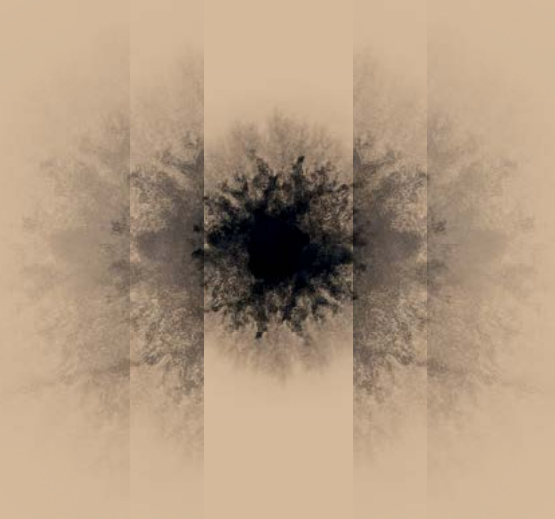


# ECHOES OF OCTOBER

TRYING TO UNDERSTAND A TERRIBLE YEAR



ADINA  
CHELMINSKY

ANTHOLOGY  
OCTOBER 7TH, 2023  
OCTOBER 7TH, 2024

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# ECHOES OF OCTOBER

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ADINA CHELMINSKY

Anthology

October 7th, 2023  
October 7th, 2024



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All profits derived from this book will be donated to Women Wage Peace and Women of the Sun, two organizations led by Israeli Jewish, Israeli Muslim and Palestinian Muslim women who are working, from their own motherhood, to find some solution to the conflict.



"AMONG ALL THINGS THERE IS ONE  
THAT NOBODY REGRETS ON EARTH.  
THAT THING IS TO HAVE BEEN BRAVE."

JORGE LUIS BORGES

i.b.

## INTRODUCTION

# A BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATERS

Two parallel wars are raging over Israel and Gaza today. Both painful. In one, the situation is completely out of our control. In the other, all of us are losing.

The first is being fought on-site. The raw war, the armed conflict, the one where there's strife, killings, dead and wounded people. No one who's reading this (unless Netanyahu, Sinwar or the Ayatollahs are among you) holds any sway over it. The second is fought in public (and private) discourse, on social media and the press. A battle that's being waged all around the world, one that, judging by the prevailing polarization, fake news and manipulation, we are absolutely losing... all of us.

No matter which side of the conflict you are on, engaging in a productive dialogue with people who think differently from you seems impossible today. We have reached unfathomable levels of verbal violence, which hinder any chance of reasoning.

That is this book's whole *raison d'être*. That second battleground: public discourse. However, let me warn you, this book is not for everyone.

If you are looking for a historically accurate recounting of October 7th, 2023 and its aftermath, with audited figures, tracing back to the story of Abraham, the Patriarch (where the conflict first began), thoroughly explaining all the events that brought us here today, this is not the book for you.

If you are looking for a book that pins absolute blame, prescribes universal truths and spouts lofty opinions with a raised index finger, stop reading this.

If you are looking for a book that claims to have an “objective” take on the matter, look elsewhere. At this point, I don’t believe anyone is capable of objectivity when it comes to such a complex, visceral and painful subject. All we can aim for is the acceptance of a complicated reality and the lens through which each of us sees the world.

If you’re looking for an optimistic book, you won’t find it here. This cannot be fixed with positive affirmations and well-meaning wishes, or by just trusting that humans are inherently good. Looking for happy endings? Don’t even start reading. I’ll spoil the ending for you: things are fucked up. There is nothing positive about it. At least not in the short or medium run.

But I don’t think those are the kind of books we need right now. That’s why I wrote this one. We need to question and reflect and go back to civil forms of dialogue.

And hold on!!!! Before you accuse me of being self-absorbed or wanting to insert myself in a conversation that does not concern me (I live thousands of miles away, no one in my immediate family has been killed or taken hostage), please refer to the first paragraph of this introduction: I am definitely not part of the first war, but I am most certainly part of the second. We all are.

This book is simply my view of things and the way they have evolved over this first year since the October 7th massacre.

The view of a proudly Jewish woman who defends Israel’s right to exist and defend itself without justification. The view of a Western woman who is aware of the risk that Islamic fundamentalism represents for everyone in the world, the absolute irrationality of its members and the impossibility of dealing with them.

It is also the view of a woman who has (moderately) studied the subject and knows that there have been mistakes and mishandlings of the political, social and military strategies over many years.

This book is an anthology. A compilation of everything that has gone from my mind to my pen since October 7th. Published articles, other pieces that, for some reason, I never published, social media posts, famous quotes that caught my eye at different times.

This is a book about the conflict as seen and lived from my very personal, selfish and tiny point of view. It is a book with far more questions than answers, with ruminations on problems that do not beget solutions. It is a book for those who think like me to find mutual understanding and solace. It’s also for those who don’t fully understand what’s going on (most people) and want to start forming the healthiest, most reasoned opinion possible.

But, first and foremost, this book is for people who are diametrically opposed to my way of thinking and with whom I would love to build a bridge over troubled waters.





CHAPTER 1

4:00 A.M.

OCTOBER 7TH - 25TH, 2023



*On Saturday, October 7th, 2023, I woke up at 4:00 a.m. An effect of many restless nights, an effect of age, an effect of wanting to pee.*

*Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw my phone. Hundreds of messages and notifications flooded in. Hundreds. How strange. Who texts at this hour?*

*I opened them.*

*It was noon in Israel. The Hamas attack had begun 6 hours earlier.*

*I woke up my husband. My voice stuck in my throat. I showed him the phone, all I could say was, "Read."*

On October 7th, 2023, three thousand Hamas militants and Palestinian civilians from Gaza (with whom Israel has a complicated and fatal history, which I will go into more detail later) crossed into Israel and attacked dozens of towns and kibbutzim, including attendees of the Nova music festival.

The toll was soul-crushing. Hundreds of houses destroyed, over 1200 people dead (following the worst imaginable torture), gang rapes: 254 people were taken hostage and transported to Gaza. Among the victims, there were Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, of around twenty different nationalities.

It is the worst attack against the Jewish people since the Holocaust.



Adina Chelminsky  
@AdinaChel



I am sitting at home. Literally paralyzed by the sadness and the horror of what is happening in Israel.

I see photos, videos and reports, and I can't move. I talk to my cousins, aunts and uncles back in Israel, and I cannot contain myself.

They ask if I'm going to write something about it. If I'm going to speak up. I have something written already, I just need to go over it with a cool head (as cool as possible) so as not say something I might regret.

In the meantime, I have only two things to say: may Hamas rot in hell for the horror it's unleashing on both Israelis AND Palestinians; Am Israel Jai, the people of Israel live.

8:00 AM · Oct 7, 2023

# WHO IS TO BLAME? ISRAEL OR PALESTINE?

OCTOBER 8TH, 2023

First of all, I want to make it very clear that I am not a political scientist, nor am I sociologist, nor an expert in anything whatsoever. I am certain that, in these lines, I am failing to include the theory of X or the treaty of Y or milestone Z that would enable me to share the absolute truth that so many believe to possess when they speak about what transpires today in the Middle East.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is complex, complicated and it always elicits a visceral reaction, from both sides. I do not know if it's the worst conflict in the history of the world, but it is certainly the most emotionally charged whenever it's discussed.

It is impossible to synthesize it on a single page. It would be irresponsible to do so, as it would be to simplify what is impossible to simplify, forcibly fitting it into this good-versus-bad binary that does not contribute to either analyzing or solving it.

After nearly 80 years of conflict, no one is faultless. No side has been exempt from making mistakes, both sides have blood on their hands. No side is even homogeneous (not all Palestinians are the same, not all Israelis think alike). Within Israeli society, there are dozens of worldviews and behaviors, just as there are in Palestinian society.

But there is one fact that is indisputable, an atrocious and cruel fact that has rendered any likelihood of peace IMPOSSIBLE, the main cause for the hostilities currently tearing up and bleeding the region dry: the Islamic terrorist groups (chief among them, Iran-funded Hamas) that for 80 years have used the Palestinian population as

cannon fodder to serve their political interests without the slightest regard for the dignity of the Palestinian lives they so claim to defend.

They are the ones who have hindered and subverted the Palestinian people's legitimate right to live in peace and prosperity in an independent state. They are the ones who have indoctrinated entire generations of Palestinians into the purest and most vile Machiavelian principle of *the end justifies the means*, effectively turning them into terrorists. They are the ones who have diverted funds for Palestine to build missiles instead of schools and perpetuate the cycle of poverty that fuels violence.

Why is Hamas launching the most vicious attack in its history now? Is it because the political division in Israel perhaps left gaps in its national security? Was the aim to derail peace with Saudi Arabia, which is not in Iran's interest? Did they find a flaw in their military defense that allowed them to attack with such ferocity?

I don't know. Only a handful of people in Tehran and Gaza know the answer. The only thing I am SURE of is that these attacks are NOT aimed, in the least, at improving the real, daily living conditions of the Palestinian population.

Hamas obviously doesn't give a damn about Israeli lives. But it cares just as little for Palestinian lives, their present or their future. This massacre is not a response to the "years of Israeli occupation" (by the way, Israel left Gaza in 2005, so they have been autonomous for 20 years). Every image coming out of Hamas's social media, where they praise and celebrate the torture of human lives and the poor treatment of corpses, is an irrefutable testament to the kind of "people" they are and the goals they pursue. They do not give a single damn about peace and welfare in Gaza.

Today, many Jews' (and many non-Jews') social media feeds are covered with the phrase *I stand with Israel*. To stand with Israel should be the banner of all citizens of the world. Because taking a stand against terrorism is not a matter of convenience, it's a must. Because the Islamic terrorists who are currently repressing Israel are the same terrorists who are oppressing other parts of the world. Whoever kills a Jew in Sde Boker today is the same as the person who kills a homosexual in Prague or an African American in Detroit.

And no, taking Israel's side does not mean blinding yourself to the mistakes and miscalculations of Israel. It does not mean to give it carte blanche and relieve it of all responsibility for everything that has happened. But, just as the Palestinian people have a legitimate right to live in peace, Israel is, has been and will be entitled to defend itself from this and any other attack with its full military force.

And yes, this will involve entering a war where Israel's formal power is undoubtedly greater. And yes, it's going to take a terrible toll in terms of death, destruction, terror and destitution. And no, there is no way to respond with proportional force because there is no such thing as *proportional* force against terrorism.

It is force, point blank.



Today, neither blame nor doubt should be pointed at Israel or Palestine, it should fall on the Islamic terrorist organizations and the figureheads and entities who fund them, defend them or choose to ignore their actions. Those people who remain complicitly silent in governments, social media and personal dealings. That silence is what fans the flames of terrorism.

In the midst of all this horror, no victim, on either side, hurts less.

OCTOBER 16TH, 2023

# TERRORISM, SADNESS AND BOUNDLESS HUMAN STUPIDITY

Writing while sad should be as ill-advised as texting while drunk. A recipe for disaster. Unless you write melancholic poetry or rose-colored novels, wearing your pen or your keyboard on your sleeve is the best way to write things you want to say, but perhaps shouldn't write (due to nobility of spirit, age or the state of the world).

But I have never taken anyone's advice, much less my own. So here I am writing, while feeling sad, deeply sad. You'll have to excuse me.

I begin this column with the same words that ended my last column: In the midst of all this horror, no victim, on either side, hurts less. It seems as though the only way to try and exorcize this sadness, this helplessness, is to ask myself questions about October 7th: Why? What for? How the hell did they do it? What did anyone gain?

Exorcism: Impossible. None of the above has an answer.

Within the complexity of this analysis, since the conflict is undoubtedly complicated, there are two issues that keep roaming in my mind. First, our inability to grasp the scale of Hamas's evil and goals. **HAMAS COULD NOT CARE LESS ABOUT THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE'S WELFARE.**

For 20 years, they have had Palestinians under their thumb. With unrelenting attacks, they have crushed any chance for peace. They have indoctrinated entire generations of young Palestinians into hatred. They have built their military infrastructure amid homes, schools and hospitals, turning every child, woman and man into human shields. They have systematically destroyed the wealth Gaza

once had, which Israelis (most of them) left behind when they ceded the territory in 2005.

Electrical and hydraulic infrastructure, farmlands, greenhouses, factories. One by one, they wiped out all of it, thus impoverishing the population and perpetuating a poverty-violence-poverty cycle that is impossible (and to them undesirable) to break: poor populations are easier to manipulate.

Comparing photos of Gaza in 2007 and in 2020 is heartbreaking. They reveal the brutal impoverishment to which the population has been subjected. Yes, it is partly due to the Israeli blockade, but it's mostly because of Hamas's unwillingness to build a real and prosperous future for the Palestinian people.

They have embezzled a large part of the funds granted by the international community to fill their leaders' pockets and achieve their war objectives. Instead of allocating the money to meet the needs of the population, they have used it for terror. What? Did you think that missiles, weapons and tunnels pay for themselves?

And they have no intention of ending their abuse of the Palestinian people. What happened on October 7th was not only meant to terrorize the Israeli population. It was a note of warning for all Gazans: what you see here could happen to you, too.

They were perfectly aware of how Israel was going to react. They knew that, given the scale of the attacks and hostages taken, Israel would have no choice but to strike back. Their plan was never to kill over a thousand people as a way to get to the negotiating table. What they wanted, and succeeded at, was to start a war to cause further harm to the civilian population they claim to protect.

The second issue that haunts me is the boundless human stupidity that has become evident at this point. If the shoe fits, wear it. I can understand all phobias and phobias around Israel. I can understand and respect opinions that differ from mine. I can understand that complicated situations are complicated to understand (apologies for the redundancy). I can even understand, and in many cases agree with, criticism of Israel's handling of things. But what I cannot comprehend are the people who have NOT unequivocally condemned the barbaric acts committed by Hamas, those who call for their contextualization, who point to Israel and say, "They had it coming," "They deserve it," "What goes around, comes around"

As it turns out, people who normally do not give a single fig about any of the other armed conflicts in the world, who have never cared about Assad in Syria, or about Boko Haram, or about the lack of human rights in China (to name just three out of hundreds of other issues), are suddenly worried, taking the streets and throwing up their hands in horror at the situation in the Gaza Strip.

It turns out that people who have read exactly two articles and ten posts on the problem, are now able to express "informed" opinions and judgments, as if they hold the universal truth; they speak of decolonization, occupation and a proportional response without having the slightest idea of what any of those terms mean.

Turns out, professional political analysts and internationalists forget that there are multiple dimensions to every analysis.

It turns out that members of the LGBTQ+ community give the benefit of the doubt to Hamas's actions when they wouldn't survive a second in its territories.

It turns out that the same women who rightly jump to a rape victim's defense when she is vilified for the clothes she was wearing or where she was at the time, invoke contextualization so as not to categorically speak out against the appalling sexual violence committed by Hamas.

I am 50 years old, and throughout all those 50 years I have heard about this conflict. I've read hundreds or thousands of data, opinions and analyses on the subject. I've talked to experts of all stripes. I have been to Israel and the Gaza Strip. In my house, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a constant topic of discussion and analysis. I am also Jewish (which *should* skew my opinion). And yet, and yet, and yet I'm aware of the complexity embedded in the horror, the uselessness of making blanket statements or spewing armchair opinions on Israel or Palestine, and I have absolutely no idea how we are going to get out of this conflict.

Now, it turns out that even your aunt on WhatsApp, your "intellectual" buddy, that second-rate Twitter pundit, or the cowardly veiled antisemitic commentator DOES understand the situation perfectly, can point fingers, and even has the optimal solution for it, conveniently condensed in two brief sentences.

This is part of what makes me so sad: The way I see it, terrorism will be extremely difficult to defeat, this debacle will last a very long time and will leave an extremely heavy death toll. But eradicating human stupidity, lack of empathy and humanity, that is going to be much, much more difficult to achieve.

Even before Israeli troops entered Gaza. Before the war had officially started (again, context is certainly complicated and age-old), a raging wave of antisemitism was unleashed worldwide.



**Adina Chelminsky**  
@AdinaChel



My Zeide (grandfather) was strongly affected by the antisemitism of his time. An immigrant from Lithuania, he lost part of his family to the Holocaust. He always lived in fear of antisemitism and wary of the world. He thought someone could always hurt us for being Jewish.

My brother and I would tell him to stop fearing the world, that things had changed since then, that there was no need for his caution anymore.

I am sad to say that all I can think of right now is, "Thank God he didn't live to see what is happening today." It would have broken him.

You were right, Zeide.

5:50 AM · Oct 16, 2023

On October 21st, the Israeli army entered Gaza with the intention to annihilate Hamas and rescue the hostages. Antisemitism flared to levels not seen in nearly a century. The war, which at first seemed simple (if such an adjective can even be applied to war), would escalate to unimaginable heights.



**Adina Chelminsky**  
@AdinaChel



No, the world doesn't have to worry about Jews just because we are Jews or special in any way.

The world has to worry about the antisemitism we currently face as Jews because it tramples on the basic and universal values of all human beings: security, respect and tolerance.

12:32 PM · Oct 21, 2023



# MY DAD

OCTOBER 22ND, 2023

I can't sleep anymore. My sleeping pills (Tasedan) laugh at me in the wee hours of the morning as they watch me toss and turn, trying to soothe the anguish and find answers.

At times, I'm quite envious of the people who believe in God wholeheartedly. Those who think everything is part of a perfect plan and find comfort in divinity. I need to have a talk with the God I believe in. The conversation won't be pretty, or easy, or friendly. I know God will hear me, but I doubt He will answer. I'm a woman of faith, but I'm not schizophrenic.

Today, at noon, two weeks after the Hamas-led attacks, people gathered in front of the Embassy of Israel in Mexico City for a solidarity march. It was heartbreaking. A collective mourning. Hundreds of people. Silent. Sobbing.

The surrounding streets were *decorated* with posters showing the faces of the 254 hostages. Two weeks after the fact, I already recognize their faces, their names, their ages, and the smiles they wore in a world that no longer exists, in what now seems like an alternate reality.

Walking among them felt like being in the gallows of hell.

My whole family was there.

After the event, I stayed behind to greet someone and my dad walked a few meters ahead. When I tried to catch up with him, so he wouldn't walk alone, his back was turned to me, and for the first

time in my life I saw him hunched over, looking at the faces on the posters, reading the hostages' names. He had grown small (and my dad's built like a tank). His face carried a sadness I cannot explain.

I read it in his eyes. The eyes of a man who was born just after World War II and now, at almost 80 years old, I figure must be thinking of his legacy, "I thought I'd leave a better and safer world behind for my children and grandchildren to be Jewish in."

What can I answer to that?

Until October 23rd, all my articles appeared exclusively in an all-female online journal.

Almost all of them kept quiet about the issue. I got a couple of private messages, that was it. Bear in mind that, up to that point, the Israeli offensive had not begun. There was no war that could blur the line, in their minds, between right and wrong (bullshit). The only fact on the table was that Hamas had attacked and sexually tortured hundreds of people as a weapon of "resistance." Still, no one said a word.

I decided to stop writing for them, but not before sending a few words to the WhatsApp group chat.

Hi everyone, I know this will probably be a total drag for you to read, BUT as part of my soul-searching about what I need to do, which I think is right for me at the moment, I need to write this out.

I have decided to leave this chat due to the lack of support, sorority and intelligence that has prevailed since Saturday regarding the brutal attacks by Hamas. Except for the private messages I got from a couple of you (which I appreciate with my whole heart), the silence has been staggering. Not one public statement, not a single joint proclamation. It should only take one of us getting hurt for ALL of us to raise our voices and show up in support of that afflicted "friend." Well, this is happening to me, and to [here were the names of the other Jewish columnists]. This is happening to thousands of women in Israel (those murdered, those raped, mothers, wives) and this, Hamas's violence, happens to every woman in Gaza every single day. Not one word? Put aside your personal social media stance (which is obviously none of my business). But what about our joint call as "the smartest writers in Mexico" to speak up, to take a stand? Is this not the right time? Is now not the time to speak against Hamas, to stand against those gas the Jews chants, to condemn the jihad call against the Jewish communities of the world. And yes, as you know if you've read my work, I understand the complexity of the matter and all the feelings, phobias and phobias surrounding it, but in the face of these developments, there is NO WAY TO JUSTIFY THE JOINT SILENCE, THE LACK OF A PUBLIC STANCE.

Now is the time for me to take a stand and my stand has always been to speak up for my friends, my colleagues and other women. Today, I'm speaking up for MYSELF. I wish you all the best and leave you with the words of MLK: In the end, *we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.*

All my love, Adina Chelminsky.

\*Adina Chelminsky has left the chat\*



**adinachel** ✓  
Mexico, CDMX



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**adinachel** | ALWAYS SAID I WOULD NEVER GET A TATTOO, UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCE.

But after October 7th and its aftermath, the words *always* and *never* took on a different meaning.

I never thought I'd live in a world where absolute evil and horror had to be contextualized or were allowed a few *buts*. Or one where the truth was so manipulated and silence so deafening. I never thought I'd have to justify my Jewishness. I never thought I'd feel afraid for being Jewish.

And, as the words *always* and *never* changed, so did my reasons for getting a tattoo.

Today, I got a tattoo of the Star of David and the word *hineni* (which means "here I am"), permanently visible on my left hand, the hand that connects to the heart

October 25th, 2023

CHAPTER 2

*BRUJÁ*  
*HA BAA;*  
WELCOME

OCTOBER 31ST - NOVEMBER 9TH, 2023



*My first trip to Israel was a fluke. Taglit, a foundation dedicated to fostering the Jewish diaspora's relationship with Israel, arranged one of the first solidarity missions to Israel after the attacks.*

*It was limited to a very small number of activists, due to the gravity of the facts and security reasons. Only 15 people from all over the world. Five days visiting the sites of the attacks and holding meetings with analysts and people who were directly affected by the tragedy. My husband was invited.*

*Seeing the state of emotional distress I was in, he told me, "You should go."*

*I did.*

*That's how my blog was born.*



# WHY GO TO ISRAEL NOW: LESS THAN A MONTH AFTER THE OCTOBER 7TH MASSACRE

OCTOBER 31ST, 2023

I have my suitcase packed 72 hours before departure. I always pack well in advance, but this is a new record. This time it's not because I'm highly organized and obsessive (which I am), it's because I'm about to embark on perhaps the most difficult trip I've made in all my 50 years of life.

Having my suitcase ready gives me peace, or at least a warning that I can't back down now. A month after the October 7th attacks, I am going to Israel. A country at war.

I have never been so afraid to do anything in my life and, ironically, I have never had so much conviction to do something.

What am I going for? In theory, the objective is clear: I am invited to bear witness, talk to people, provide support, understand.

What am I going for? In the broader sense of the question: I don't know. Trying to understand is beyond me. Maybe I just want to feel that there is something, however small, I can do. I don't know what that is. I don't know what purpose it will serve.

The complexity of the conflict overwhelms me. Everything hurts. The Hamas massacre, the war victims in Palestine, the antisemitism, the fake news, the lack of common sense, the loss of empathy, the existence of evil and the prevalence of complicit silence.

