the woman he would marry. The woman he described was Esther. "Has anything happened in reality yet?" the rabbi inquired. Jonathan was delighted, because he and Esther were already in contact and it was Jonathan's first opportunity to share his heart. The Mossad agent who accompanied Rabbi Eliyahu, however, wasn't so discreet. Within days the media was buzzing with the news that Pollard had a fiancée.

Later, in 1994, Rabbi Eliyahu gave Esther his blessings at a hunger strike for Jonathan which she carried out in downtown Jerusalem. A month later, at the beginning of the month of Elul, he

told her to stop. "Up to now you have been the only shofar," Rabbi Eliyahu told her, "but now it is Elul, and there will be many shofars."

Occasionally people joke to Esther that if their husbands were behind bars, they'd also have a great relationship. But Esther doesn't think it's funny at all. She says that people who make these comments are really revealing the limits of their own relationships. They could have a relationship of silence, she says, but for real connection, the odds are stacked against them.

"Being married to someone in prison increases the stresses and strains on a relationship," she says. "Prison reduces or eliminates basic kinds of contact. Restricted visits, restricted phone time, and no family time require a couple to transcend inhumane limitations. This means that unless you work out a really effective way of communicating with your spouse, you will live with soul-destroying and marriage-eroding frustration, irritation, and aggravation. Jonathan and I have learned to communicate without any ego or *shlick*. We have become one, in spite of the hardships. But for most people, prison destroys whatever communication they did have to begin with."

With an allotment of 300 telephone minutes a month, Jonathan calls his wife daily for several minutes. "But when the phone goes dead, I still worry. Will he have enough to eat today? Will his body be strong enough for him today? It is only our constant faith in Hashem that allows us to entrust each other to His care, and to go on with our daily lives."



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For now, visits have stopped, on the advice of Rabbi Eliyahu. "Right now I'm waiting for him here," Esther explains. "Rabbi Eliyahu feels an important purpose is being served by this. Fifty percent of Jonathan is already here. The other half will follow. It's so hard, so painful, but in my heart of hearts I know it's the right thing to do."

"People ask what I'll do when Jonathan is free. It's so obvious for me. I'm going to cook for him and clean for him. I'm going to take care of him so that he will have the peace in his life to do the things he needs to, not just for himself but

for *am Yisrael*. And that for me will be the greatest pleasure in the world. My biggest deprivation is to not be able to do these small things for him."

These next weeks, Esther, like Jewish women around the world, will be preparing for the Pesach holiday. "I prepare everything with the full expectation that this time Jonathan will be home for *leil HaSeder*. Hashem is omnipotent, and the Redemption will come in the wink of an eye ... perhaps even today! G-d willing, this year Jonathan will sit at his own Seder table here in Jerusalem." ■

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At the Zilberman bris, everyone enjoyed the meal, even the photographer!

(Mr. Yoel Farkash, Bnei Brak)

Who says you can't surprise your guests, even when you make a bris in the local neighborhood shul? We hired Maadan Chalev dairy catering for our recent bris. Everyone enjoyed it. The menu was superb, the buffet was stunning, and the catering staff was professional and polite. The food... it was deliciously fresh and plentiful! Even the photographer who's seen it all, found it to be a real treat!

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To arrange an appointment, please call Koby at: 052-6835359

מאדן חלב

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