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Israel at War
Flikers of Light in the Dark

More than a month has passed since the tragic and unprecedented blow that our country has received. The shock has been disastrous not only for all of us but for the whole of humanity. It was beyond any imagined form of aggression, hatred and cruelty. First of all, no one understood how anything like this was possible. What I have always admired about Israel is intelligence (I still believe in this nation's legendary endowment ability), intelligence services, the motivation of the defense army, the dedication of the soldiers, the professional training of those who lead it. And yet nothing had prevented thousands of terrorists trained to wreak havoc and death on the civilian population with incredible cruelty from entering our country. It is understandable why Israeli television refused to show the devastating images filmed by the enemy in their vain attempt to parade their victory. The local TV stations censored them because they wanted to avoid inducing despair and confusion in the population. Unbelievable. They filmed their actions proudly.

The video footage has not reached the general public, but those who have had access to it are, by their own account, traumatized for life. We saw the reaction of members of the Israeli parliament as they left the studio, some sobbing, others almost fainting, some rushing to throw up. Even without seeing the images, the interviews with people who witnessed the carnage and had miraculously survived, or the comments made by the journalists who had access to

these recordings, can horrify and traumatize practically anyone.



Girls raped before being slaughtered, babies beheaded, parents killed in front of their children, parents watching how their babies' eyes were being gouged out and their fingers cut off before they were shot. A pregnant woman had had her baby ripped from her womb and then shot just for fun. Even the "Zaka," a group of people who are assigned to the careful collection of the remains, corpse identification and burial procedures, experienced and hardened as they are, suffer from nervous breakdowns, overwhelmed by what they have discovered. I saw an interview in which one of them was choking back his tears unable to articulate a word while another was hospitalized for psychiatric treatment.

Not all of them were "lucky" enough to die instantly by gunshot or in an explosion. I have recently heard an interview of a young woman whom it took three weeks to be able to talk about the inhuman cruelty she had witnessed. She managed to hide in a cellar from where she watched in horror and anguish as a terrorist cut off a little girl's hands leaving her writhing in a pool of blood until her 'welcome' death put her out of her misery. This woman couldn't come out of her hiding place to help her (she couldn't have done anything anyway) and had to

watch helplessly a scene that would haunt her for the rest of her life, crushing her soul.

How can I find the forgiveness my soul so desperately yearns for? And if I happen to find this strength, how will I reconcile it with the strong sense of guilt towards mankind, to which I myself belong? I look helplessly at this crushing madness and I feel totally overcome by it, paralyzed. But is it not the same madness we all suffer from? How can we put a stop to the hatred that is driving a whole planet mad? How can we, from the deep pit of darkness where we have fallen, respond with love and sympathy?

And yet there is some good in all this hell. There are a few meaningful situations, even though they are merely sporadic and pale flickers of light in this utter darkness. They are perhaps a tiny oasis of hope (hope, nevertheless) for those who refuse to be crushed by evil. A young girl who was kidnapped from the Festival of Nature and Peace was released with no additional explanation. Her kidnapper simply abandoned her in the middle of the road that entered Gaza. In some kibbutzim, whole families burned alive in their homes. Nobody knows why some houses are destroyed and others are spared. While in some settlements, people, including children, were literally butchered, in other cases, parents were shot in one room and their babies were found unharmed in their cots (a real miracle that they survived without food and water for hours). One little girl around ten, who listened to her father and remained hiding under the blanket together with her brother, related how a terrorist discovered them and waved them to be quiet and then covered them back and left. They were found by Israeli soldiers many hours later, paralyzed with fear but alive. Their parents had, of course, been killed. A foreign nurse caring for a disabled

old woman persuaded the terrorist to spare them by offering them in dollars all she had saved up and wanted to send home to her family in the Philippines. They were found tightly embraced. This is a happy ending because in the neighboring house, the Filipino nurse was shot on the spot and the eighty-year-old woman was taken hostage.

Here is another stunning case. Two children have been hiding for hours in a closet in a 'shelter' room. Their parents were taken hostage but they escaped.

Here are the testimonies of two survivors. I was so deeply touched by their story, a miracle, really. These people strengthened my faith in the power of spirit and prayer, rather, in the power every spirit exerts to keep a threatened, vulnerable being out of harm's way, or, with a little imagination, perhaps even in another dimension. This account has a mystical undertone, of course, but the events are real and I feel it is my duty to let others know about them too.

An elderly woman, who lived alone in one of the kibbutzim that was attacked, locked herself in the bunker room where she heard infernal noises and gunshots. Her fright mounted tremendously when she heard terrorists banging loudly to break the lock of her room. She kept praying, focusing on her inner being, saying the same words over and over again: "I am safe, no one can harm me, I am safe, no one can harm me, I am safe, no one can harm me, I am safe, no one can harm me, I am safe, no one can harm me."

