

The Norm for Israelis: 15 Minutes Away from Terror

At 9:34 p.m. Thursday, I got a strange message from my daughter in our family WhatsApp group.

“For all those who asked, I am ok and alive.” Since nobody asked, her sarcasm coupled with a little fear were evident.

I had been recording a podcast and didn’t know what she was talking about. None of us did. It seems that there was another terrorist attack, this time in central Tel Aviv.

Three people were injured, one shot in the neck and as of this writing in critical condition. One terrorist was killed on the spot but there are reports that another terrorist got away. The last time this happened much of Tel Aviv remained on lockdown until the terrorist was caught, as it was again.

I also didn’t know my daughter was in Tel Aviv. She’s 26, I don’t need to know her every move. But she lives in Jerusalem and we live just south of Jerusalem so, while not far away, we’re not often there. It’s a strange paradox in Israel that our kids have such wide freedom, so much so that we don’t feel the need to keep track of them 24/7 or on an unusually tight leash, yet we live in a society in which this could happen.

My daughter was out at a restaurant when it happened, 15 minutes away by foot on Ben Yehuda St. They were just about to leave to go to Israel’s first 7-Eleven on Dizengoff St. nearby right before it happened.

Fifteen minutes after her first note she wrote that she and her friends had decided to go back to where they were staying and had arrived safely. Thank God.

About 45 minutes after her first message, another daughter

wrote, "There was a terrorist attack?"

About 15 minutes later, an hour after the shooting attack took place, my younger son came into the room announcing another attempted terrorist attack in a community nearby. A Palestinian Arab terrorist entered the largely ultra-Orthodox community of Beitar Ilit by bus, left a package on the bus which began emitting smoke but didn't explode (here's to terrorists being incompetent as well as evil), and then fled at the second bus stop into the city of some 50,000 residents.

The residents were put on lock down while a bomb-squad came to detonate the explosive, and other security personnel looked for the get-away terrorist.

While this was unfolding, several friends from overseas reached out to ask if we were all OK. I said that we were all fine, that my daughter who was 15 minutes away was shaken but also fine. I explained that it's sometimes surreal that things like this happen. Sometimes it's close to home, sometimes closer and sometimes it's too close. But we go about our lives.

While we were watching the news unfold, three of my kids were out, going about life. I didn't really think about it, but did want to stay up to be sure they got home safely. My youngest son went to a midnight movie with friends. Another daughter was out to a kosher Korean restaurant with her boyfriend (and didn't bring me any) and my older son and his fiancé went to an engagement party for other friends.

One friend asked about mental health and trauma related issues, a logical and intuitive question. I explained that because of the reality of terror and the threat of terror and war that exists (though the impression is that Israel is unsafe like the wild west which is not the case), people do suffer trauma but most just go about their lives.

Trauma like this particularly impacts terror victims and

families of terror victims, military and former military and orphans and at-risk youth who live in areas that might be particularly unsafe, and/or come from homes where they have no parents or parents who are unable to care for them. These children need help articulating and then coping with the realization that their homes are not safe and they don't feel protected, and that in many instances the society in which they live is also dangerous. It's one of the important projects that the Genesis 123 Foundation funds, to empower "at-risk" youth and make them into children of promise.

First responders must be trained in defense, able to confront a live terror incident and take care of anyone injured from an attack before EMS personnel arrive. Providing resources for these rapid response civilian security teams saves lives, I know because my son-in-law is in one of the local teams and has actually saved people's lives. It's a reason that this is also a project that the Genesis 123 Foundation is proud to fund.

Friday morning, while running errands before the onset of Shabbat, the Sabbath, I drove by Beitar Ilit, just 15 minutes away from my house by car. I went to the bakery where "Abed" and I always greet one another, as we did again. In another shop, another Palestinian Arab worker helped me professionally and politely. All as if nothing had changed. Maybe it hadn't. Maybe this is just the norm: on one day others try to kill us and the next day we're being polite and respectful.

All this comes on the heels of other civil strife in Israel that's been adding to the stress of increased terror attacks. Earlier in the day there were country wide protests over proposed sweeping judicial reforms.

 Roads were blocked to and at Ben Gurion airport, and main arteries in Tel Aviv. Hours later, Tel Aviv's roads were clear of protestors, replaced by police and military securing the area and hunting for the terrorist who got away.

This is a taste of life here. There are injured people and their families who need your prayers. There are others for whom this creates trauma.

And if these don't hit too close to home, the rest of us just try to go about our lives. {eo}

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