In the upcoming days, I hope being there helps me find an answer and, above all, find something I can do to improve something, however microscopic, to change someone in some way, to communi-

cate, to raise awareness and initiate dialogue. It's beyond comprehension. It may be useless.

But my suitcase is packed. My children think I'm crazy for going to a war-torn country. My friends' eyes go wide in disbelief when I tell them where I'm going. My parents won't sleep for a week. My psychiatrist is the only one who seems fully convinced that this is a trip I have to take.

# WHAT SHOULD I PACK?

NOVEMBER 1ST, 2023

The upside of writing a blog whose readers are mostly people who know me is that I don't have to explain the inconsistencies of my life. No, pink hair is not natural.

If I were to describe myself in this trip, I'd be a mediocre mix between Christiane Amanpour, Paris Hilton and G.I. Jane. Neither reporter, nor diva, nor female action hero. This lack of consistency undoubtedly complicates the process of packing for this trip.

## **I have to:**

1. Travel light, without compromising style. Bring comfortable clothes... that match.
2. Define my life's essentials and bring them in excess, in case anything extends my trip\*.

## **\*That is:**

- Contact lenses and sleeping pills = Very necessary to pack extra.
- Three different lipsticks depending on the occasion = No.
- A box of monk fruit sweetener sachets, because I can cope without food, but my ultra-sweet (and calorie-free) morning coffee is not negotiable.

- Extra high-capacity batteries for my phone. I'm bringing three, God forbid I run out of battery to tweet.
- Decent, demure pajamas, because the last thing I need is for the air-raid sirens to go off in the middle of the night and me being that crazy old lady who runs to the *miklat* (shelter) in her underwear and an old, worn-out t-shirt.
- And, last but not least, three kilos of mole and three kilos of tamale dough because my aunt, who lives in Israel, loves them.

I hope no one at customs opens my suitcase. I might be deported before I even get there.

# DOES THIS SCARE ME? ... THIS IS WHAT SCARES ME

NOVEMBER 2ND, 2023

Waiting for takeoff MEX-TLV

The question I got asked the most before embarking on this trip is whether I was afraid to go to Israel right now. The answer is complicated and complex.

Am I afraid for my safety during the trip? It would be ridiculous to say no. But I'm not stifled by that fear.

Let's be honest, I'm staying at a five-star hotel, all my commutes will be protected by a security team, and I know for sure that the organizers of this trip (I will talk about them in another post) would never put anyone's safety at risk. Ironically (or as a consequence of its perennial situation), Israel is one of the countries with the largest amount of civil protection mechanisms in the world.

But the fact of the matter is that I am going to a country at war, and a missile is a missile, an attack is an attack, and a surprise is a surprise. I can't deny that certain images do come to mind. I jokingly told my mom, who I'm sure is still on edge, that "if anything should happen, my pink hair and tattoo will make me easy to recognize." A very bad joke. She didn't find it funny. At all.

It's not fear, it's caution. I must confess I left a file on my computer's desktop with all my passwords and some instructions, I talked to people with whom I had unfinished quarrels to settle them before leaving, and I hugged everyone tighter when I said goodbye.

What does scare me is what I'm going to see over there. What I'm going to find. We are going to the hell zone where everything happened, we are talking to the families of the hostages, we are visiting

the wounded. That leaves a mark. In my soul. It scares me to face that level of suffering, to see the consequences of the Hamas attacks.

It scares me to see the ravages of war on both sides.

I'm scared of the possibility of finding there is no path to peace, which, as *Miss Universe-minded* as it sounds today, I still believe will eventually be the only possible path.

It scares me to see a country that I love so much broken.

But what makes me panic the most (and "panic" is the right word for it) is seeing how fast antisemitism and violent hatred are growing and overflowing in Israel and the world. It's not just fake news, but also physical assaults. I feel panic for my children, for my nieces and nephews, and for today's youth. I feel panic about what might happen to any Jew anywhere in the world today.

I feel panic over "never again" becoming "the day after tomorrow."

And that panic is what moves me to fly to Israel right now.

Nelson Mandela once said that courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.

# ABOUT MY FLUENCY IN HEBREW

NOVEMBER 2ND, 2023

A common question you get when you go to Israel is, "Do you speak Hebrew?" To which my answer is always, "Of course, I speak it perfectly."

I am the prodigal daughter of a 15-year Jewish school education, during which I took daily Hebrew classes, lived in Ashkelon, and still have a Spotify playlist of my favorite Hebrew songs that I listen to obsessively.

Of course, I speak it perfectly.

Or so I believed.

Last year, while on vacation in Israel, I got an allergic reaction, so I went to the drugstore. There were two check-out lines: one for people who needed assistance in English and the other in Hebrew. The first line was obviously much longer, teeming with sunburned, hungover, or overindulged tourists.

Alfredo, my husband (who is usually the voice of reason), warned me, "Get in the English line. Even if you wait longer, it'll be easier."

"No," I retorted with absolute confidence, before parroting the litany of my prodigious educational background, my life in Ashkelon and my Hebrew-themed playlist.

I approached the counter and explained to the pharmacist what was wrong and what I needed in my, *of course, perfectly spoken* Hebrew. After hearing my explanation, his eyes went wide as he turned to me

and said, "*Be eizo safá at medaberet? Rusit?*", which means, "What language are you speaking? Russian?":

And that, ladies and gentlemen, was the end of my perfect Hebrew myth.



# A WELCOME MISSILE

NOVEMBER 3RD, 2023

I'll be very honest, I had my first *from-Israel* post perfectly planned out. I was going to talk about the overpowering emotion I felt as I landed in the same place I'd been to so many times, but that now seemed like a completely different world.

I was going to write about the strength of the Israeli people.

I was going to write, *Am Israel Jai*, may the people of Israel live eternally.

I got into the hotel-bound airport taxi. Shlomo Artzi (my favorite Israeli singer) was playing on the radio. Perfect timing. I started to write my spiel.

Then, the song was cut off. I heard the radio announcer say some words. The driver stopped the car in the middle of the road. All the other cars did the same. He said, "Grab your phone, get out of the car, there's a missile coming."

I grabbed my phone and got out of the car. We sat in the meadow by the road. Us and all the car passengers: children, families, elders.

Twenty minutes after the danger had passed, we got back in the car.

We continued our way to Jerusalem.

I forgot about my sentimental post and, for the first time in a month since the tragedy of October 7th, I burst into tears.



# TRANSLATE: *PESAR*

NOVEMBER 4TH, 2023

Jerusalem is dead calm. Everything is the same, yet all of it is different.

I was here a little over a year ago. The streets are the same. The restaurants are the same. The frappé from Aroma tastes the same. Yet all of it is different.

Despite it still being the safest city in Israel. More soldiers. More armed civilians. Less traffic, as tourism is pretty much non-existent. But above all, there's an atmosphere of gloom.

*Es el pesar*, my cousin tells me at lunch. *Pesar*. I can't think of the exact translation for it. Beyond sadness. Sorrow. Grief. Today, at the table, everyone knows someone (or someone's someone) who was at one of the attacked kibbutzim or at the Nova festival. Someone who died or was spared or beaten or whose daughter was killed.

*Pesar* and anger. Over this situation, over this collective mourning, and over what is unfolding in Gaza as well.

Everyone at the table has done military service. No one (except myself) is unfamiliar with the burden of serving in the army, what it entails. Everyone understands the pain of war (for both sides). Everyone knows someone who is fighting right now. We toast to the coming of a normal day: *Le yamim reguilim*.

In the anguish of the conversation and the future, I drink more than one glass. Then I go for a walk. The streets are the same, yet so different. I end up sitting at a burger joint with the street in full view.

Sitting at the table in front of me, four soldiers on duty, dining. They are no more than 20 years old. Not a single person goes by without greeting them or winking at them. An older lady with a walker stops as she sees them, gives them a blessing and says, "Don't worry, boys, God will save us."

"God will save us, but in the meantime," one of the soldiers replies, "in the meantime, there's us."

# CAN A JEW WRITE ABOUT ISRAEL OBJECTIVELY?

NOVEMBER 5TH, 2023

I went from the world of *fake* news in Mexico to the world of terrible *realities* in Israel. I don't know which is worse.

I understand why it's so easy to get sucked into the "fake viral news" vortex. Besides the speed at which information spreads on social media, one-dimensional realities are simply much more comfortable.

Whichever side you are on, it is easier to believe in unisonous data and deny the inexorable multipolarity of the human experience and all of our conflicts. Please forgive the couple of GoldStar beers I had. My drinking now is fully aimed at lessening the anguish.

From the onset of the conflict, the question of whether a Jewish person can be objective when manifesting a public opinion on this matter has been rumbling in my head. By all means, some of the best commentary in Spanish about this has come from spectacular Jewish or Arab analysts.

But every time I post or share something by them, the response is always, "Well, they're not objective, they're Jews (or Arabs)!". *Objectivity*. I hate that word.

I know it is the holy grail of journalists, analysts, political scientists, opinion leaders. The first adjective granted to a professional commentator (on any conflict) who deserves praise is, "Wow! That is an objective person", "His objectivity is apparent", "She looks at the facts objectively."

Sitting at the table in front of me, four soldiers on duty, dining. They are no more than 20 years old. Not a single person goes by without greeting them or winking at them. An older lady with a walker stops as she sees them, gives them a blessing and says, "Don't worry, boys, God will save us."

"God will save us, but in the meantime," one of the soldiers replies, "in the meantime, there's us."

# THE CRISIS

NOVEMBER 6TH, 2023

Oftentimes, assessing each aspect of a tragedy separately makes them even more tragic. When we say “there’s a war,” even if we do understand the tragedy of war, the inconceivable scope of what it means remains concealed.

Yes, the most important and horrible aspect of it is the human loss (on both sides), but the costs of war go far beyond that.

Saying Israel is in crisis is an understatement. There is no level of Israeli society and life that is not shaken by the current affairs. The crisis is not only geographical, spread all across the country, it is also felt in every second of everyday life, of the present and of the paths to the future.

I guess that’s how wars are. This is the first one I’ve experienced. This war is being fought on so many fronts that they all seem to intertwine and collide at the same time.

The first and most obvious (because that’s war) is the macro military (I’ll explain the “macro” in a moment). This one has to do with the goals that must be met without exception: unequivocally destroy Hamas as a necessary condition for peace not only for the State of Israel, but for the entire world. This objective is complicated for dozens of reasons: diplomatic pressure, the role of Hezbollah (in trying not to open another battle front), the existence of hostages we want to bring back alive, and the Israeli army’s concern with minimizing civilian casualties in Gaza. Yes, the rest of the world doesn’t seem to notice the level of care taken by the Israeli forces in their military operations. Yes, the war is tragic, and death tolls are

Ladies and gentlemen, I hate to disappoint you all, but objectivity does not exist. Not here, not in China. Neither in this nor in any other conflict.

Every human creation carries a small piece of the human being who created it.

That's impossible to deny. The pen is connected to the heart. That's not only natural, it's excellent. Because we must commit our whole selves to every opinion we express. Because it is the human element what makes us connect, discuss, learn, reason and shape our personal views.

Now, that does not, in ANY WAY, cancel out the journalistic responsibility to tell the truth and not ever tamper with information. However, as a reader, asking for objectivity in any human work is impossible. What we have to demand of those who write about this or any other conflict is not objectivity, but rather something much more difficult: that they understand the complexity of the situation. And I believe there are few conflicts as complex as that of Israel-Palestine today.

Nothing is ever black and white. There are ifs and buts, rights and wrongs. There are aspects that can never be understood. There is pain on both sides.



# THE HORROR

NOVEMBER 7TH, 2023

*"Lo pojedet?"* (aren't you afraid to go?), one of the soldiers escorting the group asks me, as we drive to southern Israel, the epicenter of the tragedy.

"No, I don't think I'll see anything I haven't already seen in pictures," I reply. "It's not about what you're going to see," he tells me with a mixture of anger and sadness, "it's the smell."

We arrive in Kfar Aza, one of the kibbutzim most affected by the tragedy. Exactly one month after October 7th. The only October 7th that's ever existed.

Today, it's a ghost land. No civilian can be seen for at least four miles around the area of Gaza — cities have been completely evacuated. It's just us and the soldiers.

We are here on an expedition authorized by the army, with helmets and bulletproof vests. We are here to see, to bear witness, as Elie Wiesel said, for the dead and for the living. We are about a mile away from the border, we hear the military blasts, loud and clear. Boom. Boom. Boom. Our bodies are armored. I wish there was something to armor the heart.

The smell of the massacre is sour. Like vinegar. Stagnant, rotten, burnt. The body coughs and retches at once. And yes, you can see things you haven't seen in photographs.

In Kfar Aza, a tiny kibbutz, 58 people were killed, 17 others were taken hostage. NONE of the 200 houses was spared from being

attacked or destroyed. Most cars were burned. Most people were shot or burned to death (or shot and then incinerated) inside their shelters. Or in their beds. There's still blood on the mattresses.

Burnt, shot, looted. Each and every house. None was spared. Each and every one of those houses belonged to civilians who took advantage of their proximity to the border to advocate for peace. They were involved in social projects for the people of Gaza. Irony turns into anger, which turns into impotence, which turns into devastation.

The horror froze time. The objects that survived the attack are still exactly in the same place. A painful reminder that a second before 6:30 a.m. on October 7th, just a second prior, there was life there. A rich life. A full life.

A stroller on the road, now full of bullets. Empty beer bottles on a table. Bicycles on porches (or what's left of them). An Israel flag with the word Shalom hanging outside one of the houses that now has a bloodied, bullet-riddled door.

A soccer ball as the sole survivor of an incinerated house. Horror, I realize today, is something that can be described, but can never be explained.

There's no photo, no image, no way to put into words the horror seen in Kfar Aza.

In Kfar Aza just like in Alumim, just like in Nir Oz, just like in Re'im, just like at Nova, just like in Sderot, just like here, and here, and there... How?

Horror can be seen, horror can be smelled, horror seeps through and freezes your bones the moment you see it before you. And there, in the midst of all the horror, a red-flowering tree stood tall, impervious to the tragedy.

*Itgadal be itkadash shemei rabam.* Exalted and hallowed be God's great name.





NOVEMBER 8TH, 2023

# KEEP IMA: A MOTHER'S GRIEF

I imagine all moms in the world are basically the same. Giving birth (or parenting) changes you in body and soul.

I imagine moms all over the world worry about their sons and daughters eating properly, staying warm, thriving. They want what's best for them, try to raise them as best they can, have a hard time letting them go, and (for sure) embarrass them by doing and saying the least appropriate things, by being old-fashioned, over the top, and incredibly uncool.

I also imagine (although I would never ever want to experience it) that the pain of having a child that has been kidnapped or has gone missing must be a living hell. The nightmare of feeling dead inside. The waiting.

And here we are together, Mexican and Israeli mothers. Those whose children disappeared at the hands of Mexican drug cartels and those whose children disappeared at the hands of Hamas. Such likeness. United in the same hell of pain. In a shared powerlessness. In the same endless search. In the same wondering that eats away at their soul and life. Doomed to endure a kind of pain that can't find an answer, a remedy, or be controlled. Where are they? How is she being treated? Is he cold, hungry, afraid? Will we ever see them again?

They go on strikes and protests, they hold banners with their faces. They ask everyone to remember their names. With hashtags on social media. Not knowing what works. Not knowing what doesn't.

And here we are, Mexican and Israeli mothers. Without answers, without a path forward, and with eternal hope.

Give me back my son, *narco*. Give me back my daughter, Hamas.

# *HALEVAI:* HOPEFULLY

NOVEMBER 9TH, 2023

This is my last post from the trip. I am already on the plane back home. Thank you to everyone who came on this journey with me.

In every language, there are words that are impossible to translate. They may be included in a dictionary, but those definitions don't explain their true meaning.

Halevai, in Hebrew, is one of them. The literal translation is "I wish" or "hopefully," but it means so much more than that. It's a wish from the heart, from your faith in God or the forces of the universe, from the eternal human desire for the world to be a better place.

A month after October 7th and after spending a few days in Israel, I return with more doubt than certainty, with more pain than comfort, but also with more love than hate.

Love for an incredible land and its people. Even while understanding the complexity and pain on the other side.

What comes after this? I have absolutely no idea, but this is my take:

1. Israel will win the war. At an extremely painful cost in lives for both sides, since there is no other choice but to obliterate Hamas and bring the hostages home (trying to achieve both objectives at once will be a dreadful trade off). There's also the millimetric complication of not opening battle fronts with Hezbollah, in the north, and with the rest of the Arab world.

The human cost of war is terrible. For Israelis, the pain is two-fold. On the one hand, troops are part of the civilian population, which means the death toll includes everyone's children. On the other, I don't know a single Israeli who isn't mourning the human losses in Gaza. But there is no other way.

I'm not saying that the end justifies the means, but the end of the war is not in a ceasefire, it's in the leverage Arab powerbrokers possess to dismantle Hamas, truly address the Palestinians' situation and release the hostages. But they (Hamas and the rest of the Arab world) have not the slightest intention of doing this. Instead of saying it to Netanyahu (who, by the way, is one of my least favorite people in the world) or posting about it on social media or demonstrating for a ceasefire, turn around and tell THAT to Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia. They are the ones who control the sources of terrorist funding. I'm going to say something that's so totally politically incorrect: Israel is doing the world AND Palestine a favor by finishing off Hamas.

They are the worst scum of the universe. Bloodthirsty, sadistic, corrupt, devoid of any moral compass and manipulative of their own people. They should be the ones charged with crimes against humanity for what they did on October 7th and for what they have done to Palestinians over the past 20 years.

The horror of Hamas penetrating the Western world is a ticking time bomb for all citizens of the world.

2. By the same token, Israel will lose the war. The war of global public perception which, however innocuous it may seem, has a huge cost for Israel as a country and for the Jewish Diaspora.

Rebuilding a war-torn country will be deeply painstaking. Once the war is over, Israel will have to fight a terrible political battle at home. It will have to rebuild its political leadership and reconfigure its social composition, the roles of religious and secular members. Accountability and ownership will be necessary in order to repair the moral fiber that was completely torn apart after October 7th.

3. Antisemitism will be rampant and it's going to get worse before it gets better. The analysis of why antisemitism exists is as long as the history of the Jewish people. Physical, verbal, and social attacks against all Diaspora Jews will be horrendous. Another trip to the bottom of the underworld.
4. Israel's relationship to Jews outside of Israel, and vice versa, is more important than ever. The symbiosis is undeniable. Israel needs the Jews of the world. The Jews of the world need Israel.
5. It's time to act, not talk. Each of us in our own daily battlegrounds. We all have to act to minimize whatever we can minimize. While Israelis are fighting, Jews in the Diaspora are contributing, providing physical or financial support, explaining, building bridges of understanding. Avoiding panic without lowering our guard.

And all citizens of the world have the responsibility of not falling prey to fake news. Of understanding that the situation is complex and painful, but that it cannot be an excuse to bring out the worst in human beings.

Finally, there's a phrase that has been ringing in my head for days now. In 1993, at the signing of the Oslo peace treaties, Yitzhak Rabin gave one of the most compelling political speeches in history, I know it by heart. In retrospect, the Oslo Accords were of little use (and we know what happened to Rabin). But there is one paragraph that, ironically, seems more relevant now than ever. It does not speak of borders, or security, or agreements, or politics. It simply says: *We who have fought against you, the Palestinians, we say to you today in a loud and clear voice: Enough of blood and tears. Enough.*

I know it won't happen today. The situation will get worse before it gets better. I know it won't happen tomorrow either. We don't have the necessary actors or conditions. But I also know that, eventually, that will be the only way.

*Halevai.*

# THE JEWISH CONUNDRUM

12 DE NOVIEMBRE DE 2023

La semana pasada me marcó mi hijo que estudia fuera de México. Last week, I got a call from my son who is studying abroad. I found it odd since he's quite independent, but he had sent me a text saying, "Can I call you? I have a quick, important question." I called him.

"Mom, do you think I should hide my tzion?" He was talking about the Star of David hanging around his neck. I didn't know how to answer. I've always taught my children not to hide who they are, but his fear really got to me. When we hung up, I cried.

This is not an isolated incident. True, his experience is minimal compared to what Jews around the world are facing. Violent attacks and destruction of synagogues. Beatings in the middle of the street. Pro-Palestine demonstrations that turn anti-Jewish (it's a very thin line). Strangers shouting slurs. Offensive graffiti and signs in streets all over the world. Ridiculous fake news. Paid hordes of trolls inciting virtual masses. Swastikas.

Murderous Jews.

Hitler was right.

Let's turn them into soap.

*Kill the Jews. Gas the Jews. Rape their daughters.*

This is not a wailing wall, it is the daily reality of what we as Jews experience today around the world, in some countries more so than in others.



Many people think that playing the “ANTISEMITISM” card right now diverts attention from Israel’s mistakes or responsibility regarding its management of Palestine. Gaslighting, they call it.

That’s not it. Not at all. Criticism against Israel (provided it’s informed, truthful and as objective as possible) is valid, necessary and as Jews we partake in it all the time. But the documented reality is that we are experiencing the strongest global wave of antisemitism of the last 80 years. Coincidence? We know it’s not.

Whenever there’s a conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors, antisemitic events multiply. They go beyond social media and start appearing in the *real* world. This does not happen with any other global conflict. I have never seen issues in Syria inciting “Kill the Muslims” graffiti (Assad is a Muslim, isn’t he?), or Iranians being harassed in the street over the Ayatollahs’ management, or people chanting “Death to the Russians” over the war in Ukraine, or Hindu temples being burned when problems arise between India and Pakistan.

What is it about the issues in Israel that causes such visceral reactions against Jews around the world? Jews who may or may not feel a connection to the State of Israel and who undoubtedly have very different views on the conflict.

Sadly, the answer is antisemitism. I’d love to find another reason. The line between hating the Jewish state and hating Jews is very thin.

The word antisemitism has become politically incorrect to say, but it has not gone away. In some groups it still prevails, in others it has become much more subtle, and that subtlety becomes particularly insidious in times of conflict.

Allow me to explain: The problem is not with the publicly flagrant antisemites. We are used to them, those who openly or in their private circles hate Jews. They are not the first and will certainly not be the last. The problem today lies with those who (despite having Jewish friends) have preconceived notions about what Jews are or aren’t, AND THAT is what makes them jump to biased, default conclusions about all conflicts involving Jews and the Jewish state.

And those preconceived notions make them easy targets for media manipulation and prone to either downplay the problem or keep quiet when Jews are attacked.

All Jews are rich, so they boast their greed for land.

Jews believe they are God’s chosen people, that is why they colonized Palestine.

Jews want to conquer the world, so why bother reading the most basic world history to learn about the conflict.

Jews control the media, that’s how they manipulate the news about Gaza.

There is a secret Jewish society, that is why world leaders support them.

Jews killed Christ (believe it or not this is the top argument I get in private attacks), so they are capable of killing anybody.

Having preconceived notions about any person or group is not only deceptive and idiotic, IT'S ALSO A FORM OF HATE because it fuels indifference and silence, which are both complicit in the worst tragedies in history.

