

It Was October 7, but It Will Always Be Shemini Atzeret



By Robert Lichtman

Federations, congregations, Hillels, JCCs and day schools gathered to mourn the tragic plague inflicted last year upon our loved ones in Israel, and through a connection cherished by us and exploited by our enemies, visited upon Jews everywhere. We brought prayers, candles, speeches, poems, music and cries. We spoke in the languages of English, Hebrew and Silence. We recalled the valor of those who defended them. We honored the heroism of those who fight still. We prayed for the safe return of the hostages. All of these emotions swirled together, forming ripples of hope and visions of peace that somehow emerged as a wave strong enough to carry us through our sorrow as the programs ended and we took leave to go on our individual ways.

This is a catastrophe large enough to have charred the Jewish world for generations. At the same time, it is a heartbreak

intimate enough that we know every single name. This is a tragedy indelible enough that we must keep its observance as a People. At the same time, there is an undeniable trauma that we are still working through as individual people.

In addition to whatever communal commemorations evolve over time, perhaps there is a personal way to observe this historical marker.

The attack occurred on Shabbat, October 7. From year to year, the day may or may not be Shabbat. The Hebrew date may or may not fall on October 7. But it was and will always be on Shemini Atzeret, which, yes, is expanded with Simchat Torah observances in Israel, but is universally and forever Shemini Atzeret in our history and in our prayers.

After drawing closer to God during the month of Elul, after celebrating God's coronation on Rosh Hashanah, after exoneration by God's mercy on Yom Kippur, after joyfully exulting in our expansive relationship with God on Sukkot, we begin to pack up and go home. Shemini Atzeret is God say-

ing to us, "We have spent so much time together. It was good. Your leaving me now is hard for me. Please, just stay for one more day." (Rashi on Leviticus 23:36 and Numbers 29:36, based on BT Sukkah 55b) In all of our interactions with God throughout history, this is about as close as God ever gets to saying, "I love you."

That is Shemini Atzeret. It is the day God expresses care for us, concern for us, affection for us.

For me, among the saddest memories of the massacre are the phone calls and video messages making their way from safe rooms, bomb shelters and hiding places along the road or in the bushes from people who might be moments from leaving their loved ones forever and taking the time—taking the risk—to make sure that one final message of love, care and connection came through.

As God expressed love for us, to us, on that first Shemini Atzeret, as so many *kedoshim*/martyrs expressed love for friends and family last Shemini Atzeret, this is a way

in which we might commemorate our national tragedy on a personal level. Call someone. Text someone. FaceTime someone. Write someone. Tell them, "I am thinking of you," "I care about you," "I miss you."

Those who were murdered on Shemini Atzeret will never be able to express these feelings again. I am not suggesting that we should do this for them because they can no longer do this for themselves. I am suggesting that we do this because that is what they did. That is what God did. God and they are my teachers. They taught me that I should reach out to you because you are important to me and I care about you.

May the memories of the *kedoshim* be a blessing. One that continues to teach us how to live.

Robert Lichtman lives in West Orange and draws upon his long tenure of professional leadership to teach and write about strategic issues and opportunities impacting the Jewish community, and other things. This article appeared in *The Times of Israel*.

Living the Past Year in a Time Capsule: And How Israel Is the Envy of the Western World



By Amy Neustein, Ph.D.

For many Jews, the past year began on Simchat Torah when a joyous holiday of celebrating the annual conclusion of the Torah readings turned into a bloodbath of epic proportion. A music festival and towns in southern Israel on October 7 were ambushed by Hamas terrorists that killed 1,200 innocents and took 251 hostages. Universities around the world ignited vociferous attacks on the Jews reminiscent of 1930s Europe. With the one-year remembrance of October 7, which falls on the Gregorian calendar just days after Rosh Hashanah, we begin the year on a far different note. Israel's tour-de-force intelligence gathering, military superiority, and technological prowess prompted a major feat against Hezbollah in its long-term efforts to eviscerate the axis-of-resistance. Its military and intelligence gathering capabilities have proven once again to be the envy of the Western World.

In fact so much so, that the same day that Hassan Nasrallah – the redoubtable terrorist leader responsible for the killing of 238 U.S. marines in October 1983 and for the March 1985 kidnapping of Associated Press Bureau Chief Terry Anderson – was assassinated by the IDF's bombing of the Hezbollah central headquarters hidden beneath a building in Beirut, Moody's credit rating agency downgraded Israel two notches to a Baa1 from an A2 rating. In so doing, Moody's maintained a negative outlook for Israel, placing it below investment grade and in league with countries such as Spain and Bulgaria, whose GDP per capita are remarkably below those of other European Union member states.

