

Reflections on the unimaginable

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Opinion

BEARING WITNESS

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In Short

History has taught the Jewish people that when we are targeted, terrorized, dehumanized and slaughtered, others will doubt, minimize and even try to erase what happened. We can't let that go unchecked.

Last week, I experienced the most gut-wrenching 45 minutes of my life while watching collected footage from Hamas's terrorist attacks on Oct. 7. Every person in that room at the Holocaust Museum of Houston, where I hosted the viewing along with Israel's Consulate General to the Southwest United States, was left silent and shaken. As gutting as this film was, it was critical for me to watch as a way to bear witness to the innocents murdered because they were Israelis and Jews.

As a father of two young children and the husband of an Israeli whose grandparents escaped the Nazis, I was particularly impacted by the plight of a father and his two young boys. The video from the family's home security cameras showed an unimaginable horror.



A living room in an unidentified house in kibbutz Nir Oz after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, pictured on Oct. 19, 2023. Photo by Alexi J. Rosenfeld/Getty Images

We see a father waking up, realizing that something is wrong. Without time to dress, the father urgently wakes his sons and runs with them to the family's bomb shelter. Within seconds, a Hamas terrorist appears. The terrorist throws a grenade in the shelter. One second later, the father jumps out of the shelter — covering the grenade with his body.

Leaving the shelter requires the boys to walk over their father's dead body. As they cry and scream, Hamas terrorists direct the boys back to their living room at gunpoint. The two boys cry as they agonize over their father's murder. One of them cannot see out of one of his eyes, and the other's leg is gushing blood. The younger brother asks the older brother if this is a dream. "Why are we alive?" the older brother replies, and screams for his mother and father.

Meanwhile, the armed terrorist helps himself to a soda and looks on with glee.

Later, silent footage captures the mother's return to her home, accompanied by kibbutz security. She sees her husband's body at the edge of the bomb shelter. The silence cannot mask the universal signs of shock and grief that she feels. (We later learned that the mother chose to share her private footage so that the world would know what and believe happened.)

Another particularly striking aspect of the video was how young these terrorists are — mostly teenagers and young men in their twenties. They smile, laugh and celebrate at every turn. They post their videos on social media; take selfies with Israelis they raped, murdered and kidnapped; and call their parents to brag about killing Jews. Whether they know better is a question only they can answer. Hamas has brainwashed them to blindly hate and dehumanize Jews (yes, all Jews, not just Israeli Jews), glorify the killing of Jews (again, all Jews) and eliminate Israel. After seeing these young men proudly display their hate for all the world to see, as well as the street celebrations they enjoyed upon their return to Gaza with captured Israelis, dead and alive, I'm at a loss for how we can begin to undo Hamas's morally bankrupt dirty work.

During the film, as I experienced anger, anxiety and grief, I kept praying that someone — a soldier, armed guard, anyone — would arrive and push back Hamas and live to tell about it. The unanswered questions of how this happened will get answered, because Israelis relentlessly pursue accountability.

As the video ends with still, unedited images of men, women, and children, all dead, it is clear why Israel meticulously reviewed, analyzed and documented everything — from cell phones to CCTV to social media and everything in between.

History has taught the Jewish people that when we are targeted, terrorized, dehumanized and slaughtered, others will doubt, minimize and even try to erase what happened. This pattern continued with Oct. 7. The *Washington Post* reported what many of us have been seeing: in city council hearings, public protests and online, “a growing movement with ties to Holocaust denial is effacing history in real-time... Oct. 7 denial is spreading... bleeding into the real world.”

Israel had to prove its trauma because it simply had no other option — and proof notwithstanding, unabashed, undetected or unacknowledged antisemitism persists. For those who have entertained doubts, repeated tropes or downplayed what happened on Oct. 7, think of the widow who was so familiar with the Jewish experience that she knew her husband's gruesome murder had to be shared, simply to be believed.

If this horrifies you — and it should — ask yourself what you can do. Give money. Invest in Israeli companies. Call your elected officials, not just in Washington, but at home in your local municipalities. Do not hide. This is our moment to be vocal, not to cower out of fear. It is our moral obligation to stand up to hate, bigotry and antisemitism.

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