The Festival of Nature and Peace, where about two thousand young people gathered and danced and sang the entire night, was cut short in monstrous slaughter. Terrorists shot left and right, threw grenades and took hostages. Even though it was an open field, some managed to save themselves by running and hiding in ditches and pits, trees

or bushes that were harder to spot. I was particularly impressed by the incredible story of a twenty-five-year-old survivor of this inferno. In order to understand this person's attitude and reaction better, let me refer to a few things about her life. She has been living in Guatemala for three years, on the shores of Lake Atitlan. Her life there was very simple, close to nature and she focused mostly on her spiritual evolution. For the past year and a half, she has been learning special yoga breathing techniques that she has come to teach to others. She was visiting Israel when the terrorist attack caught up with her at this very celebration. Sensing danger, she and three other young people fled to their car, hoping to save themselves by driving away from the place. The others, overcome with fear, did not understand her reaction. In those moments of panic, she was focusing on her inner being, concentrating on her breathing. Seeing that they were surrounded and that the car could not help them, they all got out, each looking for a hiding place. Of the three young men, only one escaped alive. She said that what saved him was that he cared not about himself but about his wife, who disappeared in the whirlwind of the attack. The young woman jumped into a bush where she stayed curled up for six hours until Israeli policemen pulled her out. They actually had to drag her out because she seemed stuck there, entangled in the branches, in an awkward position. All along, she meditated, pictured her survival, believed in herself, used the breathing techniques she had learned and communicated by text message with her family and friends, reassuring them. From the bush that had saved her, she saw terrorists, girls running away, heard gunshots whose effect was easy to imagine. The people who took her away from the 'hot' zone were two Bedouins who knew the place well and who had been saving people

nonstop since six in the morning. They were rescuing young runaways by driving them to safety. She said that she felt safe by simply looking in their eye.



Now, more than a month later, things are much more serious. The traumatized young woman has nightmares, nervous breakdowns, and faces a heavy sense of guilt towards those who perished, murdered, or even worse, towards the girls who, raped and maimed before the final blow, were praying to die. She could have been a victim too. What miracle saved her? It's hard to understand why she wasn't spotted by the terrorists. She could have been seen very easily, the bush being bare, almost dry. And yet ... A real miracle!

More flickers of light in this deep darkness. Despite all this, despite the unfathomable and intolerable failure of the Israeli leadership, the population immediately started organizing themselves, motivated by solidarity, by patriotism and because they were driven by the same thought: to help, to stand by those directly affected and, above all, to defend the legitimate right for life. Anticipating the official orders, the soldiers went to their bases, ready to take action. Aid collection centres for the army, for the disaster victims and evacuees were set up immediately in every town. It is incredible to see how promptly the population reacted,

full of empathy and energy. Everyone donated essential items, food, money. Our son was summoned as a doctor with a tankers unit and told us that he and his comrades slept on donated mattresses. Psychologists, social workers and people who truly cared volunteered to offer emotional support to the families of those who were killed, disappeared, or were kidnapped. In all the darkness in which we will probably still be living for a long time to come, these actions, these attitudes, are the oases of light that we all so desperately need.

The well-trained and well-equipped army has now entered Gaza. Its objective is to destroy the Hamas organization, annihilate its leaders and terrorists, detect and destroy the weapons storage centres, from where thousands of rockets are still being launched over Israeli cities, the hundreds of tunnels that have been dug for years to attack our country. In order to avoid the death of innocents, The advance is complicated and slow precisely to avoid the deaths of innocents. Our soul weeps for every soldier who gives his life for his homeland, whether Jewish, Christian, Druze or Bedouin. Unfortunately, this action causes disastrous suffering to the civilian population in the region. Israel has announced bombing raids and summoned the population to take refuge in the south, but in many cases the terrorists have blocked the passage of their own people, using them as human shields. There are casualties, too many because the terrorists have placed their centres near schools, mosques, in the basements of hospitals. The bombings, however precise, cause collateral damage, probably not to the extent announced by the Palestinian media (they are known to be manipulative, and for that, they often distort reality). On the other hand, the terrible images offered by the media of entire neighbourhoods destroyed,

people, including children, pulled out from under the rubble, are crushing. Even though my heart cries helplessly I am sadly aware that, painful though it feels, there is no other way. In a few days, when the fresh footage has reached everywhere around the world and the censored incidents of October 7 (too shocking to be made public) have slowly been forgotten, the HATRED against Israel begins to deepen. The latent anti-Semitism is now constantly hitting from all directions taking on menacing proportions.

