

### ***My Travels to October 7<sup>th</sup>***

In Israel, everyone knows what October 7<sup>th</sup> means. It was the day Israel was invaded by a group of men, and many women and children following them, intent on nothing less than murder and degradation of their chosen enemy. In this case, the enemy was innocent men, women, and children civilians referred to as those who live in Israel, "The Zionist Entity." Many Muslims will not speak the word "Israel."

I was reluctant to go down south because I did not want to be a tourist. The idea of going to crime scenes has a macabre and uncomfortable feel about it.

However, after much reflection I decided that it was necessary to see what happened in southern Israel at the collective farms and Nova Festival on October 7<sup>th</sup>. It is true that for most people "seeing is believing."

The man who met me at one of the Kibbutzim was named Yishai. He works for an organization called L'vinot. It is not a government agency and receives only private funding. The organization, among other things, rebuilds housing using mostly volunteers for those who have the courage to move back to the decimated collective communities.

The following are my observations but mostly the statements made by Yishai and others whom I met.

"We redo the houses so that they look different. People have died here and suffered. People had to quickly abandon their houses and some of them want to come home.

As you can see, we repaired bombed out houses. When you have nothing to go back to, you have no life. In the beginning there was no government aid and no help for these people.

I cry with the survivors and talk with the volunteers. Now the government is starting to help, but its resources are limited given that they are fighting enemies on all fronts.

When the terrorists broke into these homes, their wives and children, who frequently follow them, took the food of the homeowners, their personal possessions, and robbed these people of what little they had left. The survivors felt that their soul was taken. The terrorists got inside many of the houses and caught the women and children. The women were cut right near the children. They were cut and raped in front of their husbands and the children. The terrorists and their families then took the remaining belongings.

The terrorists brought their women and children to rob the houses on the Kibbutzim. You just can't believe it. They cut babies out of pregnant women.

These bombed out homes that you are looking at are sacred places. It is not exactly a cemetery, but it is similar to one. We started our work down here in January 2024.

People come here to help us and to help the few survivors recover. They discover their Neshama [their soul]. What it means to be a Jew is at the core of the work we do.

When you work with your hands, it is different. You have a more accurate, clear understanding of the reality of what occurred here. Volunteers who help us go to the Nova site where they talk and meet survivors.

There was unimaginable chaos here. But there also were a lot of heroes.

We say on Yom Kippur that in the coming year some will live and some will die; some by fire, some by strangulation, and other means are listed. Here, the people died in all kinds of ways.

Some of the Kibbutzim were hit harder than others.

The Machlibim [terrorists] were looking for children to take to Gaza as hostages. Hostages are a weapon of war for these people.

There is no question that all of these people in Gaza wanted to kill us. We need to be strong together.

We have nothing else. We need to get along as a people. Those who hid in shelters died. Hiding in shelters turned out to be an even worse choice. Some people hid in bus shelters and some people hid in ambulances. The terrorists threw grenades and bombs into those places so that they could kill as many innocents as possible. This was not an issue of collateral damage to civilians. Civilians were the target.

There are many stories. There was a story of security not being able fully to respond to terrorists because the Army had taken their guns. They told us the Army took them “for our safety.”

The Army took guns away from these farmers two weeks before October 7<sup>th</sup>. They said that Bedouins would steal the guns. If you need it, we will bring back your guns. Afterwards, some of these farms had no weapons to protect themselves with. The terrorists, make no mistake about it, came to kill Jews.

If we believe we can win the war against terror, we can. There is no question that we must destroy Hamas. This is not a political statement. I have a broken heart for all of these people.

The Mamad is a saferoom. Many people hid in the saferoom, and they also became a tomb. The people who farmed here, who lived and worked here, lived with and worked with Arabs from Gaza. The Arabs came and they worked for good wages, they broke bread with the farmers, and many times they slept in these places during the week. On October 7<sup>th</sup> those same “friends” came with maps and lists. They knew where the children were, they knew where the cars and the car keys were. They were able to help the terrorists commit their terror. They knew the families.

Organizations like L’vinot desperately need money.

You will see on many houses the mark of Zaka. That was an organization which took care of dead bodies and turned over victims for pathology. In every house where there is a symbol of Zaka, someone died.”

You can hear artillery in the background. There is a sound of silence on these collective farms. It is literally the sound of death.

“This is our country. Why can’t we live here in peace? This is Eretz Yisrael.”

Other houses have the sign of the “Tav” in them which is where the Army went in when they showed up.

“The Nova Festival was a great opportunity to kill.”

In the distance, you could clearly hear the distinct sound of rapid fire, machine gun fire. Yishai said, “This is the mission of my life.”

Lots of tourists are now coming. In our travel, I was surprised to see lots of cows. The terrorists took no pity on the animals. They killed, murdered, and shot domestic animals, dogs, cats and, of course, cows. Yet, there were several Kibbutzim where the cows survived.

“Something has to change. Something has to happen.” Yishai looked me in the eye and said, “I need to find your Neshama within me.” That is a job we all have.

There are areas with what appear to be dozens, maybe hundreds, of cars piled up. People in all of those cars were killed. Some of the attendees at the Noval Festival were fleeing in cars and others not. Many were running by foot.