And yes, I speak about antisemitism because I'm hurt by it, and I now have to experience it, but this issue is not exclusive to Jewish people. The same logic of preconceived notions as a prelude to hatred and silence affects Muslim mothers who want to protect their children from Islamophobia, African American mothers who want to defend their children from police violence, mothers of LGBTQ+ youth who witness the hatred aimed at their children for being who they are.

The Jewish conundrum is a universal conundrum about mutual understanding, about tolerance for those who are different from you, about respect, about the preconceived notions that breed violence, about people who don't speak up.

And this conundrum should be relevant to EVERYONE.



CHAPTER 3:

# THE NEW (AB)NORMAL

NOVEMBER 22ND, 2023 - FEBRUARY 6TH, 2024



*Coming back to Mexico after my first trip to Israel was like walking into the twilight zone.*

*My body and my mind were completely split. The former functioned mechanically to get things done, while the latter wandered into the darkest and most threatening corners of future possibilities.*

*The mental images haunted me. I couldn't tell anyone about it. I was ashamed to admit that I wasn't as brave as I had claimed to be when I said, "I'll be fine looking at what happened with my own eyes."*

*The logic of the world seemed lost to me. The line between innocence and guilt (which I'm not sure exists) seemed to have gone into a tailspin. Arguing and protesting had lost all purpose as a source of awareness and had become only aggression for aggression's sake.*

*I was choking back a scream: Yes, it is a tragedy. Yes, every death hurts. Yes, it's extremely complicated. But at what fucking point did the narrative change to find a way to defend Hamas at the expense of Israelis, at the expense of Palestinians themselves, at the expense of logic, at the expense of the peacemaking process?*

*Instead of shouting, I focused on writing.*

NOVEMBER 22ND, 2023

# ANTISEMITISM, LET'S CALL THINGS BY THEIR NAME

My grandfather, Jacobo, who escaped Lithuania in the 1920s and lost a significant part of his family to the Holocaust, lived his whole life wary of the non-Jewish world.

He was able to function perfectly in Mexico, the homeland that adopted him, and he never hid an ounce of his Judaism, but he always lived in fear. "You have to tread carefully as Jews," he would tell my brother and me, "you two don't understand." David, my brother, and I would say to him, "Come on, Zeide, you're overreacting. The world has changed, you're the one who doesn't understand."

A week after the October 7th attacks, I texted my brother, "I must confess something that's whirling in my mind: I'm glad my Zeide is gone now, this would have crushed him."

"I've been thinking the exact same thing," David replied.

Now, the word antisemitism is back in the conversation. And fear, the fear that never went away, has resurfaced. That fear that runs in our veins. Because two thousand years of persecution do not go unnoticed in the collective memory.

"It's anti-Zionism," some cry out. "It's antisemitism," others shout.

How can we explain antisemitism when so much has been written about it, and yet it is so little understood? How can we explain antisemitism when it is such a visceral subject but must be discussed in a cold and rational way?

For two thousand years, the wisest sages (Jewish and otherwise) have tried to explain and decipher antisemitism. They have not come up with an answer. I couldn't possibly come up with one myself, but here's what I think.

To be antisemitic is to take two actions towards Jewish people: view them through preconceived and generalized notions, and judge their actions (our actions, the actions of the Jewish state) by double standards. Having preconceived notions is the surest way for mass manipulation and fake news to breed and take root in society, both virtual and real. Measuring Israel, its actions and decisions (in good and bad times) by a standard that is not applied to any other country is the surest way to give in to fallacious arguments.

And yes, ladies and gentlemen, feminists, activists and members of the LGBTQ+ community, progressive students, social media intellectuals, holders of the universal truth and other champions of the motto "I'm not antisemitic, I'm anti-Zionist!"

BEING ANTI-ZIONIST MEANS BEING ANTISEMITIC. Sorry to break it to those who hide behind anti-Zionism as their moral defense.

Read carefully: Being anti-Zionist means being antisemitic. Jewish people have the historical and legal right to have a Jewish state in the geographical location where Israel is. And to deny the Jewish people this right constitutes antisemitism.

We can discuss it all you want, and I accept all opinions and disagreements over the very painful side effects of war, the political mistakes, the mismanagement, the border issues, the annexed territories, West Jerusalem. Israel is definitely not an irreproachable country (as no other is).

But the rallying cry (let's be clear here, it's not a cute hashtag, it's a rallying cry) *From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free*, denies the Jewish people's right to part of its identity and to its pillar of survivability.

Today, I speak up against antisemitism because I'm now experiencing it and being hurt by it, but this issue is not exclusive to Jewish people. Antisemitism is the canary in society's tolerance mine.

And, again, this is an issue that should be relevant to EVERYONE.

You were right, Zeide Jacobo. You were right.



# WHAT IS LOST AND WHAT IS REGAINED

NOVEMBER 25TH, 2023

It feels rather banal to write about what I have lost in this debacle, sitting at home, with a cup of coffee, healthy, my entire family with me, when so many others have lost so much. But I know that, these days, we all have lost *something*. I hope my losses resonate with you.

In addition to the horrific October 7th massacre and the intrinsic horrors of the war in Gaza, the last few weeks have been laden with intense personal pain. From what I've realized about friends, acquaintances, colleagues, followers and people I follow.

The surprise of their reactions, biases, opinions and silence has been extremely painful. I don't know a single Jewish person who is not sharing their pain over the reaction of many of their close ones. In the last few days, I have given much thought to all that I (we) have lost.

"Lost" is the wrong word. Lost is more like when you lose your car keys and search far and wide until you find them. I have painfully let go of many of the people and things that were part of my daily life. Some of them were quite important, some others were banal.

An online newspaper I used to write for. A group of feminist women (the smartest in Mexico) of which I was a member. Close friends. Buddies. Colleagues. Contacts from work. LGBTQ+ friends to whom I always considered myself an unconditional ally. A bunch of social media followers. Opinion leaders and content creators I admired. Close relatives. My lawyer. My proctologist.

I let them go because of their overwhelming silence towards me. These were people I always tried to help, in big or small ways (and no, I'm not keeping score), and who, in the days following the massacre, couldn't find 30 seconds, some sensitivity or some empathy to speak or write to me. It's not like I expected them to take a political or public stance on the matter but perhaps just ask, "How are you?" "How is your family in Israel?"; "I'm here for you"; "Sending you love"; "I have no words"; or just a simple sticker. It's not because I expect to be the center of anyone's life, but I don't want people who are not capable of empathy in my life.

I let go of those who post fake, biased, passive-aggressive or just plain bitchy information about the conflict — I sent them packing. No, not everyone has to agree with me. Yes, I understand the complexity and conflicting opinions that surround this topic, but I don't want to be friends with people with poor judgment. People who just parrot whatever they read without having (a) the common sense and (b) the intention to ask questions.

I have lost faith in the "feminist movement" because of its double standards when it comes to crimes against Jewish women and its cowardice to speak out.

I have lost my sense of belonging as a Jew in a global world I used to feel part of as an equal and in a democratic way, regardless of my religion. Now, I realize it wasn't like that, that I am still, in the eyes of many, The Jew.

I have lost my sense of physical and emotional safety — *one for all and all for one* — due to the increasing and ever more dangerous episodes of real antisemitism in every corner of the world.

I have lost my temper. Badly. In several discussions, anger and passion have trumped my intelligence. I've been inches away from becoming #CrazyLady.

A week or so after October 7th, wrestling between anger and pain, I began to make a list of all the people I was erasing from my life. A full list in my phone's notes app. I furiously wrote the names down.

Those who know my husband, Alfredo, are aware of this, but for those of you who don't know him, he's much smarter than me and is the regulating force of my life. He told me: "Why don't you rather make a list of the people who have surprised you for the better?"

And he was absolutely right, because within the long list of losses there's also a list of things I have regained, not as long, but much richer.

Those acquaintances who, without hesitation, sent me a message of support. My accountant, who asks how I'm doing every time she sends me a wire transfer code. The non-Jewish friend who changed his profile picture to an Israeli flag. The friends who have put up with my breakdowns (see previous line about losing my temper) without checking me into a mental institution. Those who keep texting me to ask how I'm holding up. The followers who send me

heartfelt good wishes and ASK ME about the topic if they don't understand it. Those influencers that have risked and lost thousands of followers for taking an uncompromising stance. The non-Jewish people who take a stand that is not necessarily pro-Israel but is steadfast against Hamas and antisemitism. Those Jewish friends and acquaintances I wasn't particularly close to before, but with whom I now exchange texts almost every day to share news stories or memes or a *shabbat shalom*.

I've regained my faith in the enormous power of a stranger's simple words.

I've reinforced my conviction that it is profoundly important to take a stand on the issues that matter to us. Not only on those that concern and hurt us personally, but also on those that concern and hurt someone else.

I've also regained part of my Jewish identity, which I had not forgotten about but, admittedly, was a little rusty. I have regained the importance of Judaism in my life. Learning from it, living it. Passing on its wisdom and intelligence.

Being The Jew in the eyes of others has reminded me that yes, I am indeed, and proudly so.

Counting your blessings beats counting your losses.

DECEMBER 3RD, 2023

# THE JEWISH CONSPIRACY... TO WHICH I WAS NEVER INVITED

I've heard the phrase "Jewish conspiracy to [enter your gossip of choice here]" so many times that, despite being a Jew, I'm starting to believe it actually exists. These days, with the barrage of October 7th horrors, that subject and phrase are resurfacing once again on social media, TikToks, hashtags and in ordinary conversation.

Those goddamned Jews want to take over the world.

They run the whole media, those bastards.

*#JewishControllingTheWorld #JewishControllingUS*

Apparently, we don't just want to control Gaza, we want to conquer all Arab countries, take over the entire world, manipulate elections, kill children and drink their blood, control the media and crypto.

I am obviously interested in participating in such an ambitious conspiracy. Where are they meeting? Who is in on it? Are the meetings by Zoom or in-person? What's the dress code? What do they serve for lunch? Is there an order of business? Who's taking notes? And, most importantly, why the HELL haven't I been invited?

I don't have the list of requirements with me, BUT: I am Jewish (99% Ashkenazi Jew, according to my DNA tests), I'm good at business, with connections in all kinds of social circles, I speak 3 languages, I'm a bad-ass-bitch and I can act like a saint.

I assume these must be prerequisites. I mean, if you're looking for someone to help subdue the world, I think my profile is pretty per-

fect to contribute to the cause. What I lack in bank account funds, I make up for with plenty of energy, willingness and strategic planning.

Besides, I provide a modernizing vision (the pink hair is not a coincidence). I can be part of the conspiracy 2.0 (better suited for the 21st century). I can draw up a business plan and pimp it. How about a new logo? Friendlier colors? Cartoon versions of all participants with the typical Jewish nose, yet cosmetically-improved? A full brand makeover. We should make everything more Instagrammable.

I would start by changing the name. It should no longer be the *Jewish Conspiracy of the Wise Men of Zion*, it should now be called the Jewish Conspiracy of the Wise People of Zion. I mean, at this point in the struggle for equity, I think there should be gender parity among the connivers: 50% the usual men, 50% the new wave of women who have a lot to contribute. We could also start considering taking over the world of fashion and cosmetics, as they're million-dollar industries.

If there's no gender parity among the conspirators, feminist collectives will need to be alerted, you know, those same ones that have been so silent about the atrocious acts of sexual violence committed on October 7th, so that NOW they can make a fuss.

I would also modernize the purpose behind all that conquering and takeover. I would turn it into, in today's corporate language, a unicorn conspiracy, so that it could have even more exponential growth. Perhaps we could be listed on the New York Stock Exchange (an eminently Jewish city), expand our areas of control, and merge with some of the other conspiracies of the world.

Just give me a spreadsheet and I can make extremely accurate financial projections. Forget about self-imposed limitations. The sky (and the netherworld) would be the limit for us.

I would also find out the caloric content of the non-Jewish children blood we're accused of drinking. I mean, it's one thing to conspire, it's another entirely to cheat on your diet. Is there gluten in it? We should accommodate those who are intolerant.

Lastly, I would try to solve a small issue that has always troubled the Conspiracy: how is it possible that, being the all-powerful Jews that we are, we haven't been able to keep our existence a secret? We have to do something about that. I don't know, we could talk to Elon Musk, or Zuckerberg, or Gates so they help us work in the shadows, or we could come up with a watertight alibi.

All done! I have my PowerPoint presentation ready with proposals for the first meeting I'm invited to. My outfit is well thought out. Black and ominous. That's how I always dress (see? I'm IDEAL!).

If any of the conspirators are reading this (or if someone knows someone who knows any conspirators), please call me and include me in the next meeting. Since you control the entire world, I guess it won't be hard for you to find my phone number or email. Seeing

ADINA CHELMINSKY

how things are faring lately, financially speaking, I could use a bit of extra cash.

Today marks 60 days since the October 7th massacre, the onset of the Gaza war debacle and the abysmal growth of global antisemitism.

Sixty days of death. Sixty days of war (which hurts so much). Sixty days in which 110 people have remained hostage. Sixty days in which blood has not dried, in which many bodies have not been properly buried. Today is also the first day of Hanukkah. The festival of lights, the feast of miracles.

I don't know if this is a matter of coincidence, or irony, or if it's a message. Or if I'm just trying to connect the dots and find forced answers and explanations to such a painful and incomprehensible situation.

This is what runs through my mind: In Hebrew, each letter of the alphabet has a numerical value and meaning, 60 is represented by the letter Samekh.

*Samekh*: A perfect circle. No beginning and no end. Like the spirit of the Jewish people, through which again and again and again we have overcome tragedy and adversity to move forward, as a people and as individuals. An unbreakable circle. A perpetual continuum.

*Samekh* also means "containment." Its literal translation (taken from the dictionary) is to be able; to sustain, to contain; to be capable of; to prevail; to overcome; to comprehend.

I cannot think of more concise, concrete and exact actions for what we need to do today: trust in our ability to move forward; sustain and contain each other; know that we will prevail, overcome what we are going through, and, someday, understand what happened. *Samekh*: The continuous circle, the containment.

Tonight, we'll pray: *She'asa nisim la'avoteinu ba'yamim ha'heim ba'z'man ha'ze*. The prayer about the miracles God performed in the past and continues to work today. Right now, immersed in the pain, the anguish, and the WTF of it all, speaking of miracles may seem redundant and even laughable.

Today, in view of everything that is happening, I find it hard to believe in God's miracles (sorry, I know it's sacrilegious to say so, but if I'm going to hell anyway for thousands of other reasons, saying this is *peccata minuta*).

What I know for sure, beyond a shadow of a doubt, is that we, as human beings, are capable of working miracles for each other. The miracle of human connection. The miracle of never giving up as a people. The miracle of the non-Jewish friend who reaches out. The miracle of my newfound connection to my Judaism that was half-forgotten before. The miracle of the voices of sanity that challenge the cowardice of the silent. The miracle of common sense (which so many people seem to have lost). The miracle of rebuilding what was broken (physically and emotionally) and building it back stronger and better. And I long, with all my heart, for the miracle of peace. For everyone.

Because, just as I wish for miracles for the Jewish people, I also wish for the miracle that Gazans may overcome the deadly stranglehold of Hamas and the ideology of jihad that has hurt them/us so much.

Miracles are not like cake slices that you hand out until they run out. You getting a miracle doesn't mean I don't get one. On the contrary, miracles are like the light of the candles we'll light today, one candle can light another one without losing its brightness. What's more, a candle that lights another candle only strengthens the intensity of the light.

Albert Einstein said there are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.

I hope we all choose the second one.

May the Hanukkah candles be a guiding light through the darkness we walk in today.





Samaj letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

# THE REASON FOR EVIL

DECEMBER 9TH, 2023

A couple of days before flying to Israel to see the aftermath of the massacre committed by Hamas, I realized that maybe, just maybe, it would be a good idea to talk to my psychiatrist. Living in my head is not easy.

I've been seeing my psychiatrist for years. Not only is he a great doctor, but he also gets my sense of humor. He is not Jewish, but he knows my psyche perfectly well, so he's aware that Judaism (especially since October 7th) has become more prevalent in there. Moreover, his geopolitical opinion on what is happening in the Middle East is consistent, smart and akin to my position.

So touching base with him, prior to my trip, was not only a good idea (that would be an understatement), but also the responsible thing to do for my mental health.

I scheduled a session to, as the saying goes, ask for forgiveness, not permission. The ticket was purchased, and the suitcase was packed. I wanted to talk to him to vent about what was swirling around in my head and get a prescription for more sleeping pills (controlled substance) in case my psyche went nuts in the middle of the Negev.

I started my session of October 28th, three weeks after October 7th, talking about my anguish, sadness and helplessness over what had happened in Israel, over my children's situation in their American colleges, over the attacks I was getting on social media, over feeling furious at the silence of feminists, over feeling lost in the world.

I word-vomited for 40 minutes, uninterrupted. I finished my story

by saying, "Doc, one last thing. This will probably make you think I'm crazy." He laughed. "I'm leaving in 3 days to Israel to see what's going on with my own eyes."

His response surprised me. "Chelminsky, I think that's an excellent idea, it's the best thing you can do right now. But I do suggest you do two things." See, psychiatrists don't force us to do anything, they merely suggest.

"First, write down everything you feel. You may use a piece of paper, your phone, or a scroll. It may be for other people to read or just for you. But whatever you feel, let it out and write it down." That's how all these writings were born. "But, most importantly, do me a favor: Don't try to find an explanation for evil. Don't tie yourself up in knots trying to find the reason behind the facts. Evil has no explainable reason. If you, in your rationality, try to look for it, you will drive yourself crazy."

"Crazier?," I replied. We both laughed.

I have thought about this conversation over and over again. Not only while I was in Israel, but also every day after. When I hear stories of the appalling sexual abuse against Israeli women. When I think of the hostages. When I see, too, the pictures of what is happening in Gaza. When I hear the context and cavils of intellectuals and university directors. When I see protestors shouting things they don't even understand, and yet cry out with such hatred. When I talk to loved ones, and they ask me (as if I have the answer): "But why?"

I strive to follow my doctor's suggestion and try to understand that sometimes there is no reason for meanness, stupidity, bigotry and twisted rhetoric. It goes beyond labeling things as "antisemitism" or "wokeness" or "geopolitical problems." **SOMETIMES IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND A CAUSE FOR HATRED.**

If you try, you'll go crazy. Crazier, in my case.

But, although finding the cause is impossible, there is one thing we can, and must, do. Take steadfast action instead of racking our brains trying to find reasons for hatred or incoherence or human dumbassery.

It is what it is.

Instead of getting lost in rhetoric, we should focus on action. Raise our voices sensibly and assertively. In the right form and with the right content. Leave unwinnable arguments aside, not because we are not right, but because harsh words should fall on deaf ears.

Educate our young to face the world they will now face. With identity and purpose.

Act with caution, NOT with paranoia.

Build bridges and open channels of dialogue that take into account the complexity of the situation. Yes, there are issues that do not require context for people to speak out, but there are others where the situation is complex, and we must consider that and explain it.

Do things to let the world know that in Judaism there's a universal commitment to *tikkun olam*, to repair the world for everyone.

There may be no reason for evil, but the right action will always be a reason for being.

"PEACE IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF  
CONFLICT; IT IS THE PRESENCE OF  
JUSTICE!"

WILLIAM FAULKNER

DECEMBER 17TH, 2023

# YES, I HURT FOR GAZA

Many people think that we Jews (especially adamantly pro-Israel ones) are immune to the pain and tragedy in Gaza. Worse yet, there are others who think we take joy or morbid pleasure in watching the warfare. *They deserve it, they brought it on themselves, they should suck it up.*

They couldn't be more wrong.

And no, I can't speak for all Jews, but out of the people with whom I'm in frequent contact, both in my immediate and more distant circles, I don't know a single person who finds any kind of pleasure or comfort in the situation there. War is horrifying.

Even seeing footage of dead or apprehended Hamas terrorists (who are the absolute scum of the universe) does not give me any kind of pleasure. It gives me some peace of mind to know they are being thwarted (for our sake and the world's), yet not a shred of happiness.

Jewish religion hinges on two universal principles. No matter the country, the ideology or the level of religiosity, these are foundational to everything we aspire to be (and no, we don't always succeed):

- The first is the concept of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. And no, the phrase is not *tikkun olam yehudi* (repair the Jewish world). It's *tikkun olam*, period. Repair the world for everyone. Make it better. Leave it a bit more ordered, inhabitable and fair than how we found it. Act for others.

- The second is the *pikuach nefesh* commandment, save a soul and preserve life, which takes precedence above all other tenets. Human life is the most sacred thing in Judaism. Again, it is not *pikuach nefesh yehudi* (save Jewish lives). It's *pikuach nefesh*, period. Consecrate all life, first and foremost.

War, any war, undermines these two fundamental tenets of Jewish life. Despite all the humanitarian precautions the Israeli army takes in its attacks, war is bullshit. People die, there's starvation, entire cities and futures are destroyed.

It's vile.

I have read a lot of anti-Zionists who, with a hidden whiff of antisemitism, say that we Jews have gone from victims to victimizers. So, what they're saying is that, somehow, this war is morbidly vindicating us or showing who we "really" are. That we are doing to Gaza what the Nazis did to us (see all the marches with swastika posters), that we want to get revenge without any reasoning whatsoever.

No. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Jews are not going from victims to victimizers, we are moving to defend ourselves, so that we're not burned, raped, massacred and crushed to death.

And no, Israel is by no means perfect and has made a thousand mistakes throughout history. In a 75-year conflict it is IMPOSSIBLE to signal someone as untainted, or to separate the good guys from the bad guys. I have said many times that Netanyahu should not only be replaced as prime minister, but also tried and excommunicated (this is just my opinion).

In this tragedy of errors there are few *universal truths*, one of them is that the consequences of war are horrifying. And nobody, absolutely nobody is happy, or comfortable, or immune to the tragedy.

I hurt for Gaza. Very much so.

My pain for Gaza did not start the moment the Israeli offensive against Hamas began (which is when the whole world and social media started worrying and expressing their concern). It runs much deeper.

I ache for Gaza because of the war and the deaths and the famine and the destruction.

I hurt for Gaza because of the poison that Hamas (and jihadist groups) have fed to entire generations. Making them suck on the tit of hatred from birth. I hurt for Gaza because whoever is raised on hatred loses all chance for empathy and distinguishing between right and wrong.

I hurt for Gaza because its citizens, especially women and children, are used as human shields and cannon fodder to make a media and political statement as a means to gain who knows what. Women,

children and elders are the first in the line of fire. I hurt for Gaza because the only thing your government is NOT interested in is safeguarding the lives of the people it claims to represent. To them a dead Palestinian (especially if it goes viral on TikTok) is worth more than any fight for the living.

I hurt for Gaza because Palestinians have become the bargaining chip of all Arab countries against the Western world. Iran, Syria, Jordan and Egypt, who are all so good at championing the Palestinian cause, don't give a single damn about the welfare of the Palestinians. They don't provide them with shelter, they don't help them prosper, they are not the voice of reason in the face of Hamas manipulation. They only care about Palestinians for the political and barter value they can extract from them when dealing with international institutions.