Not long ago, a friend from abroad expressed her regret that these bilateral vendettas make innocent victims. They are vendettas, I won't deny it. There may be isolated cases of aggressive, hostile actions but the Israeli security forces intervene promptly to stop them. I also don't deny the political mistakes that have been made over the years, especially those made by the current government, but nothing justifies the shocking nightmare we have recently been living in. The intention to form two peaceful states (one Palestinian and one Israeli) on the territory of the former ancient Roman Palestine has been around since the beginning of the last century and it materialized after the Second World War after six million Jews were exterminated. Except, the neighbouring Muslim states were against Israel's presence in this territory.

This was the beginning of an endless series of bloody conflicts and wars that were waged out of religious fanaticism and political interests, culminating in the (unfortunately successful) terrorist attack of unimaginable cruelty of October 7.

Israel has always been threatened and had to improve its defenses in order to exist. I have lived in this wonderful little country for almost forty years and I know about the

diplomatic efforts that have been made to resolve this problem. Whenever success seemed close, something always occurred either on one side or the other and thwarted things. Diplomatic links were established first with Egypt and then a few years later with Jordan. Perhaps the closest we came to a successful, hopeful moment was under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, but he was assassinated by an Israeli right-wing extremist (sadly and paradoxically by his own countryman). Other attempts followed, but each time something bad happened. Buses and restaurants were periodically blown up by suicidal Muslim terrorists. Then, a tactical error was committed by the then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. He walked on the esplanade of the El Aqsa mosque, and, as a result, the 'intifada' of the indigenous Arab population broke out. Perhaps the latest incident was also not a coincidence: just when Israel was about to establish relations with Saudi Arabia, hell broke loose. The whole world is now blaming Israel for trying to stamp out this criminal organization that wants to form a Palestinian state without Israel. This changes the dynamic altogether. I wonder whether the non-Islamic world, full of empathy for human suffering, which so angrily condemns Israel for the war in Gaza, might want to take this aspect into account, too.

The war scenes I see on TV break my heart. And apart from this, the thought that more than two hundred Israeli hostages are detained in who knows what underground passages in Gaza, without any certainty when and if at all they will be released (assuming they are still alive), or the news of every soldier who fell so that we may be safe, shakes us all. Such sacrifice! I thought, in my naïve way, that Gaza and Cisjordan could truly have developed wonderfully if,

instead of 'feeding' murderous groups, they would have used the financial loans for development and prosperity. One could live so well in this "Promised Land," A little compromise in the name of decency and there would be room for everyone. Old Jerusalem, one of the grounds for dispute, could be administered by an international forum represented by the world's three monotheistic religions. I wonder, will this dream ever be possible?

What will future this strip of land look like after the " Hamas " organization has been annihilated or at least rendered so weak that it will no longer pose any danger? Unfortunately, there are other organizations that want to destroy Israel. Very few Islamic states accept the legitimate existence of the State of Israel. Ideology cannot be erased by resorting to force. It takes years and years of education and good faith and, perhaps more importantly, international solidarity. So long as the growing number of fanatical factions raise their children in hatred towards everything that is not Muslim and especially towards Jews, it is very difficult to be optimistic. Everyone close to me, friends and acquaintances, aspires for democracy, peace, a peaceful neighbouring Palestinian state, and mutual respect. I say 'aspire,' but I can't help noticing that lately, due to the increasingly savage and frequent terrorist attacks, this aspiration is tainted with suspicion, if it hasn't disappeared altogether, overcome by the instinct of self-preservation. We certainly won't lose hope but will this dream ever become reality?

Everybody is railing against Israel. Is it possible that an entire world is blinded by secular anti-Semitism and accepts the distortion of truth and reality? This is really deplorable and painful. From the outside, without experiencing menace day after day, it is easy to condemn. Some of my friends

abroad think that if the State of Palestine were established, all conflicts would be resolved and the long-expected peace would come to this troubled land. How easily they recommend something Israel was in favor of from the very beginning but which was answered back with war! And why? Because Muslim states have opposed its coming into existence and refused to recognize its legitimacy.

It is true that now, decades later, the political dynamic has changed in at least one part of the Arab world, which is beginning to see the positive side of an Israeli state in the Middle East. Yes, an independent Palestinian state that respects international law would be the proper strategy. But what kind of Palestinian state and what kind of peace? With such a fundamentalist ideology, Israel, the country that was built with tremendous effort, devotion and expertise by a people who have endured so much suffering and persecution to be granted the right to have their own country, their haven, would slowly vanish from the world map.

The Israelis are threatened and they fight for the mere right to existence.



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