

## **Wherefore is this night different from all other Nights? by Lynette Karp**

The question is so familiar to all of us at our Seders on Pesach -but the answer on this particular night of 22nd April 2024 was different from ever before. And certainly, despite the fact that I am comfortably in my eighties I felt justified in asking the question from the depth of my despair as I truly felt 'a child' in the circumstances of the situation. Our Seder commenced with the reading out of each of the 133 names of the hostages still incarcerated in Gaza in the knowledge that many of the names uttered were no longer alive with no one around the table knowing which of them still survived but all of us imagining the dreadful circumstances that the men and women in captivity were experiencing and the torment of their families with so many places empty around their own tables.

What a roller coaster life has been for the last six months commencing with the terrorist onslaught of October 7th. And so, in search of some kind of answer my thoughts returned to that dreadful day and the horror and pain that we have all experienced since then and still do. The television coverage of a lorry arriving in the streets of Sderot and a bunch of terrorists disembarking and making straight for the police station appeared to be an isolated attack - but how wrong we were. We soon saw the shambolic mess of cars and bodies blocking the confusion on the roads exiting the South and news of the attack with photos of the breach in the security fence and hundreds of Hamas terrorist surging through the crumpled steel hole so formed with frenzy and determination whether on foot on motor bikes - even in the sky with paragliders- undoubtedly a well-planned attack which was successful beyond imagination. On this dreadful day 1200 young healthy kids musicians and fun lovers celebrating love and peace and music and joy were slaughtered mercilessly or captured as human trophies as they tried to flee - and taken straight to Gaza , And that was just the beginning . The rampage continued to border kibbutzim where unbelievable terror, death and destruction invaded the lives of all inhabitants. 400 innocent souls were grabbed that day as hostages and flaunted triumphantly half naked and worse through the streets of Gaza before being incarcerated in a village of tunnels in an underworld of hiding places and military outposts. Despite desperate attempts by kibbutzniks and volunteers trying to stem the barbaric attacks on the kibbutzim on the Gaza border in answer to cries of help coming from inside locked safe rooms- from Grannies and Grandpas from children hiding in cupboards whispering their pleas for help. Many of the rescuers themselves killed for their bravery! Over 400 hostages whipped away that day and immediately distributed to 'safe' houses or tunnels in Gaza and divided between the Hamas operatives and other terrorist organizations like Hizballah and Isis.

## BUT WHERE WAS THE ARMY?

In time, when perhaps this mayhem ends we might get that answer. Those who experienced and survived the horrors of that day and those of us who were silent witnesses watching television and listening to each and every report that came through will never forget what we saw..It is our memory of what was undoubtedly our own mini Holocaust. The German army were meticulous in recording the names and fate of the victims of the Shoah - and here Hamas perpetrators recorded all their dastardly actions live on film and video -proud of their actions. The world cannot deny what was witnessed . We have yet - six months down the line to have any official explanation of the lack of preparation or response from the army - no military responsibility or government explanation has been forthcoming .

National Israeli grief numbed us all for a while - but action was mobilised and very soon we were at war with the very direct intention of rescuing the hostages and destroying the Hamas military leadership and terrorist army of Hamas. In all fairness we were warned that this task would take a long time and the army - our wonderful brave young people doing their trained duty to protect us all were warned too that many of them would be lost in the heavy responsibility they were tasked with . Mental anxiety, despair and deep pain at the loss of so many kindred young spirits and brave volunteers.. I spoke of a seesaw of events - the call up of the army resulted in a 150 per cent response . Israelis from the ends of the earth came flying `home` to protect our Jewish home, Israel- veterans of earlier wars - students and volunteers - airplanes landing at all our airports in bulk filled with supporters of our plight. There is in addition, a bastion of strong support with desperate pleas to free the hostages from a non military army of mothers, fathers sisters, brothers ,wives, children friends of those many hostages who have created an international army of witnesses pleading to governments throughout the world to put pressure on the Gaza community to release their loved ones . Initial small batches of released hostages were successful in exchange for prisoner releases from Israel and small ceasefire agreements for days or a few weeks....but that soon ended . No information of how many hostages are dead . No names or information except from the few released prisoners who can offer much horrible detail but scant help on that level.