I ache for Gaza because its leaders (who have had absolute freedom of action since Israel's withdrawal in 2007) have embezzled billions out of the funds granted by the international community for the region's progress to fill their own pockets. I hurt for Gaza because these same leaders, from the comfort of Doha, build war tunnels instead of water treatment or power plants. I hurt for Gaza because money that's meant for schools is spent on missiles that, ironically, are launched from schools. I ache for Gaza because this theft is not limited to material goods. Palestinians have also been robbed of the possibility of future progress and, with it, the possibility of peace.

Gaza hurts, not only because of the October 7th massacre against our people, but because of the decades of massacre perpetrated against them. The abuse against women, against the LGBTQ+ community, against anyone who dares speak out.

Golda Meir once said a phrase that rings in my ears every day: *We can forgive the Arabs for killing our children. We cannot forgive them for forcing us to kill their children. We will only have peace with the Arabs when they love their children more than they hate us.*

That is very, very, very painful.





Adina Chelminsky  
@AdinaChel



I have read a lot of people (anti-Zionists with a hidden whiff of antisemitism) who say: Jews went from victims to victimizers.

No, ladies and gentlemen, we Jews are moving to defend ourselves, so we're not burned, raped, massacred and crushed to death.

With the extremely painful consequences that entails.

11:19 AM · Dec 17, 2023

DECEMBER 21ST, 2023

# MERRY CHRISTMAS... FROM THE OTHER SIDE

When my kids were younger, every Friday of December (since mid-November, actually) on the way to *Shabbat* dinner, our favorite thing to do, both on the way there and on the way back, was to count the number of houses that were already decorated for Christmas and marvel at them.

We counted them, compared how many more had been decorated since the previous week, and discussed our favorites and those we thought were too over the top.

I think there's no better example of what my life has been like as a Jew at Christmas time. Driving to our *Shabbat* dinner rejoicing in the Christmas preparations of others, which somehow also became part of our weekly tradition.

To this day (many years later), when I want to give my children directions, I tell them: "Turn right at the house that had that giant Santa on the roof."

Being Jewish during the Christmas season is strange.

You don't partake in the celebration, but the spirit is contagious. You don't put up a tree, but you are aware of all the decorations on all the nearby trees and on social media. I don't know anyone who doesn't hum Christmas carols at this time of year (I have a Christmas playlist that I dust off every December).

You are never too aware of being *the other*, but, at the same time, you never feel too involved in a celebration that is not your own.

Mass, for example, is completely foreign to me, emotionally, but going to a *posada* gets me excited even before I drink crazy amounts of Christmas punch. You are never so aware of the religious and gift-giving differences, but the similarities and commonalities are also never so evident.

Because no matter which representation of God you pray to, at the end of the day we all seek the same thing in life: to be guided by the light, to be surrounded by love and family... and to eat delicious food until you have to unbutton your pants.

Being able to experience Christmas as a spectator (sometimes actively, when invited to an event, sometimes just peering through my car's window) is one of the greatest privileges of my life. Not just because I get to understand what's important to my non-Jewish loved ones and celebrate with them, but also because in understanding the other, despite or precisely because of the differences between us, we cement our own identity, gain a better understanding of who we are, reinforce our values, and create an inclusive and tolerant joint community.

Seeing those differences is how we confirm the golden rule of any religion: "Love thy neighbor as thyself" (and you shall not envy the gifts under the Christmas tree).

To all my friends celebrating Christmas: Thank you for letting me be a part of your lives and learning from each one of you. May your homes and hearts be filled with love, joy and affection and, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks used to say, may we all help light up the world.

# BAD EDUCATION

DECEMBER 23RD, 2023

In this war of Tyrians versus Trojans (read, pro- and anti-Israel), no trench is without battle. Military operations on the ground in Gaza, missiles in Israeli skies, protests (often violent) in the streets of the world and, as a sign of the times, on social media.

It's impossible to understand what we are going through without analyzing all these battles as a whole. I believe, without being a political analyst, that this is the most multidimensional conflict in history. All these battles give a lot to talk about. All of them worry me, each with its own degree of horror, costs and consequences. But the only one I believe I can offer a moderately informed opinion on is the last one: the battle on social media. Although it does not compare to the others in terms of sheer pain and horror, it is the one that affects most of us.

Spoiler alert 1: This war is lost already.

Even without the floods of paid trolls and bots that light the anti-Israel fuse, which is then replicated and re-replicated, it's a fact that public opinion is biased against Israel.

And opinions will become more polarized as the war rages on. For whatever reason, but that's a subject for another time.

Spoiler alert 2: Many of us are making it worse.

Fighting the battle to "win" or to flip public opinion or to change people's preconceived notions ON SOCIAL MEDIA is the stone of Sisyphus. Getting sucked in by replies upon replies to comments

upon comments is useless. It only polarizes and further entrenches people's opinions.

Moreover, civility in social media battles is lost pretty much immediately, making the debate even more aggressive and useless. NO ONE IN THE HISTORY OF SOCIAL MEDIA HAS EVER CHANGED THEIR MIND ON ANYTHING BECAUSE OF SOMEONE COMMENTING ON THEIR POSTS OR SENDING THEM PRIVATE MESSAGES.

Trying to educate people on social media is impossible, useless and exhausting. Even more so when it comes to such a complex conflict. Even more so when we have lost all decorum. Even more so when there is a visceral element so prevalent in all pro and con arguments.

Note: This does not mean we should keep our heads down. Not at all. Not at all. Not at all. It means we should pick the battles that are worth fighting. We have to get off social media and start explaining what we think in our personal spaces. That's where the battle is.

Not in trying to educate @FreePalestineHunk or @MyQueenPalestine710, but the people in our close circles, my neighbor, my colleague, my friend. Building bridges of mutual listening. Because there are valid arguments on the other side, too.

It's in being well-informed. Just as we accuse others of fake news, we should make sure we do not fall into the same trap.

It's in refining our judgement. Reading what makes us uncomfortable. Reading a lot from other perspectives.

I believe there is no text more important to read than the one that makes us uncomfortable and leads to reflection. Talking with our close ones out of a desire to build bridges of bilateral understanding.

Understanding that, sometimes, we shall agree to disagree.

No one can educate anyone else, but perhaps with direct dialogue we can understand, and make the other understand, that we have more similarities than differences.

JANUARY 2ND, 2024

# FEMINISTS ARE RIGHT: HAMAS RAPED NO ONE

Esteemed and admired feminist friends, you with whom I have marched hand in hand in every demonstration, with whom I have signed all released statements regarding any and all injustices against any woman anywhere in the world.

Yes, you. Those who, like me, still fight for gender equality, justice and safety for women every day. Those who want us all to be safe, those of us who know we cannot be abused or attacked because of where we go or how we dress.

You who have been so silent about what happened to Israeli women (and men) on October 7th and what has been happening to the hostages every single day since. You who call for context, trivializing sexual violence and making it a circumstantial issue.

You, feminist, international, public and non-government organizations and collectives. You who deny that Hamas committed mass rape on October 7th.

I am here to apologize. You are absolutely right. Hamas did not rape any woman (or man) on October 7th. Not a single one.

You are right. That's pure Zionist propaganda.

WHAT HAMAS COMMITTED WAS THE MOST BRUTAL ACT OF VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL BARBARITY. YOU ARE RIGHT, IT WAS NOT RAPE.

They raped women and so many people with such cruelty that they

broke their pelvic bones. They gang raped. They vaginally and anally raped little girls and old women. They filled women's vaginas with nails and screws. They raped a woman and then proceeded to insert a gun into her vagina and shoot her. The bullet exited through her head.

They raped a woman while cutting off her breasts and playing with them. They cut off a man's penis and put it in his mouth before killing him. They cut off penises, testicles, breasts.

They inserted any objects they had on hand into the ani and vaginas of multiple men and women. Before killing them. While killing them. After killing them. While their children watched. While their children died.

None of them was just raped. None was just mutilated.

You are absolutely right.

I hope you accept my apology. Now you can all go back — individually and collectively — to looking for the context that best allows you to justify the barbarity (which was not rape): They were colonizers, Hamas is the resistance. It's not that big a deal. There is no verbal proof of the dead women.

You can go back to begging and shouting and demanding that a woman not be judged for how she was dressed when she was attacked — though she can be judged for being Israeli — and to beating your chest over gender quotas and misused pronouns in public conversation.

"LET ME FALL IF I MUST. THE ONE I  
WILL BECOME WILL CATCH ME."

BAAL SHEM TOV



With the beginning of the war came a huge onslaught of antisemitic attacks on my social media. Some of them laughable, others concerning, others made me want to cry.

I never pay attention to most of them, BUT there are some that provide an opportunity to make the obvious evident.

•

January 18th, 2024

Hi Adina. I've been following you for a long time now and I love everything you post. But honestly, I think you kind of digress when you talk about the hostages in Israel. Don't take this the wrong way, I just feel like it's not what your account is all about. Hugs.

3:38 PM

### On taking a stand on controversial issues

For the last 3 months I've had a constant aching in my soul. Anguish and pain, 24 hours a day. I can't get rid of it, I've tried everything. Sometimes, in the middle of the day during the most mundane activity, I feel this tightness in my chest and tears come out.

This is because of what's happening in Israel, because of the terror of October 7th, because of the over 100 days of torment the hostages have lived through and, believe it or not, because of the civilian deaths in Gaza.

Every time I write about it, I get messages like these (on top of the dozens of death threats with the moniker f\*Cking Zionist bitch). I'm not a macro influencer (I have a relatively small following compared to the big content creators), but I think this perfectly shows what I'm made of and what I think we all need to be made of.

I don't know what "my account is all about", as your message says, but what my life is all about is taking a stand. Taking a stand for things that affect me directly (Israel and antisemitism, for example) and for things that don't affect me directly but hurt the people I love (LGBTQ+ rights, for example).

Part of my pain these days is how many non-Jewish friends with "influence" have been silent or oblivious about what is happening to women who were taken hostage and raped in Israel. So as not to get into trouble or controversy or lose followers.

So, my account is about sharing memes, jokes, poetry, famous quotes and various quibbles, but, ABOVE ALL, it's about raising one's voice. Regardless of how many followers are lost in the process.

We raise our voices to defend what is ours and what is others! That's what I was taught growing up, and it is the only legacy I can leave to my children. TAKE A STAND, SPEAK UP FOR YOURSELF AND, WHEN NECESSARY, SPEAK UP FOR YOUR FRIENDS, FOR WHAT IS RIGHT IN THE WORLD.

I will never stop speaking out for fear of the consequences and, EVEN LESS SO, if the consequence is losing social media followers.

5:07 PM

After a short ceasefire and various negotiations, in December 2023, fifty hostages were released. At the beginning of the year, the hostage situation worsens and the prospects for further exchanges become hopeless.



**Adina Chelminsky**  
@AdinaChel



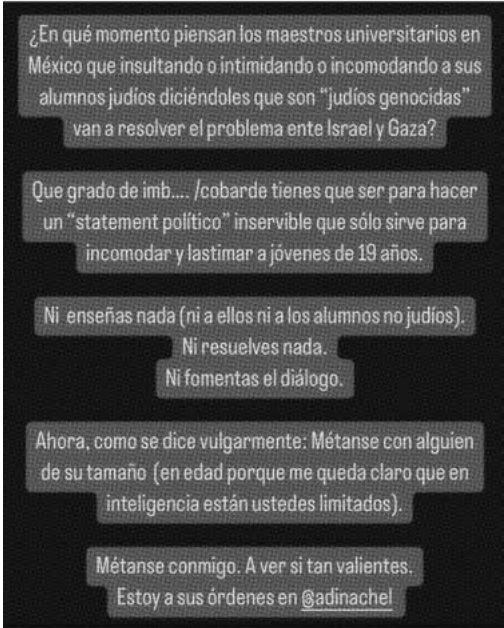
What a tiny heart (and brain) you must have NOT to raise your voice for the kidnapped and raped Israelis because "you hurt for Gaza."

One can understand the complexity of the situation and empathize with both tragedies. Not raising your voice for the hostages is just cowardice.

7:13 PM · Jan 19, 2024



**adinachel** ✓  
Mexico, CDMX



Liked by **yvonne.I** and **1,196 others**

**adinachel** How can college teachers in Mexico believe that insulting or intimidating or making their Jewish students feel uncomfortable by pointing them out in the classroom and calling them "genocidal Jews" is going to solve the problem between Israel and Gaza?

What a grade A ass... /coward you must be to make such a useless political statement that is only good for hurting and making 19-year-olds uncomfortable.

You're not teaching anything (to them or to non-Jewish students). You're not contributing to a solution. And you're not encouraging dialogue.

Crudely speaking: Pick on someone your own size (I mean age-wise, because it's clear that you are quite limited in terms of brains).

Pick on me instead if you're that brave. I am at your service.

January 22, 2024



**Adina Chelminsky**  
@AdinaChel



Empathy is not a slice of cake. If you raise your voice or step up for a cause, it's not like you run out of it and can't empathize with anybody else.

Empathy is the icing that should cover everything in your life and guide the path of your positions and actions with consistency and humanity.

10:47 AM · Jan 29, 2024

# PINK-HAIRED JUDAISM

JANUARY 23RD, 2024

On October 7th, 2023, more than 1000 Jews died in Israel.

One was born.

Me.

There, among the ruins of ravaged kibbutzim and "Kill the Jews" chants in cities around the world, I found my Judaism.

I used to feel Jewish. Now, I am Jewish.

I don't know how to convey that subtle difference in my newfound Judaism. I dress the same, I get up every day the same as before, I swear and curse with the same ease and fierceness, and yet I am a different person. More aware and proud of the role that being Jewish plays in my life.

My newfound Jewish side is a Pyrrhic victory considering all that's been lost. A tiny gain that makes no difference in the millenary history of the Jewish people, but which has made a radical difference in my life. In my sense of belonging. In my sense of agency and commitment.

And no, I'm not kosher now. And yes, I still break 9 out of the 10 commandments. But I had never felt so Jewish. So twinned with all things Jewish. So close to Israel (I'll leave the debatable political issues for another text).

A pink-haired Judaism.



I read Rabbi Sacks while getting my hair dyed. I use Wikipedia to learn about the great rabbis. I analyze the parashah (prayer) of the week by googling on *Shabbat*. I got a tzion tattoo on my left hand. My favorite time of the week is going to pray in the temple on Friday afternoons and hearing the Rabbi preach. I have pink hair and a blue heart. *Cajol be varod*. Blue and pink.

It may seem like a strange kind of Judaism, contradictory and probably a source of dismay for many traditional Jews. But here is where I found my little piece of heaven.

These days, I try to talk to Jews of all types and levels of religiosity. And, despite how far we may be ideologically, I had never felt so close to them. I try to listen to them, understand them, find common ground and not get caught up in the differences.

A delayed-action Judaism. It took me 50 years to strengthen my conviction and connection to the Jewish people. A peculiar and very personal Judaism, yet an undeniably clear guide in my life.

A type of Judaism that is not necessarily about religion, but rather about peoplehood. Brotherhood and sisterhood, not in spite of religious differences, but because of them.

This neo-Judaism is making me ask myself questions and learn. I haven't found any answers. But that is what the Jewish people are: the people of questioning and perplexities, not the people of certainties. We are the people of constant learning, not of absolute truths.

And no, I don't know if I believe in the existence of God, but I do know, with NO DOUBT WHATSOEVER, that I firmly believe in the Jewish people: I believe in our millenary wisdom from which I try to learn (the great Jewish sages, Hillel, Rambam, Spinoza, Kaplan, Sacks, Schneerson and so many more) and which has guided the modern world's way of thinking.

I believe in our connection to each other, in our solidarity, in our moral compass. I believe in our commitment to improving the world around us and in our ability to connect and help our fellow men and women (Jewish and non-Jewish). I believe, beyond a shadow of a doubt, in the tenacity of the Jewish people to move forward, to defeat those who want us dead. To forgive. To resolve. To find alignment amongst disagreement. To, eventually, seek peace.

Many people, Jewish and non-Jewish, who I know both personally and on social media, ask me if I don't think that this new path in my life seems a bit dramatic and ridiculous. That talking so much about Judaism will take away my groove, that this form of Judaism is too weird, that it's going to alienate people from the non-Jewish world, which I also belong to and love.

Why do you get so involved? Why do you write so much about it? Why do you suffer so much from deaths that are happening thousands of miles away? Why are you so distressed by antisemitism when things are relatively peaceful in Mexico? Why do you take it so personally?

I had not been able to explain it. The reason for my change of heart in the wake of the tragedy. Did I really need this catastrophe to find myself?

I have been justifying this new emotional path to others and to myself for three months now. Today I realized something.

How lucky I am, how blessedly lucky I am, to have found a path, a safe haven. A cause for which I am ready to raise my voice relentlessly and act tirelessly. How lucky I am to be able to live my particular brand of pink-hair Judaism to the fullest, enjoying it, but also, in the current state of affairs, suffering for it.

I hope everyone is lucky enough to find something like this to believe in.

# JAZAK VEEMATZ: STRONG AND BRAVE

FEBRUARY 1ST, 2024

No seconds go by more slowly than those between your child telling you, "Don't worry, but..." and them explaining why you shouldn't worry.

"Mom," my son calls, he's attending a university abroad, "don't worry, but..." He pauses for an eternity. "There was a pro-Palestinian march today at school and one of the student groups I'm in, as a board member, decided to promote and sponsor the march."

The seconds between him telling me this and me finding something to answer went by even more slowly. I couldn't respond at all.

I could just hear his anger and anguish. His helplessness as he explained how he tried telling his fellow club members why it was neither congruent nor right to sponsor an antisemitic event disguised as anti-Zionist. How he explained to them that he understands the situation is complex, but that it did not justify using the word genocide to rally a protest. How he tried to negotiate with them to sponsor an event to raise awareness about the hostage issue, as a way to provide equal support. How he explained to them that he was afraid to watch the march from across the street. At the end of his argumentation the answer he received was, "We don't see what the problem is."

Wow!!!! You don't see what the problem is? Saying that four months into the atrocities (which are all over the news) is a display of absolute stupidity. Not because they support the Palestinian cause (which is OK), but because they don't see there IS a problem. That the problem IS the problem. Beyond Israel and Gaza, there IS a

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What saddened me the most was that he told me all of this with sorrow, not with surprise. As if he had known that this would eventually happen to him.

"What did you do, honey?," I asked him, artificially keeping my cool. There's nothing worse for a teenager than hearing his mom in hysterics.

"After they told me they didn't see what the problem was, I decided to quit the club. I told them that we definitely didn't share the same values of inclusion and respect for others, that I could understand the complexity of it all, but not the lack of reasoning. I told them that what they see as a social event is actually my life."

My eyes filled with tears.

"But don't worry," he adds. Another eternity goes by. "I said it without yelling, without getting angry and without losing control." He DEFINITELY did not get that from me.

*Jazak veematz.* My strong and brave 18-year-old boy. I hung up the phone devastated.

What a fucking bleak world young Jews are living in right now and will live in from this moment on. What a fucking nightmare to live in

a world where there is no capacity for dialogue because the other doesn't even see where the problem is and doesn't want to understand. How shitty to live in a world where antisemitism is becoming not the exception but the rule.

After wiping away my tears, I did what any good Jewish mother would do. I ordered a babka (a traditional Jewish cake) online to be delivered to his dorm room.

# THE SILENCE OF THE FEMINISTS

FEBRUARY 6TH, 2024

A monologue I wrote for my podcast

I know the worst topic to be popular these days is anything related to Israel-Palestine. It's too controversial for some. Too boring for others. Too emotionally charged and opinionated for most. But I ask you, please give yourself the chance to listen to this.

Let's make one thing clear: What is happening in Gaza breaks my heart. I do not underestimate, even for a second, the pain behind EVERY SINGLE death and the destruction. The humanitarian suffering is terrible.

War is humanity's worst tragedy. There are no winners. Ever.

If we believe Hamas has taken a toll on Israelis, it has been even worse for the Palestinian people. For decades, they have inflicted appalling violence upon Palestinian women, they have viciously killed members of the LGBTQ+ community, they are thieves that have plunged Gaza into poverty in pursuit of terror. The Palestinian people's worst enemy is Hamas.

It is also very clear to me that, in a conflict that has dragged on for so many years, NO ONE is guiltless. No one has been exempt, including the Israeli government, from errors of commission or omission.

What I want to talk about today is not anyone's position on the Israeli-Palestinian war, which many banally address as if it were a matter of "who you're rooting for" in a soccer game. There's another issue that, regardless of the complexity and horror of the war, we need to bring to the table: On October 7th, one of the worst attacks of sexual violence in modern world history was perpetuated.

The sexual crimes committed by Hamas against not only Israeli and Jewish women, but also foreign, Christian, Druze and Muslim women, were bestial. And I'm not using the word "bestial" as a metaphor. They acted like literal beasts.

In addition to the pain of the barbarity itself, silence from feminists in the face of these events is enormously painful and infuriating. From supranational organizations (UN Women, the Red Cross) to governments and people in positions of social power, to feminist collectives, to the media, many groups and individuals dedicated to women's issues have decided not to raise their voices against the unjustifiable for fear of losing followers or stirring up controversy.

Feminists who defend women's rights have decided to keep quiet and become selective feminists.

Deafening silence.

So now it turns out that sexual violence shouldn't be denounced because it happens in Israel?

We have been speaking out against sexual violence for decades, rightly saying that sexual violence is not justified under any circumstances. No context validates it. And now, it turns out we doubt the testimonies of raped and tortured women. Turns out we doubt evidence from the forensic experts who collected the bodies or body parts that remained.

It turns out that we must contextualize videos of female prisoners with bloodstained pants or of women with dismembered bodies, raped, pulled through the streets so that people could spit on them. Videos taken by the aggressors themselves.

Now it turns out that there are women who have been raped in captivity for 4 months, yet feminist voices are mute.

What's wrong with us? Why the cowardice? Why the double standards, the lack of morals?

Certainly, as a Jewish woman, silence and cowardice pain me greatly. They make me sick.

But mind you: The problem is not that it hurts us Jewish women.

The problem is that the feminists' silence is damaging, perhaps irrecoverably, the defense of any woman, of any religion, anywhere at any time, against sexual crimes.

Those who are not speaking up today are doing a great disservice to the women's cause. As a whole.

This silence is setting a terrible precedent. The notion that we should NOT always believe what women say, that sometimes sexual violence is valid, that using women's bodies as a battlefield is a valid tool in warfare. That pointing out and condemning sexual crimes depends on context.

ADINA CHELMINSKY

This is setting back the women's rights movement 100 years. Not just for Jewish women. But for ALL women in the world.





