

Israeli Life: Living Normally Amid the Abnormal

Since January 1, there has been an unusually large number of terrorist attacks here in Israel, including a higher rate of shootings that have killed at least two and left dozens injured. Some have been reported in the Israeli and international media, some only in the Israeli media, and some have not been reported but happened all the same.

Since October, at least 28 have been killed and hundreds wounded. Proportionally, that's as if more than 225 were killed in France, and more than 1,100 killed in the U.S.

The New Year's Day attack in Tel Aviv was particularly shocking because it was an Israeli Arab who did the shooting and because, as of this writing, he has not been found yet. Many Israelis in the center of the country are experiencing greater fear of attacks in more common places like Jerusalem and near where I live in Gush Etzion. The recent attack was a shooting, but only weeks ago in central Tel Aviv, another terrorist stabbed several, killing two, as they left an afternoon worship service.

One of my daughters is particularly unnerved as she lives near Tel Aviv. She takes public transportation and is aware of her surroundings, particularly about Arabs on buses and waiting at the same bus stops where she is. A few weeks ago I was driving her home for the weekend and she observed how, as we got closer to home, there was a bigger security and military presence that she didn't feel near her apartment.

Until this week, living in the center of the country has been a respite for her compared to coming home where the main intersection near our house has been dubbed in the media as the "intersection of death" due to the high rate of terrorist

attacks and deaths and injuries that have taken place there.

Among the recent casualties there included an American student, a 21-year-old Israeli woman, a Palestinian-Arab man, and one of my son's ninth-grade teachers. Also, a neighbor witnessed a stabbing and is credited with helping to save the woman's life, protecting her with a knife still in her back (as we are taught not to remove knives as that might increase the bleeding), until emergency services arrived.

Last week, my oldest daughter had come home from college and shared something from the Internet about how Israelis are coping with "the situation." She read to us in Hebrew how the joke is that Israelis arrive at crowded bus stops, grocery stores and malls, weddings, public events, and other places and think, "This would be a good place for a terror attack."

My wife also related how a young woman who does her nails and served in the intelligence unit of the army had been at a crowded bus stop recently and noticed two Arab men acting suspiciously. She'd been trained in the army to note such things, and took their picture while trying to stay away.

Israelis balance the panic and paranoia of calling everything in that might be suspicious and overwhelming the security networks, with that of making sure to prevent any attacks. Unfortunately, this young woman did not call the police and later that day noticed that the same men whose photo she had taken were the ones who carried out a stabbing attack.

On Sunday night, I was dropping off my 10-year-old son to play soccer and heard an orchestra of emergency vehicles on the main road, Route 60, near our "intersection of death." *Naturally*, I thought the worst. A few minutes later I was on the sidelines as the game was about to begin and heard more sirens, this time coming away from the intersection, toward Jerusalem, which meant an ambulance or ambulances on the way to the hospital.

I walked to the fence to see what was going on. I filmed it out of curiosity and also to share with people who don't see, much less understand, how we live here these days. (Please see the attached clip.) In the foreground, I saw a security car from my community, parked, observing maybe to see if there needed to be assistance, maybe to see if terrorists or others would try to breach our security near where dozens of kids were playing soccer, or maybe just to get a front row seat on the action. Moments later I saw a police car racing by, with lights and sirens blazing, followed by an ambulance doing the same, followed by a military vehicle.

I'm still not sure what happened at the "intersection of death" that night. I couldn't find anything in the media. But I do know that it doesn't take three emergency vehicles to take a patient to the hospital. The convoy was completely out of the norm.

As I was standing there my son ran over to me and asked what I was doing. I told him I was filming to share with others overseas so they could have a better sense about how normal life is being punctuated by completely abnormal things these days. The video is below:

My son's immediate and casual response was "it's probably a *pigua*" (terrorist attack) and then he ran back to play soccer. His team won, 3-1.

Completely normal with a dose of abnormal.

Yesterday, as I was leaving my house, I learned of another attack. A stabbing of one of the soldiers sent there to protect us. The soldier was injured and the terrorist permanently disarmed.

A year ago, during another plague of terror that left dozens dead and injured, I got a call from a pastor in Louisiana who wanted to know how he could help. He heard the stress in my voice and comforted me by saying, "Don't worry Jonathan, I've

read the Book and you win.” Amen.

Our comfort is derived from faith in God, from our security infrastructure, from prayers and support of others overseas, from the work of people here who help heal physical and psychological wounds, and that despite the abnormal, we are still able to go about our lives as normally as possible; shopping, celebrating weddings, and playing soccer.{eo}

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