

‘It’s Horrific and Inhuman’

I was nauseated three times today.

Early Tuesday morning I received news—like the rest of Israel—within minutes of a particularly gruesome and bloody terror attack. In the early morning hours at a small synagogue in a western Jerusalem neighborhood of Har Nof (Mountain View), during morning worship, some 25 men were attacked by two Palestinian Arabs.

The scenes described and initially shared online were horrid. Prayer shawls (talitot), prayer books and the worshipers themselves were all bloodied. It’s bad enough that there’s been a recent increase in terror attacks leaving more people killed in terror attacks in the past two months than the previous two years. Preying on people in the midst of morning prayer is horrid and evil. I was nauseated and it was hard to begin the day as if nothing had happened.

I was nauseated additionally seeing photos and reports emerge later online describing the scene and the attack itself. Two Palestinian Arab men—it seems one of whom worked in the neighborhood—entered the rear of the synagogue, armed with axes, knives and guns and began hacking and shooting at the worshipers. Severed body parts littered the sanctuary. It’s not as if Arabs driving their cars into crowded bus or train stations, or running down the street stabbing individuals to death is OK at all. It’s not. It’s horrific and inhuman.

But there’s something particularly offensive attacking men in the midst of worship and studying holy text. It’s not the first time. Several years ago, a single terrorist entered a prayer hall of a boy’s school and shot and killed several boys in the midst of studying Torah. I am a friend to an Arab Israeli paramedic who was one of the first on the scene there. He still weeps and asks rhetorically, “What kind of animal

would shoot young boys studying holy text?"

Now, as then, the nation is gripped by the hatred and evil that is behind such an attack. There's a sense of anger coupled with fear, worry and angst. So many emotions are at play. But what's not happening is violence in return. There are many who say as long as Palestinian Arab terror is taking place, Palestinian Arabs should not be working in our communities. That's logical perhaps, but it's easier said than done. There are tens if not hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs who work in our communities, stores, hotels and even schools.

Later in the day, at a conference in Tel Aviv (seemingly a world away from the horrors in Jerusalem in the morning), I met and heard from "A," the paramedic who was first on the scene. His shock and horror were visibly clear. He's been a paramedic for years, but never saw a scene like this. He got to the scene so early that there was still shooting going on, from the terrorists at him, as he tried to save those injured.

Outside the synagogue, before he knew what was going on, "A" came upon the first victim who was sure that he had been shot, but all signs were that he had been hacked with a sharp object. He explained what happened in a way that was graphic, as if I had been there with him, nauseating me, as he must have felt. This man was not at risk for his life, so he moved on into the building. Inside, there was nothing to do for the first man he came upon. Then another man, severely hacked by the terrorists, was still alive. He was a policeman who perhaps was there praying or to save others. "A" dragged the policemen out of the way while shooting was going on around him and at him. "A" was "breathing for" the policemen and got him to a mobile intensive care ambulance. He then went on to treat others.

The policeman died of his wounds, probably bleeding to death. "A" said he had never seen so much blood before. The Israeli

national blood service, which Heart to Heart is proud to support along with the ambulance and EMS service, dispatched nearly 200 additional units of blood to Jerusalem hospitals to deal with the immediate aftermath. In a small country of only 8 million, sending blood in this volume to the capital, Israel's largest city of just over 800,000, is unprecedented on a regular day.

Jews recite a special blessing of thanks—*Birkat Hagomel*—when one has recovered or was saved from a life-threatening or dangerous situation. It's unimaginable that those who survived this bloody horror will utter a prayer of thanks, while still traumatized by what befell them hours earlier, just as "A" must have when he was not only the source of saving lives, but who also at risk of losing his. *Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who bestows kindness on those who are committed, and who has granted to me all kindness.*

While these people have the opportunity to give thanks, four families are grieving and broken. A total of 24 children are without parents as well as even more grandchildren are without grandparents.

This evening, I received a call from a friend in Virginia. Barely had she gotten the words out, "Jonathan it's P," than she broke down in tears. Emails and other social media messages abounded sharing our grief, asking about our well-being. One of the inquiries was addressed to my wife and me, asking how we were. She answered it really well, "It's a really awful feeling seeing young and beautiful people injured and killed. With two degrees of separation here, everyone has a connection. Our kids participated in an amazing illustration of our youths' strength today as more than 1,000 students linked hands, prayed and sang on the road where [26-year-old] Dalia Lemkes was killed [in our neighborhood] last week."

Last week, I became friends with a pastor in Louisiana who consoled me on the terror attacks that have been ongoing, and

offered, "I read the end of the Book, and we win." Amen. But times are challenging in Israel these days. We need your prayers and support. Feel free to share your blessings and good wishes, and if you like, sponsor a unit of blood to help us have the resources to replenish that which was spilled today.

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