

## Terrorism in Israel: The Need for Moral Clarity

**At a gathering mourning the surprise attack by Hamas on Israeli civilians and expressing solidarity with Israel, Rabbi Ammi Hirsch said: “We saw in vivid reality what a pogrom looks like... Make no mistake: Israeli civilians were massacred because they were Jews. They massacred whole families. They slaughtered babies. They raped young women... and they ask why there is no peace? The days of murdering and massacring Jews with impunity are over... Israel will prevail. Am Yisrael chai!”**

We come together this evening to mourn, to gain comfort from each other, and to express unwavering solidarity with Israel. There will come a time for investigating what went wrong (and it is already clear that there have been colossal failures on many levels), but that time is not now. Now we unite. Now we support our Israeli kin. Now we mobilize. Now we act to ensure victory. The stakes are very high. If this war ends short of a Hamas defeat, it will invite more war, more terror, and more bloodshed in the years to come. It is a depressing fact of history and human nature that peace is purchased through strength and deterrence, especially in the Middle East, where the weak are preyed upon and devoured.

This is a sad, devastating week for the Jewish people and all decent people who value life. We lost more Jews in one day this week — the Shabbat of Simchat Torah — than at any other time since the Holocaust. On no day, from the end of World War II, have more Jews been murdered. Jewish history will remember this week forever. What was will no longer be.

It is a week of funerals. Hundreds of heart-wrenching funerals of beautiful people — farmers, teachers, entrepreneurs, mothers, fathers, grandparents, children, babies, dozens of IDF soldiers, police and other security personnel who laid down their lives in defense of their fellow citizens. And we know there will be many more funerals in the weeks to come.

We saw in vivid reality what a pogrom looks like: mass mayhem and murder. Make no mistake: Israeli civilians were massacred because they were Jews. Anti-Israel protesters make no attempt to hide it: “Gas the Jews,” they shrieked in front of the Sydney Opera House. And therefore, this is a crisis that concerns every one of us. It affects our children. It affects our future. It threatens every Jew worldwide — and every decent person. The question for us is do we want to stand up or cower? Do we want to participate or slink away?

It is excruciating for me to think of the horror — it shakes me to my core. There are many moments I want to look away. But we need to force ourselves to not look away. We need to fully absorb what is in the nature of the human creature — what we are capable of doing to each other. And as Jews — we need to be honest about our enemies.

To all of our non-Jewish friends: Do you know what it does to a Jew to see, once again, 80 years later, Jews massacred in their homes? Jews taken hostage? Jews dragged out onto the streets — beaten and raped? Mutilated corpses paraded in public while delirious crowds holler their crazed approval? There is something rotten in the culture of these streets — putrid, rancid to the core. They massacred whole families. They slaughtered babies. They raped young women as the bodies of their dead friends lay all around them. They took men, women, children,

mothers and infants hostage into the bowels of Gaza. Among them was an elderly grandmother — a Holocaust survivor.

And they ask why there is no peace?

Keep a clear moral compass. This is not freedom fighting. This is not resistance. It is war crimes and crimes against humanity. It is rank, antisemitic, evil, wicked, villainous, abominable, heinous barbarism. And anyone — in the Middle East, the United States and the West, in the halls of Congress, in the media, or in schools or university campuses — anyone who defends, whitewashes, apologizes for, or justifies, this repugnant degeneracy is themselves morally compromised and morally complicit.

Any international agency or NGO that sends money to these criminals is morally responsible. You are funding a murderous ideology bent on killing Jews. And sooner or later, it will rebound on you. You will see it on the streets of Europe and throughout the West.

They can't even bring themselves to use the right words. They call it "militancy" or "grievance" or "violence," or some other morally empty term. And soon — "whataboutism" and words like "disproportionate" will begin to creep into the conversation. How's this for proportionality? Don't attack Israel and Israel won't attack you.

Any educator, any head of school or university whose message to students and parents is to maintain an environment of mutual respect and acceptance for all — surely a worthy message — but cannot actually bring themselves to call out terrorism, name the terrorists and condemn their inhuman and atrocious brutality — fails the most important test of pedagogical, moral and civic leadership. They beheaded adults; they beheaded children; they beheaded babies. Why are heads of school, why are university presidents silent? And if they do release statements, why can't they call out terrorism, name the terrorists and condemn their inhuman and atrocious brutality?

Any religious leader who prays for peace but cannot call out terrorism, name the terrorists and condemn their inhuman and atrocious brutality practices faux morality — cowardly, fake, evasive, armchair ethics, masquerading as spiritual leadership. It is not moral courage; it is moral preening.

All of us can make a difference. Do not stand idly by while your brethren bleed. We have prepared a list of things you can do now and in the future. On your way out, pick it up and resolve to act. If there is interest in a solidarity mission to Israel as soon as the fighting ends, I will lead it. Let us know if you may be interested. We fully intend to travel to Israel as a community in March, as planned. Consider joining us.

I want to turn specifically to young people, and their parents and teachers:

Have some Jewish pride. Safeguard Jewish dignity. It is normative on university campuses to view Israel as colonialist, and Jews as white oppressors. "Zionism" has become a curse word, another term for "racist." It is just assumed in so many university quads that "Zionists" are evil. The deterioration on college campuses is so dramatic that this culture is seeping into high

schools and even middle schools. And let's be honest. It is happening in our space, in the heart of intellectual liberalism.

Counter them. Don't be passive. March, demonstrate, protest, stand up for what is right. In besmirching Israel they besmirch you — and all of us — and all good people. They corrupt liberalism and distort liberal values. Faculty members in middle schools, high schools and universities: help your students, counter radical teachers, professors and lecturers. Alumni of American universities: respond with vigor. Parents of high school and middle school students: hold administrators accountable. Hold teachers accountable. Hold politicians accountable. Hold journalists accountable. There is so much more at stake than even Israel. It is our entire Western values system.

Dear congregants, friends and supporters:

There will be bitter days ahead filled with heartache and pain for our people and, sadly, for those in the Palestinian community — and there are many who want nothing to do with Hamas. I am filled with dread for the fate of the 150 hostages held in Gaza. Hamas threatens to execute them one by one — ISIS-style — and to show the beheadings on social media.

But Israel was founded to empower Jews with self-determination. After 2,000 years, a persecuted, abandoned, decimated people finally rose up and said, "enough." The days of murdering and massacring Jews with impunity are over. We will protect ourselves. We will defend our people. We will be masters of our own fate. There have been so many acts of military valor in Israel as to make our chests pound with awe. There have been so many acts of civic courage — Israeli civilians mobilizing to help, give blood, shelter, feed and shower with love Israeli families devastated by the attacks — as to cause our hearts to swell with pride.

Rest assured: They will not break us. There is no force in the world more powerful than the united spirit of the Jewish people in urgent times. It broke the will of Pharaoh, of history's tyrants who could not fathom how we were still around — and it will eventually break the will of Israel's contemporary enemies.

Until that day — there is no alternative but to fight back. I wish with all my heart it was not so.

Israel will prevail. The Jewish people lives.

*Am Yisrael chai!*

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