The next 5 months were a different kind of hell for Israelis . Each day heralded another 1,2, 6 and one day 22 soldiers killed on the battlefields of Gaza. Thousands of innocent Gazans warned by Israel of impending attacks and stopped from seeking shelter by their own Hamas army blown up or mortally injured by the horrors of any war. And as expected - it did not take long before the tide of international support turned and it took the form of International anti-Semitism which continues to emerge from every corner of the earth.

Hundreds of miles of tunnels have been destroyed by our army and to date over 400 of our soldiers have been killed. The country is in mourning for those killed and the families in despair, forever changed . There is the deepest respect for our brave young soldiers determined to achieve the goals of our attempts as set out at the beginning of the war. We are- fully aware of who is holding the reins guiding and supporting the terrorists and Iran has not been forgotten for a minute!. And as of the situation at this time - we are fighting on three major fronts- Gaza, the Lebanese border and the West Bank.

But when speaking of respect - the people of Israel are absolutely amazing. Their resilience, their faith , their generosity - There are thousands of residents of the north and south who have had to evacuate. Hotels doors have opened - residents have moved in with friends and given their homes to refugees. Clothing depots are filled to overflowing with donations for refugees to clothe their families - and to feed them. The roller coaster of our lives was undoubtedly at one of the lowest points in the present ride of these months culminating in the warning to the population that following on the destruction of the embassy in Syria that killed one of the Iranian hierarchy, Iran announced its intention to retaliate with power and this time Israel was prepared for the attack. Anxiety surged-army call up was intense- homes were readied for who knew what! Rice , water, tinned foods were stocked up , safe rooms were furnished with mattresses and emergency needs - the tension seemed to rise as the hours dragged by- streets were empty, schools closed- no one knew what to expect as we were all fully aware of the immense arsenal of weapons and armory that Iran had accumulated - and no one was quite sure when the retort would arrive.

But come it did- and we were duly warned that there was a barrage of over 300 missiles on its way - rockets of different intensities - drones and even ballistic missiles all launched from Iran - a kaleidoscope of lights in the evening sky. A Home command warning from my telephone woke me from my very timid sleep at shortly before 2 in the morning of 13th April and kept me up till 5 a.m. in absolute awe of what was happening as I was glued to the television - where in fact I was jumping from Sky News to CNN - both stations giving me the best English coverage of the miracle I was living through that night. It was soon apparent that rockets , missiles etc were covering a great expanse of our land - with no respect for Jerusalem where so many were planned for the destruction of our very essence- with hundreds in our skies . Explosions from the iron dome and blue arrow punctuated the sky in between the numerous sirens blaring in many regions- we were informed that the Israeli air force was preventing the missiles from reaching their targets - and what's more the skies were being guarded too by the air forces of the UK, of the USA and Jordan, France and Egypt too were mentioned- There was a 99 per cent stoppage of any of the missiles reaching *Israel*. We were NOT alone in protecting this precious land - it was Golda Meir that warned the world that we had a secret weapon this time around - that being- our own country- how right she was and is. God given and protected by the Lord himself, for those of us that have faith. This was

indeed a miraculous event. How grateful we are for our army - our wonderful air force, our amazing brave young men and women soldiers and for our very special country . This was for me the highlight of that roller coaster ride that unfortunately is taking a long, long time to settle into a more comfortable ride for all of us on it . We pray for a few more miracles to allow both friend and foe safety, peace and hope for the future. We pray also for the safety of the hostages still incarcerated in Gaza - too many we fear who have not survived the captivity. These are our heroes - they and their families -too many people are suffering from the raging psychological war and the interminable time that is so acute. BRING THEM HOME and let us find the route to end the bloodshed to stay united and to find a way of living side by side with our neighbors in this heaven on earth that is our land!

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**Written in May 2024 by Lynette Karp**

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