

Editorial / Opinion

Editor's Note:

The two opinion articles printed on this page illustrate a widening schism over Israel in the U.S. Jewish community. Acknowledging that most Jews consider themselves to be Zionists, we have seen increasing concern among Jews, along with the major Jewish organizations, over the direction the Netanyahu government has taken in its attempts to hobble the Supreme Court of Israel, to

establish authoritarian rule. In Israel this year, huge protests took place every Saturday night in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and other cities calling for the protection of democracy. Smaller blocs within these demonstrations have called for an end to the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories, a repressive regime that has been in force for 56 years. Of course, the grotesque Hamas

invasion of Israel on October 7, in which hundreds of civilians were killed and more than 200 Israelis and foreign nationals were kidnapped, has created a new dynamic. Following the carnage in the Gaza envelope, the communities and kibbutzim bordering the Gaza Strip, Israel unleashed its military might on the densely populated enclave, pulverizing neighborhoods

and killing thousands of civilians, including children. Israel's stated goal is to remove Hamas from power in Gaza, but it is unclear how this will be achieved, at what cost and what will be left to sustain the Palestinian residents of Gaza at the end of the military campaign.

In the midst of the current conflict, there also has been an upsurge in pro-Palestinian protests in this

country and around the globe, and a steep rise in unconscionable antisemitic and Islamophobic violence. In the months to come, the Jewish World will follow events in Israel and Palestine and encourage readers to participate in a respectful dialogue about this complicated situation.

Mordecai Spektor
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All of us, *b'tzelem elohim*

By MADELINE SHAW

Growing up, I attended religious school, Hebrew school and Shabbat services at Shir Tikvah Congregation in Minneapolis. *Tikkun olam* were some of the first Hebrew words I learned. Repairing the world. It is at the core of who I am to this day.

It was in my synagogue and my Jewish community that I learned my values around justice as I was growing up. In 2004, our youth group held a fundraiser to support survivors of the genocide that was happening in Darfur, Sudan, at the time (and which sadly has recently erupted again). In 2020 we became a sanctuary synagogue and supported asylum seekers.

I distinctly remember a rabbi's sermon during Passover when I was 11 or 12 years old. "As Jews," my rabbi said, "we know what it is like to be attacked and targeted, with no one coming to help us. We need to make sure that we don't let this happen to other groups of oppressed people, because we know how it feels and can't allow that to be repeated."

Because of our values of *tikkun olam*, Jews know that we are responsible for helping to repair and heal the world. We know we are responsible for making things in our communities go well. Jews have been disproportionately represented in U.S. movements for social justice, showing up alongside other oppressed peoples in solidarity, and I was raised to take pride in that history.

At the same time, part of how antisemitism shows up is by dividing Jews from other oppressed peoples. Jews across the world face real and terrifying antisemitism today, and, understandably, our communities feel threatened. And in this moment, we are especially being encouraged by the divisive political atmosphere to feel threatened by Palestinians and their struggle for freedom. Today, the memory of the Holocaust and the generations of oppression faced by our communities is being weaponized to justify the genocide and mass displacement of another people.

I am proud to stand up as a Jew for Palestinian liberation, for a permanent cease-fire, for a free Gaza and an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinians. Since October 7, Jews of all ages have prayed with our feet and put our bodies on the line to call for cease-fire. I and the tens of thousands of Jews taking action and joining multiracial coalitions across the United States believe that Palestinians' struggle for freedom is not a threat to Jewish safety.

Our safety is threatened by the antisemitism that has made Jews scapegoats and targets for violence across the world. Our safety is threatened by the far-right Christian white nationalists who claim to love Israel but regularly show their deep disdain for Jews and stoke violence against us. Our safety is threatened by the way Israel and Jews are being used as a middle agent to protect U.S. military and economic interests in the Middle East. Solidarity and connection with all peoples, including Palestinians, is what will ultimately keep us safest.

I remember singing a song in Sunday school called "B'tzelem Elohim," — "we are all created in the image of God," each life is precious. We must see the *tzelem elohim*, the image of God, the humanity, in all people — Israelis, Palestinians, Jews, Muslims, Christians, in the Holy Land and across the world. My hope for my Jewish community is that we can see the sacred in others and stop believing the lie that the only hope for Jews to be safe is to dominate, control and dispossess Palestinians.