Moody's, with the stroke of a pen, hammered Israel within hours of the news of Nasrallah's (later confirmed) demise simmering in media outlets, intelligence communities, and among denizens of countries in four hemispheres. Was this a coincidence? I think not. My proof is that to justify the unsubstantiated and undeserved credit downgrade, Moody's ignored Israel's robust real estate market, booming tech sector, and other sectors that are equally sanguine while reviving the judicial reform dispute as one of the grounds for the current downgrade. Certainly, this was not a new phenomenon, nor is it incomprehensible to have a debate of this intensity in a country that accords with democratic principles of free speech and the right to assemble. Most importantly, any discourse over the role of Israel's courts had not ignited protests in Israel for quite some time. So, why revive an erstwhile issue to justify the assault on Israel's credit rating, thereby impugning their economic stability?

Recently, Israel's Aliyah Ministry released encouraging statistics showing that 31,000 individuals have immigrated to Israel despite the shadow of war. This stat is almost three times the number of those who have left, primarily for employment opportunities, which would have occurred even if there had not been a pending war. It's hard to find an analogous model of immigration patterns in a comparable Western country that could claim they had an influx of immigrants while its military was fighting on three fronts and its citizens were on high alert for attacks in residential quarters at any time of the day or night.

What these immigration stats show is that notwithstanding the penumbral halo of war, and its ever-present uncertainty and insecurity, families and individuals have made the deci-

sion to relocate to Eretz Yisrael. They followed their heart, for it is understood that the place where we live is the grounding of our soul. For this reason, conflicts and wars will never alloy our passion to come home to the place of our destiny and origin.

The fact that Jews are rooted in history, identity and determination provokes envy in others. This is because the human condition causes most people to be peripatetic. They struggle to find themselves. They travel to exotic places; they engage in multiple relationships; or they travel via the psychoanalyst's couch to their past or even to past lives. In contrast, Jews are not itinerant. They have a purpose; they have a home. And it is the mooring of Jews that shows up the weaknesses of other nations that do not share this privilege. They call Jews "clannish" but what they really mean is that Jews have a socially viable and vibrant network of support – working together as a community and watching out for one another.

The bonds among Jews are so strong that even before Israel was a state, the Jews were a nation. As history has proven, God blessed Israel with a grounding so strong that no war, genocide, or persecution could destroy the Jewish community. What other ethnic group is *pari passu* or on equal footing with the Jews? Sadly, instead of others learning how we survived as a nation beleaguered by the hostilities of mankind, we are torn down: criticized, mocked, and repudiated in the universities, public discourse, and, most recently, in the financial sectors that dole out nasty credit ratings just at the moment of Israel's tour-de-force technological and military victory. This is no doubt a sad commentary on the ravages of unbridled envy and how left-leaning interest groups can create enough static in financial markets to im-

pugn Israel's creditworthiness though there is not an iota of evidence to substantiate Israel's undeserved credit downgrade.

We have marked the one-year anniversary of October 7 three days after Rosh Hashanah. The timing can be seen as comforting, as the Jewish New Year ushers in renewed hope, strength and vitality to all Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora. We will mark the remembrance of the first year since the massacre of innocents and the tragic fate of hostages, who either died in captivity or were executed by Hamas shortly before their release under a planned Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal, emboldened by the vigor of a New Year.

But we will also mark the first year of remembrance exuding pride, for we have shown once again – just as we have in biblical and in modern times – that Israel's military proficiency and its intelligence gathering have proven to be exceptional even among countries that benefit from large defense-spending budgets and military sophistication. Envy by others is unfortunately the inevitable consequence of success. Israel has succeeded in the past year to prove it can overcome an existential threat to its survival. We should not allow the envy expressed by others to deter, dampen, or alloy our commitment to Israel's security above all else. Let the New Year release us from a time capsule and begin our journey toward permanent security for Israel and all Jews in the Diaspora.

Amy Neustein, Ph.D., is the author/editor of 16 academic books with leading publishers. Her two most recent books, "From Madness to Mutiny (2nd Edition)" and "Moral Schisms," will be published by Oxford University Press. She resides in Fort Lee, NJ.