CHAPTER 4

# GOING BACK

FEBRUARY 21ST - MARCH 4TH, 2024



*Shpilkes in the tujes, my grandmother used to say in Yiddish. Something like "ants in your pants."*

*That feeling of being here, but not really; of being here, but wishing you were somewhere else. That itch to move.*

*"You all have shpilkes in the tujes," they would tell us when we could not sit still at the seemingly endless Pesach seder (Passover dinner).*

*In February, this is how I started to feel.*

*The more I wrote about the conflict, the more I realized the huge gaps I had in first-hand information. From a different perspective. In my personal take.*

*Because Israel is so complex that you can only understand it by being there.*

*"Buy a ticket, pack, and go," Alfredo told me.*

*So, off I went.*

# TRAVELING TO ISRAEL, AGAIN

FEBRUARY 21ST, 2024

It seems ridiculous that, only three months after being there, and in the worst geopolitical moment for the region, I would want to return to Israel. As if it were the top holiday destination.

Some go to beach clubs in Mykonos or St. Barth, or on ski trips to Aspen or Courchevel. I fly to Tel Aviv.

By this point in the blog, I think it's clear to you, dear readers, that out of all adjectives that can describe me, normal is not one of them.

It's a vacation. Literally. I have no big plans. Go to the Old City of Jerusalem. Walk (and have a cigarette) along the tayelet (boardwalk) of Tel Aviv. Eat some of my aunt's eggplant dish (which is the best in the world), walk around and go with the flow.

I'm going by myself. I love traveling alone.

The Jews that arrived in Israel at the turn of the 20th century used to say: Vanu artza libnot u lehibanot. We come to this land to build (it) and rebuild (ourselves).

They came to populate the desert (it was all desert wetlands, except for a couple of cities) and seek refuge, fleeing from the antisemitism in Europe and the Arab countries.

I am going to Israel today with the same purpose: to build (it) and rebuild (myself).

Saying build (it) is metaphorical. I am going to build an economically and emotionally shattered country. I'm going to put a tiny grain of sand in a literal emotional and economic desert. I am going to spend money on restaurants, coffee shops, hotels and other services. It's metaphorical because the 4 pesos I'm going to spend there wouldn't even make a difference on the fictional GDP of a game of Monopoly.

But I think it's the right thing to do. Showing my solidarity and sharing in the pain and anguish. I'll hug the people I love. I'll visit new friends I've made in the past few months, go for a walk, go sightseeing, and buy a few things here and there.

I will also rebuild (myself). There is no metaphor here, just harsh reality.

And it's not like my personal problems are of anyone's interest or concern (or that they compare in any way to the tragedies we are seeing), but the last few months have been very painful for me. I closed my business and, for the first time ever, I am unemployed; this has triggered a terrible depression and an identity crisis.

Yet I believe that, in the greatest irony of all, amongst Israel's ruins, I may be able to find purpose and repair my own ruins.

Broken country. Shattered woman. What a combo.

I'll be telling you about all my comings and goings. I hope you will join me for the ride.

And again, for those of you who accuse me of supporting a genocidal country: The humanitarian tragedy in Gaza has not stopped hurting me for a second.

# THAT GOD WE ALL SHARE

FEBRUARY 22ND, 2024

My Judaism is strange. Strong. Committed. But strange. Starting with the complex relationship I have with God. A one-sided relationship, as I hope that, especially right now, God is busy with more important things than a 50-year-old lady's identity crisis.

Sometimes, often, I doubt His existence. I hope I don't get struck by lightning for saying so. Although if I were struck by lightning for saying so, it would be unequivocal proof that God does exist. The only place where I am sure of His presence is in Jerusalem, Yerushalaim, Al-Quds.

There's a hidden corner in the Old City where, for an instant, if you look up and are paying attention (as the exact angle lasts ten seconds and we are always in too much of a hurry, so we pass right by it), you will see the Wailing Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, all together in the same frame. The holiest places for Jews, Christians and Muslims.

I figure that, if God ever buys an apartment, it will be right there, with that view. It's like living near your office.

Plus, when the sun begins to set, the golden hue of the city shines even more brightly, and it is at that moment that you believe in God's presence.

And no, I have no delusions of a cliché image bringing world peace. Not at all. At this stage of the game, I don't believe in world peace. I'll settle for all of us to stop beating the shit out of each other.

But there, with that view, during those ten seconds, God's presence is felt. And, in essence, whether we like it or not, no matter what we say or how hard we fight against each other, we all share that God.

Sadly, we pass right by Him because we're not paying attention. Maybe we're always rushing.





# WAR IS BULLSHIT (YOU CAN QUOTE ME ON THAT)

FEBRUARY 23RD, 2024

Nothing ruffles social media's feathers more than writing about the Israeli army. But I'm in Israel, with an 8-hour time difference, and about to go to sleep, so I'll share the post and ask God to guard the sanctity of my profile against idiotic comments. After all, dialing God's number from here counts as a domestic call.

One of the things that gets under my skin the most regarding the Israel conversation is people's nerve and arrogance. And no, it's not that it can lead to heated discussions or harsh criticism (on the contrary, I welcome that and partake in it myself). What bugs me is the sources most of those dispensing opinions use to inform their views and comments.

I have been aware of the conflict for 50 years, I have read extensively about it, I have visited all the places involved, I have talked to experts on both sides, AND STILL, I do not dare give a definite or conclusive opinion on the matter.

The conflict is long and complex, with thousands of facets and many caveats. My opinion, although obviously pro-Israel, is cautious and multidimensional, and I admit there are still many things I don't know.

But now, it turns out that those who have watched 10 videos on TikTok, have read 5 eye-catching hashtags and follow 1 pro-Palestinian account on Instagram are experts on the subject, capable of giving a doctoral opinion and holders of the absolute truth. They're a bunch of ass... who didn't even know where Gaza was four months ago and to this day don't know which sea and which river flank

those they wish to liberate.

This is for them, to give them some context.

War is bullshit. For everyone. No one in their right mind seeks to wage it. Sinwar (google him, experts) and Hamas do not function with human rationality. On the other hand, there's the Israeli army.

There is one issue (well many, but let's focus on one for now) without which it is impossible to grasp the situation of the Israeli army and the impact that this war has on every family. It all boils down to one sentence: The Israeli army is a civilian army. Military service is mandatory for all\*, men and women alike, for two or three years and, once they're done, men have to serve for a certain number of weeks a year.

No one opts out\*, serving is a privilege. The son of the peasant, the son of the politician\* and the son of the tech millionaire all serve in the same battalion. They find the same death. All Israeli mothers suffer the same anguish, including Druze and Muslim mothers.

These are the young men and women who are fighting in Gaza today, defending the northern and western borders.

Today, in Israel, there is no household, not a single one, that does not have someone close serving in the war.

Soldiers are not militia, nor are they paid, they are sons and daughters who go to war not for money, but out of a genuine desire to defend their country... and because no one else will do it for them.

It takes a nation to defend a nation.

The impact this has on Israeli society and on war strategizing is huge.

Because, yes, the Israeli army does have other guidelines and codes of ethics and conduct (go on, hit me again with your hate comments). And no, I don't mean it's an untarnished army. War, by definition, is bullshit.

There is no version of war, particularly urban guerrilla warfare, that does not end in tragedy.

Have soldiers made mistakes? Absolutely. Have there been bad practices? No doubt. Have things gotten out of hand? Definitely. Because war is, by definition, the black hole most prone to human error.

So, to all of those who criticize the Israeli army from their high horse of false knowledge and moral superiority, hug your sons and daughters, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, and godchildren tonight, and picture them on the front lines.

*\*with some exceptions.*

# MEKUPELET

FEBRUARY 28TH, 2024

If there is one thing that illustrates the inseparable relationship between Israel and Diaspora Jews, it is the Mekupelet.

No, dear reader, or dear non-Jewish reader I should say (because Jews will understand), Mekupelet is not a battle cry or a secret Masonic greeting. It's chocolate.

Perhaps the best chocolate in the world. Milk chocolate. Crumbly, with perfect flavor and consistency.

It's chocolate that, for some bizarre reason, was never subject to the ways of globalization. It has always been available only in Israel, and still is.

For as long as I can remember, the universal request whenever someone said, "I'm going to Israel" and, out of courtesy, not conviction, added, "Can I get you anything?"; the answer was always, "Bring Mekupelets!"

And to get a Mekupelet (from said person who now was forced to fulfill the request out of politeness) was the most incredible thing in the world. A slice of heaven. There's nothing more holy and sacred than a crumb (because it really crumbles) from that chocolate. Obviously, if you were brought more than one, you had to keep them hidden like treasure and savor them, one by one or half by half, at the ideal moment and with the right person.

Mekupelet was the most perfect way to remember the Israel you had visited or the dream Israel you would one day visit.

I hadn't eaten a Mekupelet in years. Because of my diet, the carbs and fats, and adulthood cynicism, which questions the magic chocolate can do.

Before coming to Israel, I was talking to a dear friend of mine, "I'm going to Israel, can I get you anything?", I asked. "Bring me Meku-pelets," he replied. And so I went and got one for him and one for myself.

And that pleasure of biting into it is still delicious, despite the time elapsed. And what it represents, and will always represent, is still magical.



# BAQA AL GARABIYYE

FEBRUARY 29TH, 2024

There, in the middle of the Arab-Israeli conflict, are the Arab Israelis.

In the middle of a conflict between Muslims and Israelis, there they are, the Muslims who live in Israel, who are both judge and jury, in the crossfire, and also mere observers. Not only since October 7th, but long before then.

All over the news and social media today, there's in-depth talk of Palestinians in Gaza and in the West Bank and of Israeli Jews. There's talk of their ailments, tragedies and mistakes. But Israeli Arabs are often left out of that conversation.

This is not *peccata minuta*: 20% of the Israeli population is Arab Muslim (and a lower percentage is Christian), and the only way to understand the entirety of the conflict (or try to understand it, because it is quite impossible to do so) is by talking to them as well.

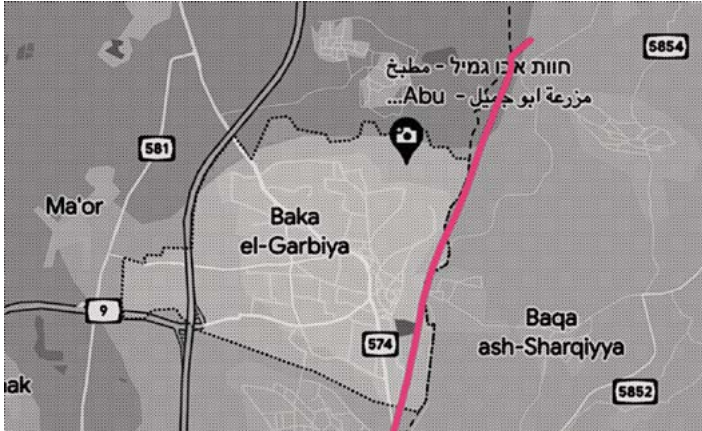
Tarek, a man that is Arab Muslim and Israeli, is the driver who has taken me everywhere on this trip — I think he can already tell who he is dealing with. I get in the car at 6:00 a.m. with coffee in hand for both of us.

"*Lama?*" (why?), he asks me in a startled tone when I give him the address of Baqa al-Gharbiyye. "*Caja*" (just because), I reply with my best nonchalance.

Truth is my ovaries are in my throat. I am not a war correspondent, I am a high-maintenance lady from an upscale neighborhood in Mexico City on my way to a Muslim village, during war.

But off we go.

The geography of Baqa al-Gharbiyye is the perfect metaphor. A full-blown Arab city located between the border with the West Bank (I can see the wall from where I'm standing) and Highway 6, one of the main roads in Israel.



An hour away from Tel Aviv, it does look like Israel, yet a strange version of it. Traffic signs are in Arabic first and Hebrew second, unlike in the rest of the country where it's the other way around. All women wear head coverings. They have the same shops as the rest of the country next to traditional markets.

If you think my hair is all the rage in well-known places, here it's an absolute shock.

I go to a community center to meet a group of women who do various social work activities there.

We are so similar, and yet so different.

We talked for hours. We started by speaking about the situation and prospects, about peace and war, politics and mistakes.

After a while we ended up talking about our children and showing each other pictures.

They served me coffee with cardamom and Arabic sweets. The same ones I serve at home when I have people over.

It is strange to hear the same war story from the opposite shore.

So similar. Yet so different.

They apportion blame differently and cite different reasons, but, at the end of the day, I genuinely believe that we all want to live in peace, we all want these children we talked about to live in peace.

I wonder if their children are terrorists, just as I am sure they wonder if I am the aunt of the soldiers fighting in Gaza against the Palestinians they see as their own.

We do not speak of the blame that each one perceives or pins. That would be absurd. Each of us knows the struggle of the other. We know each other enough to know it would be of no use.

But we have more in common than we think. Politically, too. We talked about the dangers and the utter mess caused by political extremism, on both sides, about how peace (or *entente cordiale*) will only exist when there is safety and economic opportunities for all, otherwise, it won't exist at all. We spoke of how the vast majority of people want to live in peace. Of how social programs (what they do is amazing) are a fundamental companion to any lasting peace effort (or *entente cordiale*). Of how one cannot think of the future without considering individual identities, so deeply rooted in these lands.

We spoke in a mixture of Hebrew and English, and the handful of Arabic words I understand and can say. They gave me pickled goods they make in the community center's kitchen, the same ones my mother-in-law used to make in her kitchen at home.

Make no mistake. I do not romanticize the situation for half a second. *Baklava* has never been some kind of peaceful solution. We hide, perhaps, more than what we say. Or not. I'm not sure. If we were to meet on the street in Tel Aviv or Paris, maybe we would look at each other with disdain.

But here, we sit and talk.

I thought coming here would help me better understand the situation. But now I'm even more confused.

Yet it also reinforces my conviction that, eventually, we will have to find a path towards something resembling peace. Something constructive. Beneficial.

Dai. One of them tells me when we talk about the dead. That's enough. Stop.

After hours and hours of talking about what we wish for, our dreams, our desires, I turn to them and say, "I am going to quote a person I know must not be very popular around here, Herzl!"

She cuts me off and finishes my sentence in Hebrew: "*Im tirtzú ein zo hagada.*" If you will it, it is no dream.

I hug them before saying goodbye, genuinely grateful. It's bitter-sweet.

It's all so complicated.

I get in the car and don't realize I'm crying until Tarek hands me a tissue.





# THE GRAMMATICAL DIFFERENCE

MARCH 4TH, 2024

I am writing this on the plane back to Mexico. I'm at the end of my second trip to Israel during wartime. I cried when I checked out of the hotel. The woman at the front desk said goodbye to me as she finished my bill, "Hope to see you in better times", she said. "I hope so, too."

The first sign that things had changed in Israel between my visit back in October (less than one month after the massacre) and now was a grammatical difference.

See, the best word to qualify my Hebrew proficiency level is "energetic". I understand practically everything, I speak with LOTS of emotion, but I make awful grammatical mistakes, especially when differentiating which nouns are masculine and which are feminine and applying them correctly.

When I arrived back in October, I talked to the person who picked me up at the airport (with that same energy) about my suitcases. I made a mistake and referred to them in the masculine form.

*Misbadim*. The man was so deep in his thoughts and/or happy to welcome a tourist (NO ONE was arriving at the airport) that he didn't make the slightest attempt to correct me. That's rare for an Israeli. They don't hold back any criticism.

This time, while talking about my *MisbadIM*, the person who picked me up corrected me under their breath as their eyes widened: *MisbadOT*.

Hallelujah, a sign of normalcy.

I flew to Israel alone. Today, a large part of my work is devoted to doing *hasbara* (explaining the Jewish point of view to the non-Jewish world). If I'm going to explain the war (and its antisemitic effects on the world), the first thing I have to do is explain it to myself. Not through what I read or what I'm told, but through what I see.

I am not a war correspondent, I am simply a woman frightened by what's going on, who has the financial resources to travel and a mid-dling writing ability. Considering the unfounded bullshit that others write on the subject, I believe these credentials are sufficient.

My trip in October was institutional, so to speak. I came with a group, invited by the Birthright Foundation to witness what was going on. They organized the visits superbly (and I am extremely grateful to them) but, at the end of the day, it was an organized and structured group trip, supported by the organization's vision.

I needed to see beyond that. This time I went on my own. I arranged my own visits and interviews.

I wanted to talk to ordinary people, the pieces of this massively complicated jigsaw puzzle.

Those one-on-one conversations we all need to hear and that explain so much. Because war is fought on macro decisions (political-military-economic), but its effects are micro (on the people).

And there I was, speaking one-on-one. Drinking countless *caful* (double) espressos and listening.

To soldiers (young men, my children's age) who see, first hand, what unfolds in Gaza. Their stories of heroism, but also doubt, sadness and terror.

To survivors of Kfar Aza who lost everything, and who lived the horror in the flesh. Who were saved by luck or coincidence or divine intervention, but who cannot count their dead or kidnapped friends on one hand (or twenty hands).

To released hostages (a story that will NEVER be mine to tell).

To the families of the hostages who know that each day that goes by is one less day of possibility, but even so, have one more day of hope.

To displaced people who are living interrupted lives but are thankful that at least they have lives to interrupt.

To the wounded. Victims of October 7th and soldiers. People with no legs, no arms. They're practically children. Learning to rebuild their lives, which were just beginning, with the courage, pain and rage that the loss of a body part entails. They have to relearn how to live. And to the mothers of those boys who, in the raw tirade of war, doubt God, but are grateful to Him. One of them is thankful because her son's amputation was below the knee and that makes it easier for

him to use a prosthetic leg. Another, whose son's leg was amputated at pelvic level, is grateful because he came back to her alive. And she is grateful to the people in that same hospital, to the strangers, who come in droves to bring them food, chocolates and hugs.

To Arab Muslim men and women who are judge and jury in this *balagan* (chaos).

To taxi drivers, who are the modern-day Library of Alexandria, containing all the wisdom of the world, and do not hesitate to give accurate opinions without any need to be politically correct while their fare meter is running. Religious, secular, Muslim, Jewish, hipster, Hasidic, right-wing, left-wing, young, old, Israeli-born and immigrants.

The question I asked them all was: Is there a chance for peace?

The answer goes far beyond a yes or a no.

Is there a chance for peace? It depends on who the two sides are.

The opposition blocs are so heterogeneous and with such varying interests that the answer is very complex.

Is there a chance for peace?

With the shit and scum that is Hamas (and their enablers)? Impossible. With the entire generations they poisoned and indoctrinated? Very difficult. With the non-existent and eunuch Palestinian Authority? Super complicated. With the group of Arabs in Gaza and the West Bank who are fed up with the violence and the labor blockade? Maybe. With Israeli Arabs who understand how much there is to gain from peace? Perhaps.

The other side of the ring is not simple either.

With Netanyahu and Ben Gvir's government? Impossible. With the Israelis who are furious at the October 7th attacks and the hostages taken? Extremely difficult. With the more moderate wings of government, if there are elections at all? There's a good chance. With the Israeli people who have wanted to live in peace for years? Undoubtedly.

Many stakeholders. Many combinations.

At the end of the day, in the midst of this macro mess, the people always get the short end of the stick. So, their only choice is to make do with what they've got. *Ze ma she yesh*. It is what it is. They repeat this phrase, over and over, half resigned and half fed up.

I realize that, today and in the near future, there will be no possibility for peace, that ephemeral and romantic noun with background violin music and happy endings. If they at least stop beating each other's asses and stop the killings (and release the hostages), we should call it a win.

Even while the fighting continues, the war already has clearly defined winners and losers. No one and everyone, respectively.

I think the situation is more complicated than ever, and I believe it's going to get worse before it gets better:

- There's no end in sight for the war (the northern front opening is almost an inevitability).
- Social wounds continue to ooze pus and anguish over the deaths in Gaza (on both sides) and over the hostage situation.
- The economy is in ruins. There are hundreds of thousands of displaced people.
- The domestic political landscape (both in Israel and Palestine) is an utter mess.
- Antisemitism is going to get even worse around the world. Living under attack for being Jewish is going to be the new normal. There will be attempts to banish us from all areas between rivers and seas. Are we going to put our heads down and take it? NO.

I'm coming back sad and worried. But there is a grammatical difference.

In the last few months, I've been to Israel twice trying to find out the reason for evil. That reason has something to do with political actors (on both sides), religious manipulation, hatred, financial interests and extremism. But the exact reason for evil (the why) is unknowable.

What I found out on my trip instead was the reason for good.

Good is most people's natural behavior. Because there's solidarity, empathy, hope in spite of circumstance, and similarities in spite of differences.

The fact that the reason for evil is something we need to ask (why), but the reason for good is a default answer (because), gives me some comfort, some hope for the future.

Hope to come here in better times...

The only beautiful part about my trips to Israel is seeing my family, who lives over there and always welcomes me with open arms and a full meal. I always travel with mole, Mexican sweets and tortillas.



**Adina Chelminsky**  
@AdinaChel



I believe there's no better metric of success for a trip than flying out with suitcases full of gifts for the people you love and are going to visit. And coming back with suitcases full of gifts for the people you love and are waiting for you at home.

4:48 AM · Mar 4, 2024



CHAPTER 5

# TOUGH AND NON-STOP

MARCH 6TH - JULY 9TH, 2024





*At the time of my first trip to Israel, even the most pessimistic political analysts predicted that the end of the war would come in the first quarter of 2024.*

*As the date approached, and then once it had passed, it became clear there was no way that would happen. The war got more complicated, social media got more complicated, the world got more complicated.*

# ADINA, ADINA, FREE PALESTINE!

MARCH 6TH, 2024

A few hours ago, I went to an event at the Embassy of Israel to talk about the acts of sexual violence committed on October 7th.

This event, like everything related to this topic, obviously did not go unnoticed by the argumentative loudmouths who learned about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict 15 minutes ago and who a) have lots of time to spare, b) have a terrible understanding of the conflict's complexity, and/or c) are paid to show up and protest.

When I arrived at the event, there was a small demonstration outside, with Palestinian flags and banners, harassing everyone who entered the building, whether they were attending the event or not. They were fewer than ten people, but quite loud. Judging by the shouting alone, I would have thought they were 200.

When I got out of the car, they recognized me (an extra point for giving me their undivided attention) and started shouting, "Adina, Adina, free Palestine!". Another extra point for that rhyming scheme (in Spanish).

I was about to ask them if they wanted to take a selfie with me for their social media. But the police guarding the protest stopped my intentions.

I was definitely scared. No matter how thick your skin is, some things cut through.

But, more than anything, it got me thinking. What the fuck do these people think they're going to achieve by harassing people this way?

Do they think that after hearing their screams I'm going to pick up the phone and say, "Netanyahu, I order you to stop the conflict this instant"?

And no, it's not because I think that speaking out and protesting for the cause they believe in is wrong (although I obviously don't share their cause), but because their logic and strategy are ridiculous.

We all must speak out for what we feel is right but minding form and substance. I have a dear and brilliant friend, Rossie Penhos, with whom I have talked countless times about all the things that do not *free* Palestine.

No, shouting profanities does not free Palestine. Nor does doxxing people on social media. Nor does trolling. Nor does attacking small businesses. Nor does painting graffiti on walls. Nor does assaulting college students. Nor does using biased slogans. Nor does manipulation. Nor do fake news.