Families of the victims come to look at the piled-up cars.

The soldiers. The soldiers also come to look here. In thanking each one of them, it is hard to keep one’s composure.

Many of the survivors suffer from PTSD, and even some of the volunteers.

We traveled to a junction run by two volunteers. The junction is a makeshift restaurant and rest area. It is pretty rugged. Volunteers from New Jersey, California, and the Midwest of the United States are cleaning floors, serving food, and welcoming the soldiers. It is hot. There is one “room,” hardly a room as we know it in the US, which has a little bit of air conditioning. The soldiers get out of the open Humvees dirty and dusty. It is clear that most of them have older and aging weapons. They wear no helmets, no flack jackets, but all of them have a pistol on their thigh in addition to the assault rifles. They get some food, and they eat. Most wear Kippahs. No high-tech stuff to be seen. This is not the US Army which seems to have limitless amounts of money.

I went over and I shook the hands of several of the soldiers and thanked them for being the force that stands between tyranny and democracy. It is the same thing I say to US soldiers when I see them.

We visited other Kibbutzim where people were killed. As I noted earlier, many people hid in the Mamad, the saferoom. The saferooms turned out to be tombs for many seeking protection.

Yishai continued: “The Machlibim [terrorists] knew where to look for people to shoot them because of the Arabs who had worked and lived in these communities. They had the information ahead of time. They knew where the guns and weapons were stored.”

“Our hearts and minds are wounded. I feel we are all wounded. Many people don’t want to

talk about what they saw. They don't want to talk about what they went through. Sometimes healing is denial. The children are reluctant to come back.

The noise of war is close.

Every day my own children cry when they go to school. The children are very traumatized. They hid in shelters while Hamas and people from Gaza hunted for people to kill and to take as hostages."

Dogs. You won't believe this, but diseased dogs came across the open border from Gaza.

This was not a war for territory or rights or freedom. It was a war to kill, rape, maim and degrade. It was a war to impose Jihadist structure on a free country."

I met with a woman who was a fieldworker for L'vinot and two volunteers. The owner of the house was a victim. She spoke to us in Hebrew. She wore a dog tag of a hostage around her neck.

The woman explained as follows: "We did not have enough resources to repel terrorists. There were battles on many of the Kibbutzim." Those that were observing the Sabbath and the holiday on October 7<sup>th</sup>, had their gates locked and fared better.

Many people who survived had serious injuries, brain injuries and bleeding. In one spot we saw where several people were hit by an RPG. A first responder was killed along with others. For 24 hours no one could leave because of terrorists in the area.

Some of the survivors left for nearby towns and cities and the first thing they did was establish a school. The first thing Jewish refugees do when they have to leave their home is create a school for their children.

Hamas terrorists even knew where the Kibbutz ambulance was. There were people who had jobs here. Israel was trying to give Gazans a better life. Gaza had been independent since early 2000. Israel was a partner in trying to give them a better life. They even knew where the prettiest girls were for rape. Gazans had slept here and were treated as part of the Kibbutz family.

We will never work with people from Gaza again.

It is July 9<sup>th</sup> for you, but still October 7<sup>th</sup> for us.

Those who come back want more protection, more fences, more cameras.

We feel violated. We want security.

This was to be Phase 1 for Hamas."

Many people, shot in the brain, the legs, or the sexual organs are still in rehab if they survived." The woman I talked to was getting psychological help herself.

One woman I talked to is a certified grief counselor. She is a volunteer.

"20 girls came from a Yeshiva in New York to help the volunteers. They work hard. They realize that their mission is one of survival."

I spoke to one woman fixing up her house who was an artist. She had difficulty talking about what occurred, but she was determined to do so, and it was easier with just me and a few people rather than a big crowd.

She talked to me about people who died here, right here in her house, in her town, on her walk out front.

“I see the beating heart of the Jew.” Everyone who comes to volunteer are enthusiastic and committed. “I feel love.”

As we drove through the countryside, it reminded me of the area south of Lancaster before you reach the Maryland border. It is an area of beautiful rolling hills, farms, and pristine beauty. The Jewish people made the desert bloom in this Middle Eastern oasis. What do they receive in return for trying to help the Arabs create a life, a society, a civilization that is living for themselves? Terrorist attacks such as that which occurred on October 7<sup>th</sup>.

Black gunpowder lays low on the horizon. A group of terrorists tried to break into another Kibbutz, the very day I was there. They were repelled by the Army, artillery, and ultimately jets. But the terrorists are on a suicide mission, and they never stop.

Yishai would not go with me to the site of the Nova Festival. He said that his work is about life not death.

At the site of the Nova Festival is an impromptu cemetery and shrine. Trees have been planted for many of the victims. That is a very Israeli thing to do. Across the road from where the trees were planted is a separate shrine with a picture of many of the victims.

These people who were hunted down in shelters, in ambulances, in cars, and in homes. These were not military installations.

Eli Wisel, who wrote of the Holocaust, noted that we are meant to be witnesses. That is why I went and that is what I am doing for anyone who cares to read what I witnessed in my travels to Southern Israel in the bucolic farming communities that remind me so much of Central Pennsylvania from south to north.

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