Can we see outside of our own fear enough to see the humanity of all people? Can we stretch our minds and imagine ways to build freedom and safety for Palestinians, Israelis and Jews in diaspora? There have been groups and organizations of Israelis, Palestinians and people of conscience across the world that have been doing this work for decades, despite huge challenges and discouragement. It would be a disservice to their hard work and to our own liberation if we let fear narrow our minds into choosing a side, into forgetting our ancestral teachings of *tikkun olam* and *b'tzelem elohim*.

No matter how scared or hurt we are, it is our responsibility — to each other as Jews, and to the world — to admit where we have been wrong, to see the humanity in others and ourselves and to work for repair and healing of our broken world, for all people. That starts with a permanent cease-fire, and it doesn't end until every community, Palestinians included, is free.

Madeline Shaw is a member of IfNotNow (ifnotnowmovement.org) from Minneapolis. She now lives and farms in Osceola, Wisconsin.

Our enemy is Hamas

By PETER HIMMELMAN

I've often had a certain ambivalence about never having gone to college. Today, I have none. When I watch how our once storied universities have stolen the minds of our young people, robbed them of the knowledge of right and wrong and replaced their common sense with a set of pseudo-values that have no basis in reality, my lack of collegiate sophistication is no longer a source of misgiving, but a beacon of clarity.

"Sophistry" is a pejorative. It denotes a willingness to lie and to deceive. What else but an unthinking belief in lies can explain the masses of college students who delight in tearing down posters of kidnapped babies? What else but an unthinking belief in lies allows a person to publicly shout that the rape and torture of young Jewish women is a justified response to "colonialism"? What else but an unthinking belief in lies prods an Ivy League professor to exhort on Oct. 8 — just one day

after the worst pogrom since the Holocaust — that he feels "energized" by the sight of burned and beheaded children.

Too many of us have been acculturated to believe that every society is inherently good, that we all want the same things, and that given the choice between life and death every society will choose life. In our naïve gregariousness, too many of us fail to understand the nature of *radical Islam* — not Islam as a whole, but radical Islam, Islam's barbaric variant whose adherents are estimated to number well over a hundred million worldwide.

In their various forms, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, ISIS, Al Qaeda, the Taliban and Hezbollah all maintain a categorically different worldview from ours in the West. Death is for them a righteous path, a goal, a means to a "holy" end. The abduction of toddlers is a *mitzva*. The torture and savage killing of entire Jewish families in their kitchens and in their bedrooms is a doorway to the 72 virgins in heaven who await their martyrdom. To some, that may sound ridiculous. But

that's the point. It *should* sound ridiculous; we hold an entirely different conception of the world. Theirs is a culture that prizes death; ours is a culture that prizes life. They are mired in evil. We are steeped in good. It's no more sophisticated than that.

Why do I mention this? I do so because the willful ignorance that rots in the streets of our major cities and in our schools pains me, the Jew-hatred pains me, the small band of outlier Jews who call for an immediate cease-fire pains me — just as it would pain me if those same Jews called for a cease-fire had the Nazis asked for one in the hell of October 1943. October 7 represents a turning point, an existential moment for the world and, in the most immediate sense, for the Jewish people.

It has become critical that we fully understand who the enemy is. To be clear, our enemy is Hamas, its supporters and its sympathizers. Our enemy is any American institution that gives succor to Jew-haters. Our enemy is those in cities around the world who call for the death of Israel and Jews everywhere. Our enemy is also those who call for Israel to lay down its arms and tamely succumb to all manner of future pogroms.

As the renowned left-leaning Israeli writer David Grossman recently pointed out, Netanyahu didn't cause the horrors of October 7. Hamas did that. (*Editor's note: See "Who will we be when we rise from the ashes?" by David Grossman, AJW, November 2023.*) Nor did any Israeli administration — past or present — cause the pogrom of October 7. Hamas did that. Do not be misled.

Using the strength of our unbridled creativity, our unceasing unity and our heartfelt prayers, may the Jewish people be victorious, may Hamas be utterly destroyed and may every last hostage be reunited with their families in true peace.

Peter Himmelman, a St. Louis Park native, is a Grammy- and Emmy-nominated musician, author and visual artist. His company, Big Muse, helps organizations harness the creativity of their employees.

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