Let's be honest, the people who have a hand in bringing this to an end as soon as possible are at the negotiating tables in Cairo, Qatar and Washington. Not in Mexico City's Paseo de la Reforma on a Wednesday at 8:00 a.m. You, me, them, none of us can do anything about it.

We ALL want to end the conflict and the deaths and the destruction. All of us.

What each of us does have the capacity to do is to keep our discourse, and the atmosphere around it, as cordial and peaceful as possible. Because there's no use in fanning the flames of an exceedingly heated fire.

When I left the event, over 2 hours later, those people were still there. Harassing everyone coming out of the building, whether they were coming from the event or not. I don't think their persistence was based on conviction, but rather on having nothing better to do with their day.

The security team asked me to go out through a different exit for safety reasons, but the protesters still spotted me (thanks, telltale pink hair). "Adina, you are an embarrassment to feminism."

I was this close to clapping back, "And you should see what an embarrassment I am to my teenage children when I sing at the top of my lungs."



# RAMADÁN MUBARAK: BLESSED RAMADAN

MARCH 11TH, 2024

Adina is sending a message of peace during Ramadan, the holiest month for Muslims?!

Is she crazy? Has she lost her mind? No. (I mean, yes, I am crazy, but there's more to this).

By sending a message of peace during Ramadan, Adina found sanity.

One of the deepest root causes of antisemitism (and any kind of hatred) is the inability to understand what determines and matters to the other person, the one who is different from me. This creates irreparable damage and breaks any possibility of sincere dialogue. It's impossible to connect with someone you do not understand or misunderstand. The lack of understanding, or rather the lack of WANTING to understand the other, is humanity's greatest burden. Because it makes us malleable and prone to be irrational.

In recent months, in the midst of a brutal wave of antisemitism, often disguised as anti-Zionism, which personally hurts and affects me, this theme of connecting with the one who is *different* (or considered the enemy) echoes in my head.

I can do nothing against the stupid prejudice and hatred that others have against me and my close ones, but I can avoid responding in kind. I can learn who the other is, the one who's different from me; I can learn what matters to them, I can embrace the differences, connect, and somewhere in there, find our common humanity.

You can't fight hatred with hatred.

I don't know if this will change the world, but I do hope to change a couple of lives.

Ramadan, the holiest month for Muslims, begins today. It's a celebration of when the *Quran*, the Koran, was first revealed to Muhammad and it affirms Muslims' commitment to God and to their fellow human beings. To all my Muslim readers (I hope to have at least one): *Ramadan Kareem, Ramadan Mubarak*. May it be a blessed and generous Ramadan.

To everyone else: Let us learn from the other, from those who are different from us. From the richness of the other, from what matters to them. And let us understand that we have a common humanity that we are losing.

Hatred is not fought with hatred. In the words of Rumi, the Muslim poet, "There is a voice that doesn't use words. Listen."

**"IF I AM RICH IN ANYTHING, IT IS IN  
PERPLEXITIES, NOT IN CERTAINTIES!"**

**JORGE LUIS BORGES**



Over the course of the conflict, there have been constant calls (both at home and on the international stage) for a ceasefire that would allow for the release of hostages in exchange for humanitarian pauses. Only one such exchange had been completed, back in December. International pressure has always been on Israel to make them possible, but...



**Adina Chelminsky**  
@AdinaChel



Speaking of a ceasefire to end the current humanitarian tragedy in Gaza requires some context. Who is the other fighter? How do they fight? Those damned aces they keep down in their tunnels, the manipulation of the population (the very same they claim to defend).

There should also be pressure on Hamas and its enablers, don't you think?

6:36 PM · Mar 19, 2024

# THE CEASEFIRE PARADOX

MARCH 21ST, 2024

In the animated film *Beauty and the Beast* (bear with me, I swear I'm going somewhere serious with this), there's a scene where the butler-turned-clock gives the prince (the Beast) advice on how to woo Belle, "Give her flowers, chocolates, promises you don't intend to keep."

That scene reverberates in my head every time I hear calls for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Offering or asking for unrealistic, unachievable and simplistic things is easy, seductive and free of charge. It's ideal for charming a woman in a Disney movie. In reality, you know, the one we're living in, which is more bitchy than pretty, things are much more complicated.

The anti-Israel voices of ceasefire, in slogans and hashtags, banners and "letters to the editor," are just extra noise in a sufficiently loud situation. They don't contribute to the solution, they do not grasp the complexity of the problem, they solve absolutely nothing.

There are thousands of voices rallied behind this, many are vicious, many are honestly well-intentioned, but sadly, painfully, this is not the way.

Let me be clear, no one in the world, no one in their right mind, wants this humanitarian tragedy to go on in Gaza. No one. The footage of what's happening in Gaza is horrifying.

War is bullshit. Death and destruction are humanity's worst tragedies. This is not easy for anyone. Certainly not (first and foremost)

for Palestinians, but neither for Israelis or Jews in the Diaspora. No sane person says or thinks that war is something to aspire to.

Whether they're 10,000, 20,000 or 30,000 deaths (I don't trust Hamas's figures or data on this), it doesn't matter, ONE death, just ONE, is a tragedy.

But if we want to be serious, rational adults (which I assume all of us here are), we must talk about things as they are. The point is not WHAT we all want to happen, but HOW and WHO we need to pressure to get there.

We all want a ceasefire, but pointing fingers at Israel and pressing it is not the way to go about it.

And no, I am NOT exonerating the Israeli government from its bad decisions. Not at all. I am the first to criticize many of their actions. BUT those who hold the power to end this war are Hamas and its enablers. They are the ones we need to put pressure on.

Speaking of a ceasefire to end the current humanitarian tragedy in Gaza requires some context. Who is the other fighter? How do they fight? Those damned aces they keep up their sleeve (I mean, down in their tunnels), the manipulation and mistreatment of the population they claim to defend.

We must put pressure on the cause, not on the consequence. The cause of what is happening today is Hamas's oppression, manipulation and violence against, not only Israel, but the very Palestinian population it claims to represent. The consequence is, painfully, this war.

We must put pressure on the cause.

Hamas and its panderers are NOT rational people. They don't mind using their population as cannon fodder in order to make their point in the eyes of the world. They have plenty of time and do not care one bit about human lives. That's the tragedy, that's where we need to pressure.

And I reiterate, do I believe the Israeli army has made mistakes and mishandled things in Gaza? Yes, I do. But, and this is by no means an excuse, that is the very definition of war: the inability to control all variables at play.

War, any war, is not a Hollywood movie where you yell, "Cut" and rearrange the actors. It is, by definition, a tragedy of errors.

Do I think the humanitarian situation in Gaza is terrible? Without a doubt. Despite knowing how Hamas tampers with figures and footage, that much is true. A single hungry child is a tragedy.

But it is not due to inaction from the Israeli government. It is because of Hamas's continued grip on the delivery and distribution of aid. Shipments with 218,000 tons of food have been sent to Gaza. Hamas decides who receives that and how.

Their aid distribution policy follows their same old script: The end justifies the means. Using the civilian population as pawns to indoctrinate, kill, and starve in order to gain the world's sympathy and achieve their goals.

In theory, shouting, "Ceasefire" only in the direction of Israel is the *politically correct* thing to do, but a ceasefire under the wrong conditions (the dismantling of Hamas and the safe return of the hostages) solves NOTHING, it only postpones the problem. And the problem is not only that Israel will be attacked again, but that, above all, the Palestinian people will continue to live under the deadly thumb of Hamas.

As the war escalated, errors and collateral effects on Israel's part grew. Some true, some not. The two most relevant and distressing were the Israeli army's alleged rape of Palestinian women and the proven random strike against a World Central Kitchen humanitarian aid caravan.



Adina Chelminsky  
@AdinaChel



## ON THE ISRAELI ARMY'S RAPE OF PALESTINIAN WOMEN.

We should always believe women and they should always speak out about any incident of sexual violence. From whomever to whomever. And even more so when this is used as a weapon of war.

Do I believe there's a possibility that Israeli soldiers assaulted women? Maybe. This is not an excuse, but lack of control over troops is a consequence of any war. ANY PERPETRATORS MUST BE TRIED AND PUNISHED.

What I do NOT believe (I'm basically sure of it) is that sexual violence is being used as a war strategy by the Israeli government or army, the way Hamas used it on 10/7.

11:41 AM · Mar 25, 2024



adinachel  
Mexico, CDMX



## La tragedia de lo que pasó y lo que tenemos que reflexionar.

Ojalá puedan leer:



Liked by **aleroD\_** and **413 others**

**adinachel** THE WORLD CENTRAL KITCHEN TRAGEDY AND WHAT WE MUST PONDER.

The death of the seven World Central Kitchen volunteers in Gaza is a tragedy. There is no way to justify or minimize it.

But I would like, by way of reflection (again, without minimizing or justifying anything), to put some thoughts on the table, so that we can think and discuss.

War is a tragedy. It is humanity's greatest disgrace. But those of us who aren't experiencing it or haven't lived through it, have a misconception about what happens and can happen in times of war.

We think wars are what we see in movies, perfectly lined up soldiers who start shooting as soon as someone screams, "Action." That is absolutely false. Wars are, by definition, the moment when there is the least control over actions. When whatever happens on the battlefield is completely uncontrollable, even with previous planning, even with care, even while trying to avoid mistakes.

The tragedy of war is the lack of control. We know when and how it starts, but we never know how it actually unfolds.

Taking responsibility for the tragedy (as the Israeli government immediately did, unlike Hamas, that never takes responsibility for anything) does not minimize the horror.

Now is the time to double down on the calls for a ceasefire but aimed at those who have true leverage. Yes, at the Israeli government, but also and above all at Hamas and its enablers, who continue to wage a bloody war without any accountability or intention to stop. Hamas is the worst scum of this Earth and the ultimate enemy (let's leave Israel aside) of the Palestinian people, who they so claim to represent, and of the aid organizations that are trying to support Gaza.

May the God each of the WCK victims believe in keep them and their families in the palm of His hand.

Apr 2, 2024



# IDIOTS AND QUESTIONERS

APRIL 7TH, 2024

Charles Bukowski used to say that the problem with the world is that the intelligent people are full of doubts, while the stupid ones are full of confidence.

If the last six months have confirmed anything, it is that this is absolutely true — perhaps it had been confirmed earlier, but recent times have reinforced it.

Beyond what happened, is happening and will happen in Israel and Gaza (a tragedy of immeasurable proportions), the rest of the world is fighting a battle of visceral and heated opinions that are turning increasingly violent.

In the Israel-Gaza conflict, the battle is between Israel and Hamas. In the rest of the world, there are two sides. Not pro-Palestinians and pro-Israelis. Not pro-peace and anti-peace. Not right-wing and left-wing. Not Muslims and Jews. The battle is between the idiots and the questioners. Again, if the shoe fits, wear it.

On one side, you have those who believe they hold the absolute truth on the tip of their tongue, who believe they can dispense doctoral opinions, who live by the theory of shoulds and share it with a raised index finger. Those who make blanket statements. Those who believe in a summarized reality, in the existence of good guys versus bad guys, or that all members of a certain group are the same.

Those who believe that wars are easy to fight when they've never even set foot on any battlefield, and who proffer opinions on the geopolitical situation with the same level of detail as someone commenting on a

soccer match from their couch. Those who are not self-critical. Those who confuse hard data with personal takes.

Those who do not ask themselves if, maybe, just maybe, they could enrich their immaculate and unwavering opinions and learn from others. If, maybe, just maybe, they should check in with the experts or reach out to start a (NON-offensive) dialogue with those who think differently.

Those who do not change their minds or broaden their horizons for any reason whatsoever. Those who do not ask questions or try to learn, who stick to their stale truth. Those who fancy themselves so clever for using rhyming slogans or clichéd words.

And, on the other side, you have those whose opinions are cautious because they understand the complexity of the situation. Those who know that no analysis and no opinion are ever simple. Those who know the complexity is overwhelming and that reality is complicated and multidimensional.

Those who know that each side of the conflict is heterogeneous and impossible to generalize. Those who, despite having clear loyalties to one side or the other, constantly question whether their “side” is doing the right thing or not and can verbalize it.

Those who separate objective data from their subjective opinion. Those who seek to understand and learn and talk with those who think differently. Those who never give a full opinion on the tragedy of war. Those who understand that it is an uncontrollable escalation of mistakes.

Those who know that armchair opinions don't contribute anything and don't use trite words or slogans because they are interested in gaining respectability, not in getting likes.

These are the two groups that are replicating the Middle East war in the rest of the world. Those who are proud of their certainties, and those who reflect and give space to their doubts.

And oddly enough, this separation goes beyond alliances. There are idiots and questioners on both sides (the most extreme pro-Palestinian and the most extreme pro-Israeli). In the rest of the world, we are waging a war between the idiots who, in their emboldened belief of possessing the truth, make noise and the questioners who, in their caution, speak less, BUT ARE THE VOICES WE MUST LISTEN TO. The noise and raucousness of the former upstage the intelligence and sanity of the latter.

None of us has any control over what is happening physically in Israel and Gaza, no matter how much we scream, how many walls we paint, how many posts we share. But the conflict between Israel and Hamas has triggered a spiral of violence in which we and the rest of the world are immersed and on which our actions do have an effect.

Perhaps what we should do, each and every one of us, is to assess which side we are on. Are we idiots or questioners? And understand that peace is not achieved by raising the tone or volume of our voice, but rather by raising the level of our discourse.

# HOSTAGES

APRIL 10TH, 2024

The tragedy of the war in Gaza is made up of many simultaneous, parallel, and confluent tragedies. All of them terrible. Neither one minimizes the other. Neither one is less painful.

The tragedy of war itself, which (literally) everyone talks about and (LITERALLY, all caps) EVERYBODY has an opinion about, coexists with the tragedy of the 134 hostages (or hostages' bodies) that are still being held captive and who, little by little, the world seems to be forgetting about.

They are not being forgotten by their families. They are not being forgotten by those of us who, as Jews or simply humans, keep count of the days they have been in captivity. Numbers are endless. How far are we going to keep counting? We're at 190 now, so up to 200? 365? 1000?

Yet the Western world is forgetting about them. The world of social media, so manipulated and binary, where it seems that taking a stand against one tragedy prevents us from empathizing with another one.

That world of raised-index-finger morality that fancies itself the inventor and guarantor of individual rights and liberties. The world of fair causes that is, apparently, quite selective.

That world of supranational organizations that have not given a damn about the men and women who have been held hostage for over six months by \_\_\_\_\_ (enter the noun that best describes Hamas and its allies here). In what conditions are they living? Are

they even still alive?

That world that calls for a ceasefire, which is undoubtedly imminent, but does not realize that Hamas will reject a ceasefire because, most likely, it does not have the living hostages it would need to hand over.

That world is forgetting about them. About the hostages and their life in captivity. If that existence we can only imagine can be called life.

About the corpses of the hostages who "died while in captivity" (a woke euphemism for "were killed by their captors") and are still in the hands of Hamas.

There's an issue that bothers me. Why the fuck do they keep their dead bodies? What necrophiliac pleasure do they get from that? Where do they keep the bodies of the hostages that start to decompose? Do they bury them? Do they leave them out in the open? Who in their right mind considers a rotting corpse (because that's what happens naturally) a spoil of war?

And the world is forgetting, or maybe opting to look the other way, not wanting to see the faces of their mothers. I could be one of them. Or of their fathers, who could be you. It doesn't matter if you're Jewish or not. It doesn't matter if you are Israeli or not. We could all face the disappearance of a son and the uncertainty of his whereabouts. We can all imagine the horror of having a daughter being sexually abused for more than six months. Just ask the tens of thousands of Mexican mothers and fathers.

When I was in Israel for a few days after October 7th, back when we had hope and faith that all this would be a brief nightmare with an ending, I met the parents of several of the hostages. Their eyes are forever engraved in my brain.

Their unequivocal hope broke my heart. "Do they know that their children may not come back?" I asked the psychologist who came with us on the visits. "They know, but they don't know," she replied cryptically and heartbreakingly. "If they were to internalize it, they, the families, would not survive."

The tragedy of the war in Gaza is made up of many simultaneous, parallel, and confluent tragedies. All of them terrible. Neither one minimizes the other. Neither one is less painful. We must talk about ALL of them. None can be forgotten.

On April 13th, Iran and its allies launched a massive drone and missile attack against Israel in retaliation for the assassination of two Iranian generals. 150 missiles and 170 drones were launched. For a whole day, the entire country was on pause, hiding in shelters. Almost all missiles and drones were shot down mid-air by the Israeli army, with support from the Jordanians, Americans, British and French.



**Adina Chelminsky**  
@AdinaChel



And for anyone who still doubts it, Iran's attack on Israel has nothing to do with defending the Palestinians.

Iran wants to wipe out Israel. Period.

They do not give two hoots about the welfare of Palestinians. Never have and never will.

3:09 PM · Apr 13, 2024

# A SILENCE WORTH MORE THAN A THOUSAND EXPERT QUOTES: ON ANTI-ZIONIST JEWS

APRIL 16TH, 2024

—I was invited to a Jewish anti-Zionist\* WhatsApp chat — I tell my husband.

—That's a terrible idea — he laughs — you are the most Zionist person I know, and you love arguing with people.

—I promise I won't pick any fights, I'm just there to learn.

He sighs in doubt. On the one hand, he knows I'm a sucker for understanding and questioning. On the other, he's seen me argue to the point of crying/shouting countless times. A short-tempered woman.

10/7 marked a turning point in my life, not in my notion of what it means to be Zionist and my self-definition as such, but in my need to learn about the complexity of the problem that we, as the Jewish people, face today both in Israel and in the Diaspora, both in the most stubborn right and in the most denialist left.

Listen, being unequivocally Zionist does not minimize criticism against Israel's longtime policies on the Palestinian situation. The unequivocal is not antonymous to the complicated.

This thirst for knowledge has led me to listen and talk to people that, collectively, make up a 360-degree perspective on the subject. From convinced military men to Muslim-Israeli women. I talk to anyone who is willing to talk to me. I ask and I listen. I keep searching for the answer. I haven't reached any conclusions yet. Are there any?

So, I joined the WhatsApp group. I introduced myself by asking, "Is your criticism of Zionism due to an issue with the idea/concept of it

or a criticism of the Israeli government's handling of the Palestinian situation?" I received few responses. Not because they didn't want to answer, but because my question got lost amidst much more grandiloquent conversations.

I had never been in such intense (a thousand posts per hour, at all times) and intellectually elevated conversations. The tamest of the group quoted Kierkegaard. Terms like historical constructivism and nation-state mythology peppered every conversation. I must admit I had to google several of those.

I realized that Zionist Jews and anti-Zionist Jews suffer from the same affliction. That's not to say that we have similar views, but we are equally contemptuous of the other's ideas. The very same thing that anti-Zionist Jews criticize about the *Jewish mainstream* (markedly Zionist), they themselves commit. Those on the right accuse those on the left of being traitors, those on the left accuse those on the right of being assholes. Each one believes to be in possession of the absolute truth. When you start from a place of contempt, differences are irreconcilable.

And then came the Saturday of Iran's attack against Israel and the WhatsApp group went completely silent. Not a single post. Not a word. There was something personal, raw, painful and distressing about that silence.

And there I found the answer to my initial question. Not in the expert opinions that reflect what they know, but in that stifled silence that reflects what they feel when they see Israel in a vulnerable position.

A silence that is worth more than a thousand expert quotes. Zionism is something that can be described (and criticized) but cannot be explained. Sometimes not even to oneself.

\*For the sake of space, I use the word "anti-Zionist" as a simplifier for a range of ways of thinking and opinions.



# TONIGHT, SO SIMILAR TO ALL THE OTHER NIGHTS

APRIL 18TH, 2024

“Why is this night so different from every other night?” we Jews will ask as we begin Pesach (Jewish Passover). This question is at the heart of the celebration.

What makes this night important is not that it is different, but rather that it is so similar to all the others... To all Pesach celebrations for the last 3000 years.

Because all of us Jews around the world will sit at our tables with our families, some with right-wing views, some with left-wing views, some religious, some secular, some who eat rice, some who eat potatoes.

We will repeat the same prayer. All of us. Not a praise to God, as in other festivities. We will repeat the story of how we became a people. How we went from being individual Israelites to being the People of Israel.

We will tell the same story as we have done, in good years and bad, for 3000 years. Not because we don't know the plot, but because in repetition we find cohesion.

And in cohesion we find strength. And in strength lies the permanence of the Jewish people. And tonight, so similar to all the other nights, we will sit at the table and see last year's children turned into teenagers, older teenagers bring home their new partners, and couples turned into families.

And then we'll see the empty chairs. Those absences present. And we will (or won't) hold back tears. We'll eat too much and promise (as we did last year and the year before) that next year we won't eat as much.

And we'll say, as we have done for the last 3000 years, *L'shana ha-ba'ah b'Yerushalayim* (next year in Jerusalem) because, although we are physically in our homes all around the world, for the Jews, Jerusalem is a state of mind.

And we will teach our children, and our children's children, not only about the exodus from Egypt, but also about the responsibility of having been slaves and now being free men and women.

And we will go to sleep that night, just like all the other nights, remembering the pride of being Jewish.

# HATRED AGAINST JEWS IS NOT ONLY AGAINST JEWS

APRIL 22ND, 2024

*Mother knows best.* I think this should be a pyrographed stamp at the entrance of every house. My children think it's the punchline to a joke.

Every time I try to use my age/motherhood as a reason for my wisdom, my kids cackle with laughter. They call me hysteric, overdramatic, old-fashioned.

Objectively, it took me a long time to understand that my mom was right about many things in life. So, I hope they will also understand that someday.

But this time, on this particular subject, I do know best. For those of you who don't know me, and for the purpose of you understanding this story, let me tell you: I have two children studying in American universities. These last few days, particularly last weekend, have been horrifying for all parents of Jewish children studying in that country.

The level of violence in the anti-Israel protests has escalated to overwhelming proportions. Hysteric, overdramatic?

When you see demonstrations with 600 people camping out, shouting, "Death to the Jews" and assaulting Jewish students, three blocks away from your daughter's dorm, you think, maybe, just maybe, you have plenty of reasons for concern.

The scenes coming from one university to the next (not all, but many) are panic-inducing.

And look, I agree with preserving the *American way of life* and what the right to freedom of speech entails (you won't always hear things you like to hear). And I am aware of the political mess the Israel-Hamas war has turned into.

But having the rabbi of Columbia University in New York (the city with the second largest Jewish population in the WORLD) ask students to leave campus until further notice because he cannot guarantee their safety has nothing to do with either the right to freedom of speech or the complexity of war. It is pure, unadulterated and (poorly) veiled antisemitism and it does NOT HELP TO SOLVE THE SITUATION OF PALESTINIANS IN GAZA AT ALL.

So, I embrace and accept my hysteria and overdramatic tendencies. I consider them prudent and necessary. *Mother knows best.*

Why all the anguish? After a weekend of bad sleep, I try to get my head on straight by tallying up the worst-case scenarios. My psychiatrist would be proud of my capacity for self-analysis.

Ironically, what worries me most is not that someone will attack my children. Let me be clear: I'm obviously worried about them getting hurt, but that's not what worries me the most. Objectively, the possibility of a mugging, accident or problem arising while living in Mexico City is much greater than the possibility of an individual attack over there, even in this situation.

