

With Hate and Violence All Around, Blessings Still Abound in Israel

Despite the abundant blessings that permeate life in Israel, we are no strangers to hate and violence. The past two weeks have been particularly painful in that regard.

I am not speaking in terms of the total number of incidents or casualties. We've seen many more in the past. But, it's been especially painful because much of the violence stems from hate rather than "simply" being criminal. Some has even been perpetrated by Israeli Jews. This is noteworthy because it's so rare; a case of man bites dog.

The main media reports focus on the cases perpetrated, presumably, by Israeli Jews. Not making the news in the same way is the case of a Jewish woman badly burned when her car came under attack from a Molotov cocktail thrown in an Arab neighborhood in Jerusalem, soldiers being run down by an Arab driver in Samaria, a Jewish man stabbed while filling his car with gas, or the case of a third Israeli ambulance being attacked in less than three months.

The incidents where it is assumed that they have been carried out by Israeli Jews (one man was arrested for one incident but none have been arrested for the other) are deplorable. Israel's response to these, almost uniformly across the spectrum of left and right, religious and secular, Arab and Jew, has been to come out against these attacks. Yet, Israelis are frustrated by the imbalanced responses when Israeli Jews are the perpetrators as compared to when Arabs are the perpetrators against Israelis.

Part of the problem is that, in the rare case when an Israeli Jew commits a crime like this, across the board, Israeli

society rejects this behavior, from the prime minister and president on down. We make it clear that this is not the norm, that this is not acceptable, and that we know when those who committed these crimes are caught and brought to justice, they will serve time in prison, as they should.

Yet reactions from the other side usually involve more incitement and more violence. When Palestinian Arabs are the criminals, they and their actions are celebrated by their society. It frustrates Israelis further that, while our society runs to condemn hateful violence committed by fellow Israeli Jews, particularly against Palestinian Arabs, when an Israeli Jew is attacked and even killed by a Palestinian Arab, it is not condemned in the same way.

Some have suggested that this is in and of itself anti-Arab because it implies that in Arab culture that's an acceptable way to behave or that somehow Jews killed by Arabs is the norm, therefore OK, and that Jewish lives matter less.

Of course, nothing can be further from the truth. The reality on the ground every day is that all lives matter. Even in combat, Israeli troops engage in strict guidelines to avoid actions that might harm bystanders who are non-combatants. Of course, that's made extra hard when our neighbors use civilians as human shields. But that is the standard.

I happened to have been very nearby when one of the Jerusalem incidents took place. Before it was news, before Israeli society knew about or had the chance to deplore the crazy, hateful, and murderous act of one man who has been caught after stabbing several, one of whom later died, I heard and then saw three ambulances racing away from the scene. I didn't know what had happened.

But, seeing multiple ambulances most likely meant the occurrence of a mass casualty incident. My immediate thoughts were to pray that the victims—whoever they were and regardless

of what happened—would be OK and gratitude that the ambulances arrived and treated the injured so quickly.

As Jews, we believe that saving and preserving life is the greatest act man can do on earth. Israelis are particularly sensitive to the loss of life. Conversely, we go to any and every measure to preserve life. So, when it's one of us taking the life of another, we are particularly aggrieved. I share that sentiment.

I also feel pride. I am proud because we care and do cherish life even if that leads to an imbalance of how we express ourselves after a terrorist attack by a Jew on an Arab as compared to a terrorist attack by an Arab on a Jew. We care about all life.

I am proud in knowing that when it comes to saving a life, all are treated equally. I am proud that the Palestinian Arab victims of what is presumably (as of this writing nobody has been arrested or charged with this crime) a Jewish terrorist act are brought on an Israeli ambulance to an Israeli hospital and treated with the same medical care as an Israeli Jewish patient in the next room.

I am proud that on an Israeli ambulance, as throughout much of Israel's medical system, one might equally find an Arab treating a Jew or vice versa. I am proud that hateful criminal behavior, as exhibited recently, is so outside the norm as it merits this kind of hyper attention.

Israeli society is not perfect. There are people whose behavior is outside the margins of what's acceptable. That's clear.

But, we do rise to the occasion regarding respecting and protecting life equally, regardless of religion, ethnicity or national origin. I am grateful for all the support we receive, from tens of thousands of people who share our vision and sow into Heart to Heart's mission to save lives in Israel, even in

the deplorable case when it's self-inflicted.

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