

Understanding Israel's Pain

As the nation of Israel receives the returning hostages, some of them alive (perhaps barely so), the rest of them dead, there will be much celebration and joy. At last, after more than two hellish years, they will be home. But there is also much pain, and not just the pain of the moment. It is the cumulative pain of generations.

Some will immediately say, "But what about the people of Gaza? What about their pain? What about their suffering and agony?"

After all, we see the images of the bombed cities, of the terrified children, of the grieving mothers, of the dead and the dying and wounded, virtually 24 hours a day. How can we not talk about the suffering of the people of Gaza?

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My response is that I am not denying or minimizing their suffering, neither am I justifying all of Israel's military actions. To the contrary, already in early December 2023 I wrote an article titled, "Sympathy for the Palestinians," and I have often drawn attention to their plight.

That is simply not the focus of this article here, especially as we have just passed the two-year anniversary of the barbaric, mind-boggling Oct. 7 massacre.

In that light, I think of people like Eli Sharabi, pulled away from his wife and two teenage daughters and dragged into 491 days of Hamas captivity, somehow managing to survive, emerging from his captivity gaunt and frail, bringing back memories of the starved Jews in Nazi concentration camps.

It was only upon his release that he learned that his precious family had been murdered in cold blood shortly after his

abduction. Who can imagine the pain? (His just released story, Hostage, makes for a compelling read.)

I think of the Bibas family, Yarden, his wife Shiri (just 32 years old), and their red-headed boys Ariel (4 years old) and Kfir (just under 9 months).

Yarden, too, was separated from his family on Oct. 7 and survived 484 days in captivity. His wife and little boys were also taken hostage, the boys separated from their mother, all three of them slaughtered in cold blood in captivity. (Forensic examinations of their remains confirm that they were not killed in an Israeli bomb strike, as claimed by Hamas, but were rather murdered by their captors.)

Yarden also emerged from captivity looking like a Holocaust survivor—and all this while there are still Holocaust survivors alive today. Talk about trauma upon trauma.

But, to repeat, this is the cumulative pain of generations.

Just think of the words of HaTikvah, Israel's national anthem: "As long as the heart within the Jewish soul yearns forward toward the East, an eye looks to Zion, our hope is not yet lost. Our hope is two thousand years old: To be a free people in our land, the land of Zion and Jerusalem."

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In fact, "HaTikvah" in Hebrew means "the hope." Are there any other national anthems that carry "hope" as their central theme?

Yet no sooner did Israel declare its independence in 1948 than the surrounding Muslim nations declared war. In one form or another, the war has never stopped.

So it is that the most sacred day of the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is also associated with the murder of Jews. (I'm speaking here of the Yom Kippur war of 1973.)

And so it is that the most joyous day of the Jewish calendar, the last day of Sukkot (Tabernacles), called Simchat Torah (the Joy of the Torah), is now associated with massacre and rape, with the burning of children alive, with barbaric bloodshed. (I'm speaking here, of course, of the events of Oct. 7, 2023.)

And yet still, the hope of peaceful coexistence with Israel's neighbors remains, as articulated by "Galit Dan, whose 13-year-old daughter, Noya, was killed alongside her grandmother, Galit's mother, Carmela, in Kibbutz Nir Oz."

Galit said at the recent Oct. 7 ceremony, "We do not seek revenge; we seek healing. We want to defeat fear and find hope. To overcome hatred and reconnect to our humanity. To overcome rage and reconnect to compassion. To awaken once more the values that my grandparents came here for."

This is another aspect of the pain of which I speak.

The people of Israel also know that in order to get all the hostages back, they have agreed to release thousands of Palestinian prisoners, including 250 with life sentences, some of them involved in acts of mass murder.

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How can these mass killers walk free? And what terror might they unleash upon their release?

This is the price Israel must pay to free the hostages, and it can only bring to mind the fact that Yahya Sinwar, the mastermind of Oct. 7, was one of 1,027 Palestinian prisoners released by Israel as part of the deal to bring Gilad Shalit home in 2011 after he was held captive by Hamas for five years.

It is in this context that you can better understand why, at the end of every Jewish wedding ceremony, the groom stomps his foot on a glass, smashing it to pieces. And so, “even at the height of personal joy, we recall the pain and losses suffered by the Jewish people and remember a world in need of healing.”

May the Lord bring comfort to those who grieve in Zion, and may they find rest in their Messiah and King, Yeshua our Lord.

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