But there are two things I can't get out of my mind. The first is mass action and disarray. *Masses are asses.* Hordes of emboldened and angry people with a goal in mind are like spilled gasoline, and any excuse is a spark. That makes me panic. Anyone who knows a thing or two about violence during protests will tell you that if things get out of hand (and things can get out of hand so easily), the outcome can be terrible and very, very difficult to stop.

But what distresses me the most is the emphatic breaking point that these incidents represent. The point of no return that is being Jewish in today's world. Ever since October 7th, we had some hints that things for Jews in the Diaspora were going to get rough, and this is an unmistakable sign. I hate to be a pessimist, but I just don't see how we can go back from here.

And this anguish and hysteria is a solidarity cry of *one for all and all for one.* For me, for my children and also for all non-Jews (whether they understand this or not).

To my mind, this is a total debacle. Watching those scenes tears me apart. Hearing the chants crushes me and makes me feel like I can't breathe. Seeing the inability of authorities to provide answers and solutions fills me with anger and impotence.

I hurt for my children, for the world that awaits them. Because, as my daughter said, "Antisemitism will always be around. What worries me is that if or once protesters are dispersed, what then? Instead of being contained all in one place (visible and out in the open) now they're going to be everywhere. And they'll be angry." Because

these same "students" of today are the doctors, businessmen, politicians and citizens of tomorrow.

I also feel this anguish for all NON-Jews, who are probably unfazed by all this and feel this does not affect them TODAY. I have news for you: This isn't only against us. The mix of fundamentalism (Islamic in this case) + mass manipulation + woke liberalism + incongruence + authorities' inability to act, is an equation that works against EVERYONE.

Against the basic values of Western society. Today it's working against Jewish students, but it'll work against homosexuals tomorrow, and against any other group the day after tomorrow. No one is safe.

In the words of the great Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: *The hate that begins with Jews never ends with Jews. Antisemitism is the world's most reliable early warning sign of a major threat to freedom, humanity, and the dignity of difference. It matters to all of us. Which is why we must fight it together.*

Clearly, Rabbi Sacks always knew best.

Pro-Palestinian marches are starting to take over universities around the world, mainly in the United States. These marches are giving a lot to talk about.



Adina Chelminsky  
@AdinaChel



What bothers me the most about those self-proclaimed groups that protest in pro-Palestinian marches (which have become pro-Hamas) as “Jews against genocide” is that they make it seem like the rest of us Jews are “for genocide.”

NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH. NO ONE IS IN FAVOR OF WAR OR DEATH. NO ONE.

The rest of us Jews understand the complexity of the issue and do not endorse pro-Hamas groups that misrepresent words, information and the real solution.

6:57 PM · Apr 23, 2024

# DEAR UNAM STUDENTS

MAY 1ST, 2024

Esteemed student body of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (and all of those who join them), this letter is addressed to you, Mexican students who attend our most prestigious institution.

Tomorrow, while you're setting up your tents to demonstrate, I hope you can read this. And reflect. Just a little. If only one thing out of everything I say resonates with you, I'll be satisfied.

I write to you as a Jewish and Zionist woman. Adjectives that are complicated nowadays, but of which I am proud and from which I do not hide.

I write to you as a woman who is aware of the tragedy occurring in Gaza and of the enormous complexity of this conflict. A complexity that neither you, nor I, nor any other serious person can measure or speak of in terms of black and white, good and bad, or simple solutions. If anyone sees it or expresses it as such, it is precisely because they don't understand anything about what is happening.

I write to you as a woman who has spent the last 8 months trying to unravel this complexity and build bridges of respectful and purposeful dialogue.

The sit-in that you are planning, and all the marches around the Palestine-Israel issue, speak of many things beyond the situation itself. Major issues that concern us all today are on display at these demonstrations: free speech, limitations to free speech, Western education, mass manipulation, the role of money and social media in social movements.



The aim of this letter is not to change your minds, I have three children whose minds I have never been able to change, I know how young people work. The aim is to make you reflect.

Because within the seeming certainty of the arguments you make in your calls and proposals, I believe there is enormous confusion. You are not the only ones, all of us, on all "sides", are just as confused.

We are not only confused. We are stubborn in our confusion. Either because of our natural human bias or because of social media algorithms, the only opinions we hear are those identical to our own, self-confirming that we are right, and becoming deaf to others' opinions.

So now, I ask you to listen to mine.

#### I AGREE WITH YOU ON SEVERAL POINTS.

Yes, free speech should be a bastion of Western liberal societies. This entails listening to things and ways we may not like or agree with. National and institutional governments must guarantee the right to freely express ideas. All ideas.

Yes, criticism against the Israeli government is valid and necessary. It is the foundation of democracy. And all governments should be subject to such criticism. Within the Israeli government there are, undoubtedly, objectionable officials and highly debatable opinions.

This freedom of speech as a right is exercised every week in Israel, among Muslims and Jews, who march weekly for or against the current government. It is a right that we must exercise, as citizens of the world, for or against all countries in conflict, be it Israel, Iran, Syria, Myanmar, China or Mexico.

#### BUT THERE ARE CERTAIN POINTS THAT TROUBLE ME AND I WANT TO SHARE THOSE WITH YOU.

The right to free speech is not applicable in two instances. First, it does not apply to lies, falsehoods, half-truths or data tampering, and we have seen plenty of that on the banners and chants at marches and camps. Using and manipulating words because it "sounds good" is not free speech, it is lying. Pay attention to the words you shout or write.

Second, freedom of expression applies to substance, not to form. The end does NOT justify the means; violent, intimidating and threatening statements are not free speech, they are intimidation. I hope that your demonstrations NEVER make this mistake.

Sadly, protesting is of no use. Real and genuine concern for the situation in Gaza and the Palestinians is not helped by protests or sit-ins. Neither governments, nor universities, nor public opinion, MUCH LESS ANY OF THE STAKEHOLDERS, will change their stance as a result of these demonstrations. They bolster demonstrators' convictions, but alienate, even frighten, those they are trying to convince. Will they get UNAM to cut all ties with Israeli universities?

Maybe. Will that really solve the conflict? NOT AT ALL.

There is an undeniable tragedy unfolding in Gaza, but it is much more complicated than the current one-sided finger-pointing at Israel. Are you in favor of Palestine? Your chants and placards should also point fingers at Hamas and its war tactics, at what happened on October 7th, at the hostages, and criticize all governments that allow the war to continue, such as Iran and Syria.

I am concerned about the manipulation to which you are subjected. Your valid and respectable (even admirable) ideals are being tainted by much more Machiavellian forces that want you to do their dirty work. They take advantage of your ideals, your passion and your conviction to wreak havoc they can profit from.

Why is it only this international conflict that triggers such visceral reactions and activism? In Syria, there have been 20 times more casualties, in Yemen too, in Myanmar, in China. Why is it only this conflict that strikes a chord?

If we are all so concerned about deaths (which, I agree, are horrible) and human rights, why is this the only conflict that inspires these kinds of demonstrations?

My dad lays it out perfectly in a single phrase: No Jews, no news. When Jews are involved on one side, that brings the masses together and emboldens them. Period. I'd love to say it's a coincidence, but, whether we like the word or not, it's antisemitism.

Including slogans such as *Death to the Jews*, *Polanco is a ghetto*, using clichéd cartoons of Jews or painting swastikas and making any kind of reference to the Nazi regime is antisemitism.

Speaking of an intifada (and about globalizing it) is to speak of internationally magnifying the multiple deadly attacks against Jewish civilians that marked a significant part of the end of the last century and the beginning of this one.

The new buzzword among college protesters, *Liberated Zone*, is a carbon copy of the Nazi phrase *Judenrein*. A zone that is free... of Jews.

And although some say it is anti-Zionism, I don't believe that. In fact, I don't believe there is such a thing as anti-Zionism. There is criticism of the Israeli government, right. There is the complexity of the solutions that must be delivered NOW to the Gaza and West Bank territories, yes.

But denying Jews their self-determination in a sovereign, established and legal state is antisemitism. Why must Israel explain or justify its right to exist? Does France justify it? Does Australia? Does Jordan, which was created in the SAME agreement that led to the creation of the State of Israel?

And finally, I ask you to think about the repercussions that sit-ins and demonstrations can have in terms of violence. Are they violent marches or not? The answer is complicated and must be divided

into two sub-questions: What do we mean by violent? And, if they are not violent, at what point can things get out of control?

What do we mean by violence? Is it beatings and death? Is it words and intimidation? Is it restraining a person's freedom of movement? Is it stoking fear? These are questions that each of us must ask ourselves and answer, not whenever we see it on TV or in the news, but as if we ourselves, or our children, were in that siege situation.

At what point can things get out of control? What is absolutely NOT up for debate is that even in *the least violent violence* (so to speak) when there are masses and mobs involved, especially with masked faces, things can get out of hand in the blink of an eye. Among protesters themselves, between the authorities and the protesters, between protesters and outside students, between marches and countermarches. And that is extremely concerning.

When José Vasconcelos wrote the UNAM motto, "The spirit shall speak for my race," he did it thinking (as he said so himself) of a cosmic race, of all humanity, a synthesis of all races in the world to build a new civilization.

Achieving that requires dialogue without dogmas, actions without manipulation. It requires understanding the other, understanding the complexities of the world so that, also in the words of Vasconcelos, we can move forward together.

# EITHER MEXICAN OR JEWISH

MAY 12TH, 2024

—What are you? — Someone asks me at a meeting of “intellectuals.”  
—What do you mean, what am I? — I genuinely don’t understand what I’m being asked. Am I a *homo sapiens*? Are they curious about my résumé, my degree, my sexual preference, my zodiac sign?  
—What are you? Mexican or Jewish?

The question bewilders me but does not shock me. It doesn’t surprise me. It is the most common question I get, sometimes with genuine curiosity, sometimes with genuine aggression, in all social settings. On social media, when applying for a job, in meetings, in interviews, from my non-Jewish friends.

Are we Mexican/Argentinian/Australian/American [enter your nationality here] or Jewish?

It’s a question we are all asked sooner or later, and these days, given the Israel-Hamas conflict, it happens sooner rather than later.

In this particular case, the question does bewilder me. It baffles me because of the intellectual level of the person asking it and of those who are waiting for my reply. Everyone in there has at least a master’s degree, everyone is a well-read, learned writer (at least one book per head), everyone is “worldly.”

And no, I’m not saying intellectual credentials are any type of guarantee, but I just wasn’t expecting this. I mean, telling nationality and religion apart is kindergarten stuff.

“I am both,” I answer, “Mexican at heart and Jewish at heart, too.”

One is my home country and the other is my religion." To me this is so understandable and logical that it's not confusing to tell the two apart.

"But what are you first?" They go on with the line of questioning. I have never been asked that question before, and it does take me by surprise. And here, at this exact moment, I understand, for the first time in 50 years, where the question I have been asked so many times comes from.

Are you Mexican or Jewish? It's not a matter of explaining the difference between nationality and religion\*, that is easy enough to understand. But suddenly it dawns on me: That is not the point of the question.

It's not a matter of getting religion and nationality mixed up, it's a matter of questioning loyalties. Being asked what you are, or what you are FIRST, is questioning the Jewish person's loyalty to the homeland (whatever that means or entails exactly).

This falls, consciously or unconsciously, into one of the oldest antisemitic clichés in history: *Jews are the others*, the outsiders, the strangers, those who don't belong; those who, at any moment, will betray the country; those who, as Facundo Cabral sang, are not from here nor from there. The wandering Jews. A tale as old as time.

Because a French Muslim is never asked if he is Muslim or French. An Argentinian Shintoist is never asked if she is a Shintoist or an Argentinian. A Catholic in Japan is never asked if they are Catholic or Japanese.

Evidently, you can be Muslim AND French, Shintoist AND Argentinian, Catholic AND Japanese. And believing in the teachings of the Dalai Lama does not make you a citizen of Tibet, and therefore, you can easily be a full-blooded Mexican and believe in whatever you want.

But for Jews, it's either this "or" that, not this "and" that.

This question is not asked because people don't understand Judaism (they can't possibly understand Shintoism). It's asked because clichés and prejudice around Judaism take precedence over understanding the real thing.

Either Mexican or Jewish.

And this is further aggravated by the confusion, which is also basic kindergarten stuff, surrounding what it is to be a Jew and what it is to be Israeli. An Israeli is someone who lives in Israel. No, not all Israelis are Jewish. Over 20% of the Israeli population is, mainly, Muslim or Christian.

A Jew is a person who adheres to the Jewish religion and culture. Not all Jews are citizens of Israel. Some Jews (myself included) may have a very particular feeling towards Israel because of what it represents historically, religiously and socially for Judaism, but we are not citizens. We do not pay taxes, we do not vote in their elections.

The fact that this is hard to understand has nothing to do with confusion around terminology, or with malice (necessarily). Instead, it has to do with prejudice, which is sad. Prejudice that we can hopefully get rid of.

But let's cut to the chase: What am I really? Mexican or Jewish? What am I first? Jewish-Mexican? Mexican-Jew?

My loyalties are very clear. It depends on what I'm craving for breakfast that day: Chilaquiles, Mexican; blintzes, Jewish. The answer is that simple, the question is that dumb.

"I WRITE TO BE A TRANSLATOR FOR  
MYSELF."

LUIS JORGE ARNAU

As time goes on, the social media attacks I get — as well as everyone else who writes about the conflict from a Jewish perspective, no matter how hard we try to mince our words — are becoming annoying because of how ridiculous and vitriolic they are.





**Adina Chelminsky**  
@AdinaChel



"Are you bothered by the comments and viciousness from your haters on Twitter?", people often ask me.

Bitch, please! I've survived onslaughts, comments, sarcasm, criticism and intolerance from three teenage children.

I can take anything.

8:11 PM · May 25, 2024

# WHAT DOES 'WINNING' MEAN?

JUNE 20TH, 2024

"Why don't you write about Israel and Gaza anymore?", a friend asks. In addition to putting up with me live and in person, this friend also reads my posts.

"Ugh, I know!", I reply, in a tone that epitomizes professional certainty, "I've just been so busy writing about the Mexican election." COMPLETE LIES. I always have time to write.

Moreover, in the last few weeks, I have written (or started to write) dozens of pieces on Israel and Gaza. Dozens. About Rafah, about Netanyahu, about the hostages, about the Palestinians, about antisemitism, about Zionism, about statistics, about the past, about the future.

I write them, but then I don't publish them. I end up deleting them or filing them away. I write them, reread them and then think, "What's the point?." Not even I can make sense of my own words.

Because they are just words. Those sorts of words that are so unnecessary and fix so little. Because I don't know what to say, no, scratch that, I actually do have a lot to say, but I don't know how to say it.

Because everything I write these days sounds hollow and out of touch and overly simplistic to capture the dismal complexity of the situation. That which is terribly tragic, overwhelming, endless.

Because nothing I write makes any difference. And no, I don't think Netanyahu or Biden or Sinwar read what I write or listen to what I

have to say. But I've always thought that I have something tiny spot to contribute, to enlighten. Now nothing can be explained.

I have deleted everything I've written in the last few weeks because I always try to include in my texts at least one sentence of sanity, of hope; not because I want to lose myself in romanticism (which in war is unfeasible), but because I aim to leave a trace of hope for better days ahead.

Right now, I don't see when or how those days might come.

The first time I traveled to Israel, 3 weeks after October 7th, everyone said it would all be over within three months. We're eight months in now, and counting. Nothing has been resolved. I hope the conflict doesn't drag on until 2025.

Eight months into this war, everything is much more complex and pessimistic. It's not like things weren't complicated before, but right now they are really fucked up (I tried to find another adjective but couldn't find it, sorry).

The hostages, the fallen soldiers, the dead civilians, the ruins, the human shields, the military operations, the innocent civilians and the accomplices, Hamas in control, political problems in Israel, few or no interlocutors, Hezbollah on the attack, the West Bank reaching a boiling point...

With each passing day we get further away from any endpoint. Happy endings, impossible. But there is not even an end in sight. No one can or wants to back out anymore.

What does "winning" mean? It no longer matters. There is no winning. For anyone. Not for Gaza, not for Israel, not for the hostages, not for the soldiers' families, not for Lebanon if the war in the north escalates, not for the Palestinians who, whether they understand it or not, are the first victims of Hamas, which claims to fight for them.

With each passing day we move further away from a solution and leave deeper scars. Each passing day means a longer and more tortuous recovery. Many non-Jewish people think that we Jews derive some kind of sick pleasure from watching the scenes in Gaza.

False.

Being unequivocally in favor of Israel's right to exist and defend itself, and convinced that Hamas (and its sponsors) are the ultimate scum of the Earth does not mean I downplay the civilian horror in Gaza.

War is a series of tragedies and mistakes, one right after another. Once it starts, the spiral becomes uncontrollable.

A few months ago, coming back from my second trip to Israel, I wrote the question "Is there a chance for peace?" in this blog. My answer at the time was: It depends on who the two sides are. As in the opposing stakeholders, moderates and extremists.

Today, if I were to ask myself that same question, I would answer no. As long as the matter is in the hands of politicians, there is no chance for peace. Ordinary citizens, most of them I'd like to think, are fed up. Politicians are adopting increasingly radical views.

No peace. No victory. For anybody. What does "winning" mean? Retreating and leaving Gaza to Hamas so that they keep tormenting Palestinians? Letting the Palestinian Authority take control over Gaza when it hasn't been able to govern the West Bank and ensure its prosperity? Israel staying in Gaza at an immeasurable human cost? Surrendering Gaza and living eternally under threat?

Netanyahu resigning and another prime minister coming in to deal with the same manipulation and unsoundness from the Arabs? (Although if Ben Gvir and Smotrich did resign, that would be a huge relief).

Waiting for a ceasefire plan that will never come and, if it does, will never be enforced because Palestinian lives and futures are just bargaining chips to Hamas and its sponsors?

Prioritizing the hostages' safe return over soldiers' lives? Prioritizing soldiers' lives over the hostages' release?

Leaving behind an infuriated world (beyond the conflict zone), where there is no logic or dialogue, where antisemitism runs rampant, where manipulation is the new way of creating *truth*?

What does "winning" mean? I don't have the slightest idea. But today I understand perfectly the meaning of "losing."

Antisemitic attacks are beginning to break out of social media into ridiculous comments at schools and universities.



**Adina Chelminsky**  
@AdinaChel



Today's young Jews are forced to face questions about their Jewishness and the State of Israel for which they have no answer. And they're not even questions, they're assertions like, "You are Jewish and genocidal." – David Chelminsky

7:10 PM · Jul 6, 2024

# (THE TERM) ZIONISM MUST DIE

JULY 7TH, 2024

This is one of those think pieces that is going to piss everyone off. It will anger those who, whenever they see the word "Zionism," automatically cry out, "Genocide" and "Apartheid" with emojis of Palestinian flags and watermelons. It will also anger those who would never think of seeing the words "Zionism" and "must die" in the same sentence.

I will try to be very clear so that those who will get angry, get properly pissed off.

I hesitated a lot about posting these words, I know they sound like a gut punch. But we are 8 months (and many more years) deep into a terrible conflict that, with each passing day, becomes more and more drowned out by the noise, more complicated in scope, and spawns more senseless discussions and arguments. I hope these words help remove those distractions and allow us to focus on the important issue: finding a way forward.

As strong as they sound, I stand by my opening words: (The term) Zionism must die.

And no, it's not because I doubt the legitimacy of the State of Israel and its right to defend itself, quite the opposite. (The term) Zionism must die because it is anachronistic and using it (on either side of the conflict) is the biggest distractor from the serious discussions we should be having about the peacemaking process.

I am anti-Zionist. I am pro-Zionist. Zionists this. Zionists that. Zionists must die. Zionists will win. And it goes on and on and on and on.

These are meaningless arguments that are now at the heart of the conversation. They drive public discourse about what is happening now in Israel and Gaza and hamper discussions about real solutions for the war and the future. The State of Israel exists. It's a reality, imperfect like all countries, but a reality nonetheless. PERIOD.

Getting lost in all the bickering about Zionism is ridiculous. And no, I'm not saying this because I'm afraid of these arguments or afraid of losing them. I'm saying this because the term Zionism is dead, and we should stop summoning it like a ghost.

Zionism, per its official definition, is a movement to reinstate a Jewish nation in its ancestral homeland.

It existed and died. It existed, there's no denying that. Its cause was very important. It was born in the 19th century as an ideological aspiration and a political cause. It had a fundamental purpose.

It shaped and deepened the discussion, among the Jewish people and across the international community, about solutions to the serious problem of antisemitism in the world and the Jews' right to return to their ancestral land. Then it died on May 14th, 1948, when the State of Israel declared its independence with the endorsement of the international community.

The purpose of the movement was to reinstate. Reinstatement completed.

The Zionist ideal became the reality of the State of Israel. A country that does not need a back-up ideology to support its legitimacy. Just like no country on the face of the Earth does.

Regardless of the different opinions on the Queretaro Conspiracy, which was the spark that set off the Mexican War of Independence (whether it was right or wrong, whether its cause was just or not, whether Hidalgo was upright or not, whether their actions were violent or not), by the time the country was established as the United Mexican States, no one continued giving it too much thought or questioned it ever again, except for history books.

Now we can criticize and comment on every country's present reality, but without looking at the past. It's as if we could argue that, since Mexico has serious public safety issues, we should not have claimed our independence from Spain. The conversation is valid when it's not rhetorical, when real problems and possible solutions are discussed.

In the case of Israel, the war can be debated and criticized. Policies on the disputed/occupied territories can be contested. We all can have our say, whatever it is, about Netanyahu. We can debate about the mega problem that existed in Gaza and the West Bank even before October 7th.

But arguing about whether Zionism is valid or not is no longer relevant and does not contribute anything to the current situation or to the path towards the future.



People are screaming, "I am anti-Zionist" in tons of forums and on streets around the world. Well, they should go back in time and make that point at the Second Zionist Congress held in Basel in 1898 or at the British Parliament in 1917. There's no room for that discussion today.

There is room for other discussions, of course, but not for that one. Zionism is no longer valid or invalid. It is history, period.

The anti-Israel hordes should stop using the term because they're running around in circles over a ridiculous topic. What do they think is going to happen? That the State of Israel is going to disappear? Really? That is never going to happen under any scenario. Let's behave like mature adults and discuss real issues.

As Jews, we should stop using it because it comes across as a justification for a real, consummated fact that is NOT up for debate. As long as discussions, in any forum, include the word Zionism as a guiding thread, there will be no possible solution to the conflict in Gaza.

Getting lost in the "yes to Zionism vs. no to Zionism" dispute is a very comfortable and cowardly position to be in. It's a very media-savvy strategy that pulls at a lot of heartstrings and uses lots of slogans and catchy marketing phrases, but it DOES NOT PROMOTE a discussion that rises to the challenge, let alone a real solution.

A solution that we so desperately need today.

"IN A PLACE WHERE THERE ARE NO  
MEN, STRIVE TO BE A MAN!"

