

Israel: Terror Alert During a Leisurely Trip to the Store

Recently, I made a trip to the grocery store in preparation for Shabbat when I was witness to the unfolding of a terrorist attack near my home at the Gush Etzion intersection. Because of the recent proclivity of terror attacks there, the Israeli media has dubbed this “the Intersection of Death.”

I was driving in my suburban community when out of the blue, I heard a siren and noticed a white pickup behind me with a flashing blue light on the dashboard. Clearly this was a private vehicle of a security person. As we were headed in the same direction, my heart sunk and I prayed silently that it wasn't another terrorist attack. I pulled over to let the pickup pass, as did the car in front of me. As quickly as it appeared, it was gone. I scanned the area for other emergency vehicles, trying to assess what might be taking place.

A minute later, as I approached the Gush Etzion Intersection, I realized that something had happened. Ahead of me I saw at least a dozen military and emergency vehicles, and traffic was stopped about half a mile back. As I sat in growing traffic, I realized the irony of cars on all sides of me being full of Palestinian Arabs, also inconvenienced by whatever was ahead. A minute after that, breaking news on national radio affirmed that another Palestinian Arab had tried to run down three soldiers stationed there to keep us safe. One was injured and the female Arab terrorist was shot and killed.

Initially this was reported as a “suspected” terror attack, but everyone knew. After photos were released of the terrorist's car and the knife on her dashboard—if there had been any doubt—it was now clear.

Most of us travel with phone chargers, jumper cables, cup

holders, etc. But a knife on the dashboard is pretty clear the intent was not to charge a phone or stalled car battery. While the incident was reported in successive hourly news cycles, it's unlikely that it was or would be reported outside Israel.

There is, however, something redeeming and sad at the same time when terrorist attacks like another that took place near my home are reported outside Israel. It's much more common to hear of shootings and stabbings, especially when casualties are involved. And while it was probably not reported more widely than this, it's important that the recent attack was reported at all so people understand this is the way we live, not by choice but by the hateful choices of our neighbors.

While our local community email list was abuzz with news and warnings, this is what one media outlet, *The Jewish Press*, reported: *"Arab terrorists hurled rocks at a children's school bus in Samaria, and stones and firebombs (Molotov cocktails) at Israeli drivers in Judea on Wednesday afternoon. The first attack was recorded near the northern entrance to Efrat, where terrorists hurled rocks at drivers traveling near the Jewish community. Efrat is located in the Gush Etzion bloc in Judea, about eight minutes south of Jerusalem. No physical injuries were reported, and none of the vehicles were damaged. Terrorists also threw stones at drivers in at least three separate attacks on Highway 60 between the El Khader junction and the tunnels checkpoint at the entrance to Jerusalem. No physical injuries and no damage reported in any of the attacks. Stone-throwing attacks have cost many lives and permanently wounded even more. Attacks on moving vehicles with rocks are regarded as murder attempts under Israeli law."*

It's not the first time stonings at passing cars has made the news, but it's far more frequent that they go unreported unless injuries are involved. It's one of the things that literally keeps me up at night, especially when I know my kids are out at night. More likely than not, they will be coming home right past where the stones were thrown recently, where

they've been thrown in the past, and, barring a Divine changing of our neighbors hearts, will be thrown again. I worry. I am a father. But it's how we live, and how we drive.

I worry that if one of my kids were stoned while driving, the fear and shock alone might limit a rational response that might otherwise keep them safe. While I have been driving for decades longer than they have, I don't know that my response would be much better. But when driving, I do factor in risks. Not only do I look for a kid chasing a ball into the street to avoid an accident, I look for kids on the side of the street who are readying to hurl stones at me.

Recently I had an experience that was ironic and reflective of our situation. I was driving to meet someone in a town near mine, but on a road that is considered as more prone to stonings and the like. I've driven the route many times without incident, but was concerned, or at least especially aware of my environments.

It was also a Friday, the day in which Jewish Israelis prepare for Shabbat, the Sabbath. One of my Friday errands is to buy challah, the ritual braided bread common to our Shabbat meals, and buying flowers for my wife. This Friday I had a bag of challah on the passenger seat and thought to myself that if I should get stoned, the challah might fall out and get dirty, coated with shards of glass, and/or blood. Not a pretty picture.

Practically, I pulled over and tied the bag shut so that even if something happened, the challah would not get ruined. Maybe it wasn't heroic, but I did save the challah.

As I drove, I paid careful attention to my surroundings. I drove through pristine Judean mountain hills where at every turn I was conscious of the possibility of someone waiting to pelt my car with rocks. I have to admit that, while I learned to drive with my hands in the 10-2 position, I don't always

drive that way. But this day, my hands clenched the wheel, knuckles white, pre-emptively taking into account the need to be ready.

For most of my drive, there was nobody around. These are not city streets where pedestrians are common, but more like country roads, so that was normal. But as I did pass people walking on or standing by the side of the road, my heart rate increased. My eyes darted interchangeably between the road and the people by the road, their hands, what might have been in their hands, and how they stood and reacted to my red car with yellow Israeli license plates. After passing them, my attention shifted to the rearview mirror, looking for threats from someone who might be too chicken to throw a rock at my windshield, or call and alert someone down the road to be ready for me.

Fortunately, nothing happened. I went to my friend's house, returned and bought flowers, and arrived home with fresh challah intact.

Driving has many challenges on a good day. But our neighbors' hate inspired terrorism fills our lives with added threats and concerns. We need to, and do, go about our business, but realize whether throwing rocks or a Molotov cocktail at our cars, or using their cars to try to run us down, we live in a place and time where we need to be extra careful and always mindful to pray for God's protection in our safe travels and return. {eo}

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