

Israel: Nothing to Fear Than Terror Itself

I returned home to Israel recently from traveling overseas. I landed to news of five new terrorist attacks happening that morning, leaving three dead and dozens wounded.

Suffice it to say, I quickly realized that though I thought I had been aware of how bad things were while keeping up with my family, friends, and the news while I was away, as the saying goes, one can't see things from there that I see from here.

Israelis are obsessed with news most of the time, but especially when there's a heightened security situation. The entire ride home my driver and I surfed news for live updates, and traffic patterns. Neither WAZE (developed in Israel) nor traditional GPS systems have an option to update for a terror alert. Maybe developing that is my calling.

We heard that the main road to Jerusalem was closed for security reasons, so we went another direction. Fortunately, we were among the first 50-100 cars to arrive at a particular intersection when it, too, was closed in the direction we were headed, also for security reasons. Fortunately because we were toward the front of the blockade, we were able to get around it and go a different way.

I was impressed as he received calls from his friends and relatives checking up on him and where he was, he reiterated that the answer was prayer and to rely on God. I knew that, but caught up in the stress of the moment, it was important to hear and reiterate.

"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I was helped; therefore my heart rejoices, and with my song I will thank Him" (Ps. 28:7).

My driver was interested to know that I had just come back from a trip to the U.S. where my main agenda was to build a wider base of support for Heart to Heart among Christians. He'd never met a Christian and was interested and surprised, but pleased, to hear that there's such strong support for Israel among Christians. Especially at a time like this, it was important for me to share this with him. I realized I needed to be doing so much more widely with other Israelis.

While it was hard to be away during this time, and a comfort to be home even amid the terror, I realized that I was lucky to be the object of the outpouring of lots of love for Israel because I was in the presence of Christians who love Israel throughout my trip away from home.

Especially while traveling, it was hard to keep track of each incident, and the ones I was hearing about are only the ones we hear about. The fact is there are numerous other instances where someone "only" throws rocks or Molotov cocktails at passing cars, as happens repeatedly near my community and elsewhere, where a terrorist was disarmed, or where the occasional act of violence was mistakenly initially reported as a terrorist attack. These don't make the news but are a daily reality all the same.

However, as I was driving home, two of the attacks that were taking place hit closer to home. One, aboard a Jerusalem bus, terrorists boarded and opened fire. This took place close to where my daughter was waiting for her bus to get to work. She and others knew by the sight and sound of more than a dozen ambulances racing by that something had happened. But they didn't know what or where.

That added to the fear, and they debated whether to get on the next bus at all. One woman said not to take the bus because it wasn't safe, but my daughter knew that it was no less safe waiting around on a sidewalk at a bus stop where Palestinian Arabs passed freely, as is the norm in Jerusalem.

Another woman offered, practically, that the next bus might not even be able to continue as the police were likely to be blocking traffic in the direction all the ambulances were headed. Fear and confusion conflicted with the need to get to work.

At more or less the same time, a colleague of my daughter was on Kings of Israel St. when a Palestinian Arab raced his car across the street, onto the sidewalk, running over people waiting at another bus stop. Afterward, it was revealed that the terrorist worked for Israel's national phone company. One day he's working alongside Jewish Israelis, and the next he's smashing his car into a group of innocent bystanders. The surreal and gross video of the Arab driver exiting his car, hacking his victims with a knife or ax, and then being apprehended by bystanders went viral. My daughter's colleague was the one running away from the scene, fortunately not hurt physically, but she was badly shaken up and had the distinction of being the first to call in the incident to paramedics.

As if following the release of the movie *Jaws*, which terrorized people from going to the ocean, people have been scared to go out to do simple, normal, routine things. Emails asking about the safety of going grocery shopping are stirring lots of conversation. One grocery store chain, known for actively hiring both Arab and Jewish workers and which is frequented by Arab and Jewish shoppers, has announced they will no longer be selling or displaying knives in public. Imagine!

This, of course, led others to ask what's preventing the Palestinian Arab workers who are cutting our kosher chickens to turn their butcher's knives on us.

I haven't had the time, opportunity or occasion to go to Jerusalem since coming home (as of this writing), but I understand things are tense. People are avoiding going out, or

avoiding public places while going out. One friend talked about renting a car to get around because he's worried about walking or traveling by bus. Fear is neither always rational nor practical.

Another friend related to me how he and his wife were in Jerusalem and she told him to walk behind her so if a terrorist approached from the back, he'd prevent the terrorist from getting to her. I guess that's a Middle Eastern form of chivalry. I joked that he must have a better life insurance policy. Faith and humor carry the day.

The day after I got home we were scheduled to start some renovations in the house. We hired Omar, the same Palestinian Arab contractor who led the crew that built our house a decade ago. We have always liked him and trusted his honesty and professionalism. This week, talk on our community's email list called into question the wisdom of hiring Arabs and bringing them into our community, especially at this time.

My wife related how another neighbor was doing work in their house and the required armed guard had to leave. A few weeks ago that might have been met with discomfort, but resignation. However, the wife told the guard to take the workers with him because it simply wasn't safe. The workers pleaded with her just to let them stay and work, after all they just wanted and needed to earn a living.

Despite the security situation, I was looking forward to seeing Omar. He's always got a great smile and something nice to say. He's thoughtful and helpful. The night before he was scheduled to bring his workers to our house, rumors started that Arabs were being banned from our town for security purposes. The next morning we woke to find that rumor to be true, until further notice.

At some point, Palestinian Arabs will come back to work here. Several hundred or more make a good living here every day. We

may not always love one another, but there is respect and mutual understanding that we need one another, at least among the vast majority of both Arabs and Jews. I will look forward to having Omar here, to get along with our project and even to pay he and his crew to do their work to make a living. I pray that when that happens, it will be a sign of a light at the end of this tunnel of darkness.

I may put away the kitchen knives, however. {eoa}

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