

Sirens in the Holy Land on Yom HaZikaron

I went outside in the garden for the morning siren. Feeling a slight breeze on my face, I closed my eyes and prayed for the hostages and all the soldiers to come home safely and soundly. When the siren was over, I opened my eyes. I looked around at the plants in my garden and thought about how we bury our loved ones in the earth but also plant seeds, and beautiful flowers and trees grow.

Today is Israel's Memorial Day, the Remembrance Day for the Fallen Soldiers of Israel's Wars and Victims of Terrorism. In Hebrew, the day is called Yom HaZikaron. Last night at 8:00 p.m. we heard a one-minute siren and today, at 11:00 a.m., we heard a two-minute siren. At the sound of the siren, Israelis throughout the country stand in silence to remember the soldiers who fell in battle for the state of Israel and the victims of the horrendous attacks carried out by terrorists filled with hatred for Israel and the Jewish people.

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One or two minutes of silence, moments of prayer or meditation, memories of loved ones lost.

Sadly, sirens are a part of life in Israel, and during times of war they become all too common. There are the ambulance sirens that mean someone is seriously ill or has been injured in an accident or, God forbid, a terrorist attack, and is being rushed to the hospital.

People who live in areas with constant sirens often jump at any noise that resembles the red alert siren signifying an imminent missile attack, telling us to run for our shelter or safe room. So after Oct. 7, 2023, as missile attacks became a daily occurrence with the war, the ambulance sirens in Israel were changed to avoid confusion. When I first heard the modified sirens, they reminded me of European ambulance sirens from a movie I once saw of The Diary of Anne Frank – obviously not a calming association.

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Then, of course, there are the red alert sirens we hear so often during this never-ending war, an eerie sound telling us to run to our shelter or safe room. This siren should never be a sound we get used to, but too many Israelis have been hearing it so often the past year and a half that it doesn't really phase them anymore – they act on autopilot, know exactly what to do, and just wait for the sirens to end.

Lastly, there is the siren we hear on Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, and the two sirens we hear on Yom Hazikaron, which is today. In Hebrew, the memorial siren is called a tzfira, and the siren signifying a missile attack is an azaka. These are two distinct types of sirens – the memorial siren has a continuous and constant sound, and the missile warning siren goes up and down.

My little grandson, who is just four years old, heard the Yom HaShoah siren while in kindergarten and was frightened, thinking at first that it was a missile alert siren and he had to run to the shelter. He was comforted and assured by his teacher, and when he came home, he told my son, his father, that he felt scared that day. Small children like him aren't the only ones who confuse the different sirens these days, which is why the IDF has produced videos explaining each of

the sirens and their distinct sounds.

Tonight, as Israel's Memorial Day fades and Yom HaAtzmaut, Israel's Independence Day, begins, we will move from sirens to music and celebration. After a long day spent mourning our fallen soldiers and victims of terror, we will begin to celebrate the amazing miracle that the state of Israel truly is.

Despite the continuing challenges, the hardships, the enemies we face, and the loss of so many young lives, we are a strong and thriving nation, and with God's help we will persevere and continue to grow and flourish, radiating our light to the world.

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Miriam Lock is a writer from The International Fellowship of Christians and Jews' Israel office.