

'The Massacre at Kibbutz Be'eri'

On Oct. 7, 2023 at 6:30 a.m., the small idyllic community of Kibbutz Be'eri, in the northwestern area of the Negev desert in Israel, awoke to sirens as a terrorist attack was underway. This kibbutz, with about 1,100 members, as with several other communities within kilometers of the Gaza Strip, was about to witness and endure the attack of over 3,000 Hamas terrorists crossing the borders of the Gaza Strip into Israel.

Hamas terrorists would go on to slaughter and murder over 120-130 of Kibbutz Be'eri residents. The number is not final as they are still forensically discovering who all the victims were. At least 26 others were kidnapped, babies were beheaded, women raped, limbs cut off and families burnt alive including children.

What caught my attention was when some reporter, soldier or someone sent me a photo, to my email, of our torn down and burnt sign from a bomb shelter we had donated and installed at Kibbutz Be'eri which was found on the ground after the murders and the battle that took place. Vision for Israel, our non-profit charity, up until this event had placed 155 bomb safety shelters across the southern and northern border communities in Israel to save lives.

At this kibbutz, we had donated two. These shelters are all about protecting the population from incoming rockets and mortars. My daughter Liran and I were convinced we must go and find our sign. I had such good memories from the two times I had been there previously during site inspections and installation.

After the massacre, Kibbutz Be'eri became a military zone so we had to receive permission through several layers of

security due to continuing incoming rockets and the possibility of more terrorists hiding out along the south. It had become an active military zone during this war. What we were about to witness, after entering, was beyond anything imaginable. What took place at Kibbutz Be'eri was a massacre!

As we entered one area and parked, the devastation we saw was an image that forever will be imprinted on our minds and hearts. The destruction not only confirmed the worst we had heard in the news about what took place here but the smell of burnt houses and rooms and walking onto blood-stained floors and the stench was all so surreal like witnessing a horror movie only this was for real. As we walked through the rubble of homes, children's bedrooms ransacked, bullet holes, more blood and entire areas burnt and charred, one could only sense and feel what satanic evil must have been done here.

Lives shattered forever, souls lost, babies demonically murdered and no words left to explain what we saw. We were spared seeing the bodies themselves but we know of medics and first responders who were there prior and are suffering from PTSD symptoms as a result. Their eye witness and photographic accounts of what took place show that they have never seen anything so tragic.

As we walked around and prayed for what's left of this community and documenting what we could, we came across a man searching in the rubble who then asked us who we were and why we came. He was one of the residents who had grown up there and came looking for his mother's purse and his own tools from his line of work. They lost everything. At first he showed us where bullets from the terrorists were shot, with what was easily 100 or so holes in the ceiling in one of the rooms and shared in detail the stories of others' tragedy. He befriended us and showed us the miracle of how his 74-year-old mother had been spared.

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Only months before she had installed a security lock on the inside of her bomb shelter, which most folks never needed to do, because it was assumed one would enter only because of rocket attacks but never in the event of a terrorist attack. He went on to explain how she had fainted or blacked out and was not responsive even as the terrorists were trying to break into the bomb shelter. They must have assumed no one was inside.

For nearly 40 hours, while waiting for soldiers to arrive at the gates of the kibbutz and begin their battle against Hamas terrorists, she survived the attack and at some point would make it outside through a back exit. Her name is Perach which is Hebrew for a flower. However, her neighbors did not survive as we saw the massive amounts of blood in one place, where people were slaughtered, and right next door to her where a mother and children took refuge on the second upper story floor; the mother and all her children were burnt alive.

It is truly heartbreaking and so tragic and sad. On one hand, we always rejoice to hear of miracles like what happened to Perach but others have faced such great loss and devastation; it is just so hard to find the words to express. It was the greatest number of Jews murdered in one day since the Holocaust.

As we said our goodbyes to this soft-spoken man, we prayed for him, his mother and the survivors of Kibbutz Be'eri, giving a warm embrace to each other understanding that we must stand together as Jews and Israelis in unity, never losing hope but rebuilding from the ashes and pressing forward into the future. Israel is the only national home for the Jewish people and it is going to become home for so many more as antisemitism rises in the world.

We looked all over for our damaged bomb shelter sign and just could not find it. As Israeli artillery was shelling Hamas strongholds and with rocket sirens being sounded in our area near the Gaza Strip, we will just have to wait for another opportunity or maybe we are called upon to assist and rebuild this community and support the survivors letting the ruins of the past be left behind.

Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish; but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."

Please support Israel during this crucial time. {eo}

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Barry and Batya Segal are the founding directors of a humanitarian aid center. Their longing to help build and restore Israel inspired them to pioneer the non-profit charity organizations Vision for Israel and The Joseph Storehouse in 1994.