

'THE SPIRIT ON THE HOME FRONT IS STRONGER THAN EVER'

# The entire Jewish world is grieving

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In London for my father's shiva, each service has concluded with visitors reciting the traditional condolence, "HaMakom yenachem etchem b'toch she'ar aveilei Tzion v'Yerushalayim – May Hashem console you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem."

Tragically, it has not gone unnoticed that these past couple of weeks the number of those other mourners requiring consolation is the greatest it has been at any time since the Holocaust.

Indeed, as my brother and I grieve for my father, so the entire Jewish world is grieving for family, friends and fellow Jews so brutally slaughtered by the terrorists of Hamas just a few weeks ago.

That bond with Israel and with our brothers and sisters throughout the Diaspora was deeply ingrained in my father's psyche.

As a young child, I recall him taking us to a demonstration protesting the treatment of refuseniks in the Soviet Union.

And perhaps more significant given the atrocities committed on Simchat Torah, I remember him telling me how on Yom Kippur in 1973 he had raced to shule to share the news he had heard about a surprise attack on Israel by its Arab neighbours.

Fifty years on, the country has once again been caught off guard and though our attention will at some point turn to discovering why and where the lapses occurred, for now our focus is on what we can do to both support, and show our support for, the Jewish state.

In the 10 days before my father's passing brought me to London, we at Zionism Victoria worked tirelessly with other communal bodies to organise two major com-



10,000 people rallied at Trafalgar Square in London.

Photo: Jewish News UK

munity rallies, a smaller gathering on the steps of the Victorian Parliament and a solidarity evening specifically for Israelis in Melbourne. Behind the scenes, meanwhile, were countless conversations and meetings with everyone from the Premier to the police to the press, to discuss urgent issues of concern such as communal security and media bias.

Similar initiatives and discussions were being undertaken across the country by our state and federal counterparts.

Since arriving in London, I have watched from afar as those initiatives have continued, determined to ensure the hostages held by Hamas remain front and centre in the public mind and that the justness of Israel's cause is not obscured by the mists of war.

Here in London, our efforts are mirrored. Sitting shiva on Sunday evening, visitors arrived from a rally in Trafalgar Square attended by 10,000 people. Less positive is talk of a tube driver who took

to the loudspeaker on his train to chant "Free Palestine".

My brother and sister-in-law, meanwhile, get daily updates from their pregnant daughter in Efrat – her husband is serving as an army medic, and fearful that she won't be able to get her two young children to safety in time should the siren sound, they are sleeping in their shelter every night irrespective of whether rockets are fired or not.

Their nephew is also a medic in the IDF and was one of those forced to confront the horrors of the Hamas slaughter firsthand when his unit was sent to secure the southern kibbutzes in the aftermath of the October 7 attacks.

And that's just our immediate family. Cousins also have kids in the army while close friends are still waiting for news of loved ones who are missing.

Amid all this anguish and suffering, an old acquaintance in London shares a post from a left-wing Jewish journalist

from October 8: "Today should be a day of celebration for supporters of democracy and human rights, as Gazans break out of their open-air prison and Hamas fighters cross into their colonisers' territory. The struggle for freedom is rarely bloodless and we shouldn't apologise for it."

The post defies comprehension. It's one thing for there to be Jews who are avowedly anti-Zionist – who blame Israel for all the ills of the Middle East and, indeed in some cases, all the ills of the world. Those we've regrettably come to accept.

But for a Jew to positively rejoice in the deaths of other Jews, or any innocent civilians for that matter, is abhorrent.

Known for his bonhomie, were my father still with us, I can well imagine the cheerful disposition dissolving as a look of disgust crossed his face if he'd heard about this jubilant Jew.

It is shocking to think that there are those of us who are not among the mourners of Zion at this time – who are not seeking or offering comfort, or searching for ways to express their support for, or give their support to, Israel.

We take heart though from the tens of thousands across the country attending rallies and vigils, lighting candles, raising funds, collecting supplies, baking challahs, writing letters, sticking up posters and helping out however they can. Despite our despair, the spirit on the home front is stronger than ever.

Separated by continents and time zones, I never had the opportunity to discuss the events of October 7 with my father, but imbued by my parents with that deep sense of Am Echad since childhood, I have no doubt he would be proud that I, and the community I work for, are doing all that we can to support the Jewish state and the Jewish people at this terrible time.

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