MISHNÁ



ADINA CHELMINSKY

CHAPTER 6

# ESSENTIAL

JULY 14TH - 22ND, 2024



*I went to Israel three times (and I hate to quote Paquita la de Barrio, but):*

*The first time was out of anger,  
The second was a whim,  
The third one was for pleasure.*

# ESSENTIAL ISRAEL

JULY 14TH, 2024

At this point, when I announce to my family that I'm going to Israel, to visit a country at war, perhaps the longest and bloodiest war in its history, no one bats an eye anymore.

This is the third time I've visited since October 7th. I think my family is either tired or used to it. The first couple of times I traveled there, the anguish and disbelief were palpable. Now they just say, "Take care, don't do anything crazy."

I'm also traveling with a different attitude this time. Not because things are better (in fact, war-wise, I think they're more complicated than ever), but because I think I'm getting used to the complications of the trip.

The first time I traveled over there, 20 days after the attacks, I left a file on my computer with all my secret passwords and the location of my will, in case something happened to me. I carried military-grade cell phone batteries, an emergency suitcase to carry with me 24/7, a missile-strike kit in case there was one, and shoes so I could run quickly to the *miklat* (shelter), if necessary.

This time, I unplugged my computer and packed the usual stuff, including "cuter" (i.e., uncomfortable) shoes. Now I know that, if I have to run to a *miklat* or the power goes out, it'll be alright — or it won't be great, but I'll survive.

That's the only headspace in which you can travel to Israel today. Hoping for the best, yet knowing you may encounter the worst.

And side note, it is not lost on me that, just a few kilometers from where I'm visiting, a tragedy is unfolding. Because that is undeniable, wars are a tragedy for all civilians involved, I don't ever want to minimize that fact.

What to me are voyages of discovery, to others is war.

Why am I going? Why am I going for a third time?

I'm going because, credit where credit's due, and speaking of Phoenician matters, I have a husband who funds my need to understand what is going on there in person.

I'm going because I still have a lot to learn from the situation, on both sides of the battle. I want to try to understand things that can only be understood on site. Breathe the atmosphere, chat with people, look around, feel. I don't want to be just another analyst who writes about what she reads or repeats what others say.

I'm going because I have very close relatives over there whom I love and to whom, ironically, these times have brought me closer. A blessing amid all this madness.

It only takes one text from me saying, "I land on Tuesday" for them to open their house doors, their kitchens and their hearts to me. "We'll be waiting."

I have rediscovered this geographically distant family that is now part of my daily life and that had never been so close to my heart.

I'm going because I have a couple of follow-up meetings (I will write about them soon) and to continue meeting people who have something to contribute to my vision.

But I'm actually going because... because... because... I couldn't put it into words until a few hours ago when, having just finished packing, I put away my Fodor's book (a travel guide that I use all the time) and I saw the title. And it all just clicked.

*Essential Israel*, it says on the cover.

I understand that the book is called that not because of my emotional situation but because it is the abbreviated version of the original travel guide. It includes only the essentials.

But in this moment, the title seemed aptly metaphorical to me.

Essential Israel.

Israel, to me, is essential.

It is part of me, of who I am, of my history, of the challenges I face today (i.e., antisemitism). Part of what defines me. We Jews are inextricably linked to the fate of the State of Israel.

Many non-Jewish people do not understand the emotional bond many Jews (though not all) have with Israel.



I myself find it hard to put it into words.

No, it's not my home country, I am a diehard Mexican, but I do feel it as my own.

I don't live there. Once I arrive, I move around like a tourist, sometimes the language doesn't come easy, I miss my home and Mexico when I'm there.

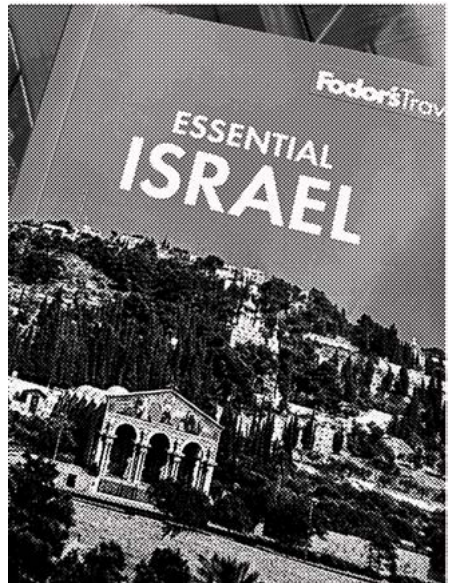
But there is a part of me that, when the plane lands, feels like it belongs. Israel belongs to me, and I belong to Israel.

Lina Landau, a very close friend of my parents and one of the most pragmatic and smart women I know, once summed it up for me in a single phrase: "Israel is the mother, the essential, the familiar. Mexico is the partner you choose to live with, with whom you build a future."

Both are essential in your upbringing, in your understanding of the world, in your understanding of yourself; in your past, in your trauma; in your future, in your path.

So, I pack my bags.

*Essential Israel*, here I come.



# EXPLAINING JERUSALEM

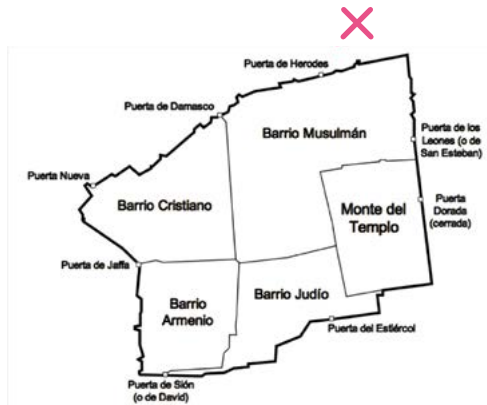
JULY 17TH, 2024

—I’m staying at a hotel in the Arab part of Jerusalem— I tell my parents in a tone that leaves no room for discussion. I feel so sorry for them, I only cause them concern instead of giving them great-grandchildren.

—Just do me a favor— my mom tells me —If you go to the Kotel (Wailing Wall), enter the Old City through the Jewish Quarter, not the Muslim Quarter.

For those of you who are not familiar with Jerusalem’s geography, let me break it down for you (see map below): The Old City, which is kind of like the historic center, is where all the holy places are (the Wailing Wall, the Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre). It is a walled city that’s divided into four quarters: One Jewish, one Muslim, one Christian and one Armenian, all intertwined. You can go through any of them to access the holy sites. Obviously, if you are staying in East Jerusalem (the modern Muslim neighborhood), the logical entry point to the Old City would be through the Muslim Quarter (the pink X is where my hotel is).

My first stop in Jerusalem was, as always, the Old City. A place at once so holy and so complex. A hub for faith in God and for human discord.





I like it because it's so beautiful and because it makes me so curious about people's devotion to whoever their God is.

I went on Google Maps to find the best route and... let's just say the algorithm did not care about my mom's request. It showed me the shortest way there: the old Muslim Quarter, through very Arab streets, with no tourists of any kind. Women in hijabs, men speaking Arabic, mosques and schools of Muslim prayer.

I had not crossed this neighborhood in 40 years. When I was a child, we walked through these streets on our way to visit the mosque as tourists, a place that has not been open to Jews for many years.

There was a split moment when I wondered if, at 50 years old, I should listen to my mother, get out of the Muslim Quarter, go around and enter the Old City through a more crowded, Jewish and familiar route. But then I thought, if I always look at the same things, I will always reach the same conclusions. So, I kept on walking.

Explaining Jerusalem to those who haven't been there is difficult, but it is fundamental in order to understand Israel today, and what the Israel of tomorrow could look like. In the Old City and in the

modern city, there's a coexistence, in greater or lesser proportion depending on the area, of Orthodox Jews, secular Jews, Muslims, Christians, Armenians, some lost agnostic tourists and the occasional person who only comes to check things out and seek spiritual enlightenment without denomination.

And it works. Not perfectly, not without incidents or mishaps, but it works. Life is livable even in the midst of a war that has everyone wrathful and fearful. They walk the same streets, eat at the same restaurants, work at the same places, vote in the same elections, complain about the same real estate prices and the same public policy. It's not perfect, there are issues, but it's real.

"Jerusalem is the prime example of the coexistence that could be achieved in all of Israel, it is the future vision of what is possible," I'm told by a young friend who has lived in Jerusalem all her life and has seen the city survive and overcome all the political and social crises of the last few years.

And yes, amidst the terrible news about what is happening just a few hundred miles away, here, things between Arabs and Jews, between Orthodox and secular Jews and between all "sides" feel more like a manageable challenge than an unsolvable situation.

—*Yalla*, lady, where are you going? — a man shouts at me with a thick Arabic accent. I was so engrossed in thinking that I had solved, in just one walk, the age-old Middle East debate, that I didn't realize I was now lost.

—To the Kotel — To the Wailing Wall, I reply.

—Wrong way, lady, this is the way to the mosque, you cannot go to the mosque.

He signals with his hand which way I should take. I start walking. The way from the mosque to the Kotel was along the Via Dolorosa.

So metaphorical. Just like everything in Jerusalem.

# DRONE

JULY 19TH, 2024

—*Eifo ha ATM ha ají karov?* — Where is the nearest ATM? I ask the gentleman at the front desk of the hotel that is checking me in. Obviously, for those of you who know me, I had run out of cash.

—*Mul ha consuliya ha americani, yajad la malón* — he tells me that it is in front of the American consulate, next to the hotel.

I switch to English at this point. I don't have enough Hebrew vocabulary to continue this conversation.

—The consulate where the drone hit this morning?

—Yes, it's 100 meters from here.

Holy shit! *Kus emek! Inquesu...* All of the curse words in every language I know ran through my head at once. One block away! What-thefuckamIdoinghere?

I already knew that a drone from Yemen had hit Tel Aviv that very morning. But, in my mind, Tel Aviv is huge, it could have hit anywhere. It was a whole different story to find out that it had hit right next to my hotel.

Just when you think you are traveling to a "normal" country, the reality of war punches you in the stomach. Naturally, the first thing I did was go check out the area right away.

I'm an irresponsible person, but I'm a quick irresponsible person. It took me less than 3 minutes to get there. I wasn't the only curious onlooker. Dozens of people were walking around the area.

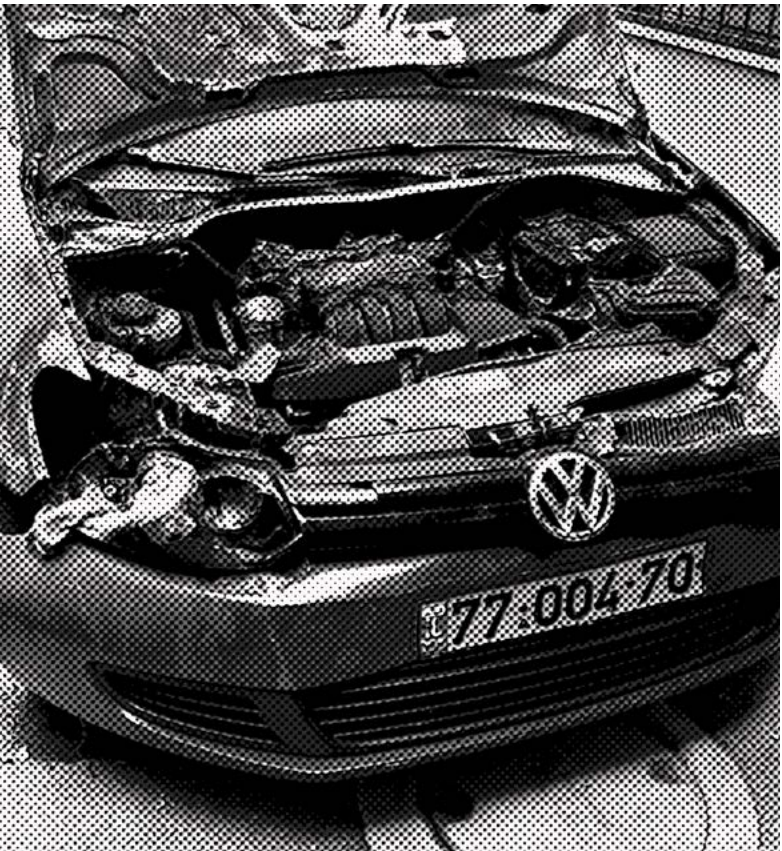
All police officers and medical staff had already left the scene. I assumed that the work of collecting the bodies (1), the wounded (half a dozen) and everything related to the investigation had already concluded. The only ones there were the nosy onlookers, the worried, the incredulous.

Among the locals sweeping the shattered glass from their broken windows, among the rubble of the half-destroyed building where the explosive device landed, among the literally melted cars, among the press filming and the neighbors walking on the street with horrified faces.

I think we were all thinking the same thing: How could a 5-meter drone pass from Yemen undetected? How many more will go through? When will it stop?

When will it stop?

We all left the area with photos and no answers.





# THEM AND US

JULY 21ST, 2024

Since the conflict first began, the thought of what Israeli Muslim and Arab women must be feeling fills me with doubt and angst.

Are they enemies? As we see in the simplistic two-sided narrative, which we buy into and want to believe in. Or are they mothers who want a better present and future for their children?

Today's post is not written by me, I'm handing the pen and the floor to Kefaia Aiaite, woman, mother, Arab, Muslim, Israeli. Peace activist for Women Wage Peace.

Clearly, her words are far more accurate than anything I could write. They are at once heartbreaking, realistic, and hopeful.



# THEM AND US: IS THERE ROOM TO GO ON WORKING FOR PEACE?

by Kefaia Aiaite

*My name is Kefaia.*

*I am an artist and a social and political activist. I have run social justice centers and, these days, I am self-employed. This is the third time I speak to an audience in Argentina. I live in Acre, a very nice city, and I have 3 children.*

*I am here today, in front of you to make my voice heard and my concern for the situation known. For more than half a year now, since that grim October 7th, circumstances have been terrible for the future of my children and all children under these skies.*

*Our situation gets worse every day in this terrible present where we all experience so much pain and suffering, and bury our children on both sides.*

*We, as Israeli Palestinian citizens, learned both peoples' cultures, the language of the leaders and the people, the pain, the way of thinking, the positions, and we learned to live together.*

*Therefore, we, the Arabs of Israel, have an important role to play to lead a change in solving the conflicts between the two peoples, the two cultures, the two positions, the two languages and also the two ways of thinking, to bring them to the table, start a dialogue, get to know each other and plan together what is good for us all, to give a life and a future to our children.*

*We, who know both peoples, have an important role to play in overcoming the conflict between the two peoples, in abandoning hatred and grief. We must leave behind a legacy that brings life to the citizens of both peoples. We must be the bridge of reconciliation and dialogue between them.*

*What is a bridge? A bridge connects two different places, so that we can move from one side to the other, making sure that the road is well-paved to reach the other side.*

*In fact, this is what we Israeli Arab women do in Women Wage Peace. For more than a decade, the main goal of our movement has been to get our leaders back to the negotiating table.*

*We, the Israeli Arab women, felt that, without a sister Palestinian organization for peace we would not be able to move forward. And so, we became the bridge between our movement and a Palestinian movement, Women of the*



*Sun. We acted between the two groups. It took us three years to coordinate our collaboration.*

*We faced many challenges together until we built deep trust and came to the conclusion that only women can bring peace.*

*As the war rages on in Gaza, and the fallen victims and hostages have not yet returned, we continue on the path that we have opened for ourselves.*

*We believe in our way to stop the fighting and make a life-giving change for us all.*

*Rim Hagagri from Women of the Sun and Dr. Yael Admi from Women Wage Peace were chosen by The New York Times as two influential women worldwide, and we have been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.*

*The whole world is inviting us to talk about the vocation of motherhood. We have been invited to France, Berlin, Slovenia, Cyprus, Belgium, Madrid and many other places... New requests come in every day. Because the world wants to hear that there are women who think differently, who think with their heads, their hearts and their wombs.*

*The world trusts that Israeli and Palestinian women are willing and able to mend the situation and believes in our path.*

*And we Arab women are determined to pronounce before the world that, when the earth trembles, anger and hatred towards the other rise, the lack of empathy is frightening, hearts become guarded and death looms around every corner.*

*Are we a nation that wants to give life to its children? Our job is to unite, explain and give life.*

*Our wound is a deep wound, we all carry it. The earth that trembles beneath our feet is the same one. The earth that swallows us whole is the same.*

*From my personal standpoint, and because you allowed me this space to say these words, I trust that you all, as influential players, will lend a hand of support and help the children who suffer the consequences of war on both sides, to provide them with treatment and heal their souls.*

*I am here to raise the voice of all mothers, I am an Arab Muslim with a complex identity. I am a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship who cannot hide her feelings about what is happening to her Islamic brothers, and also to the people of Israel, our cousins, and to the future of all our children.*

*Thank you.*

# ZE MA SHE YESH: IT IS WHAT IT IS

JULY 22ND, 2024

The only thing that my three trips to Israel since October 7th have had in common is how absolutely hammered I get on every flight home.

—Water or orange juice before we take off?

—A beer, please... Make that two.

The flight crew is always either very accommodating or very understanding of the level of stress that comes with traveling to the Holy Land these days. This land that is so holy and so beautiful and so complicated and so painful.

They bring me two beers... and then two more. I always write my farewell texts and thoughts on these flights, under the emotional anesthesia of alcohol.

The most painful part of this journey is how normal pain and anguish have become in Israel. How they can coexist and blend into everyday life. How they become imperceptible, yet deafening at the same time.

On my first post-attack trip, at the end of October, I found a country in shock. The streets were empty. People burst into tears in the middle of the sidewalk. Trains and buses were deathly silent. It seemed as though someone had lowered the volume and the brightness on the country's display. Everything was blurry and quiet.

On my second trip, back in February, when the initial shock had given way to despair and damage assessment, I found a sad and angry country, facing a devastating reality and searching for answers that

were impossible to find. A country immersed in a full-blown war, which they still, at the time, thought could be relatively short and, if not winnable (wars can never be won), at least solvable.

On this current trip the only feeling I perceived was of normalized weariness. Do you know what I mean? People are fed up and angry... and tired of being fed up and angry. Fed up with a war that seems to have no end (the war in the north is clearly imminent); fed up with the political situation that seems to have no remedy (the sides against and in favor of Netanyahu are increasingly confronting each other and it's clear that, as long as the political infighting continues, it will be tough to move forward with a real peace process); fed up with the economic crisis that affects everyone; and fed up with the pain from Gaza.

The prospects for the safe return of the hostages (or at least their bodies) are diminishing by the day. Bringing them home is no longer just a condition for a ceasefire, it's a necessity for the country to heal and move forward. Everybody knows that, if the wound left by the hostage crisis remains open (if not all the people or bodies are released), it will fester forever. In one of the marches, I see a sign that sums it all up perfectly: *Ha atid iatjil im tshubam*. The future will begin with their return.

Israel doesn't have a pebble in its shoe, it has a sharp blade. But, at the same time, life has gone back to a certain kind of normal. An abnormal normalcy.

During World War II, Hannah Arendt defined the term "banality of evil" as how evil can coexist with ordinary people in everyday life. I am confronted here today with the "banality of pain," the pain that coexists with ordinary people in everyday life.

Don't get me wrong, and don't think I'm being overly gloomy: I didn't suffer through my trip. Not at all. Israel is still a special and spectacular place to visit. Jerusalem is magic and Tel Aviv is, without a doubt, one of my favorite cities in the world. But it is still sad.

I cannot deny the reality of my travels: After all, I am in Israel today (and I've come so often) because there is a war happening that is tearing the country and Gaza apart, and another *war* (of growing antisemitism) that is taking its toll on the lives of Jews in the Diaspora. And that latent pain doesn't go away for a second during my trips. Here's to more hummus, to more sunsets, to more hugs.

That one cousin who, during my first trip, described the situation as *sorrow*, today describes it as *despair*, as going from grief to hopelessness.

One of the few things that are clear to me, very clear, extremely clear, is the imminent desire for peace, not as a cute thought on social media, but as a pragmatic and urgent effort.

Peace activists, the real ones, are not in Columbia or on social media (those are just loudmouths who, let's face it, wouldn't give a damn about this if Jews weren't involved). They are in the streets of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and all surrounding cities and towns, marching

week after week, pressing the government, creating and strengthening NGOs, calling for an END to the war and the restoration of order and normalcy for Palestinians. Israelis with loftier aspirations do it out of a genuine desire for peace, those with more realistic views do it because they know there won't be safety in Israel unless an entente cordiale, at least, can be reached.

To the outside world, "ending the war" is just a screenshot on their phone or a shout into the void of social media. To Israelis, it is their future and their present.

I always return from Israel with my arms aching from giving so many hugs, but today I leave with a bitter taste in my mouth.

Underneath the tough exterior and the "I've got everything under control" attitude that characterizes the Israeli spirit, today there is a heavy melancholy, a longing for days gone by or for days to come.

I don't know if this new reality is a bump on the road towards a better future or a perpetual stalemate, but, as Israelis say over and over again, I'm not sure if as a description or as a way of consoling themselves: *Ze ma she yesh*. It is what it is.



# DOPE VACATION PHOTO

AUGUST 6TH, 2024

Yes, the time of the year when everyone shows off their vacation photos. Those that capture them in their best clothes, in the most beautiful places, with the most colorful sunsets, with the prettiest faces and the most beaming children.

With the most self-centered hashtag: #blessed.

And that's totally fine. There are blessings to spare. May we all have many.

This is mine. My most precious and gorgeous photo of this vacation.

In 700 AD, in the golden age of Jews in Sicily, a Mikveh, a ritual bath, essential for Jewish life, was built in a small village (which, at its peak, was 30% Jewish).

It was built during the Byzantine Empire and was operational for almost 800 years, until 1492, when the Edict of Expulsion expelled the Jews from the village and the era of the Spanish Inquisition began. We know how the rest of that story goes.

The Mikveh was closed. The entrance was blocked, the place was buried, and a small palace was built on top. It was as if it had never existed. Neither the Mikveh, nor any trace of Jewish life in Sicily.

Thirty years ago, a family purchased the building with the intention of turning it into a bed and breakfast place. While working to fortify the building's foundation, they found a door. They forced it open (it had been closed for over 500 years) and found the Mikveh inside,

intact, in one piece.

The erased but indelible Jewish presence. Perennial despite time and circumstance.

Today, in a world where Jewish life is being challenged in so many ways, this to me is the most important photo of my vacation. The most beautiful. The most necessary.

The unequivocal proof that we were, still are, and always will be #blessed.



ADINA CHELMINSKY

CHAPTER 7

# ENDLESS

JULY 31ST - OCTOBER 6TH, 2024





*It is said that, in politics, there are two types of decisions: The crappy ones and the ones that don't solve anything.*

*The bad ones are those made with a faulty diagnosis or strategy or with the simple intention of not fixing anything and just pulling the wool over people's eyes. The crappy ones are those made with a purpose in mind but with very costly side effects (either calculated or incalculable).*

*War is politics.*

*Decisions regarding the war in Gaza and the hostage release strategy are becoming increasingly complicated.*

*When those of us who have only seen wars in movies comment on them, we think that going into battle looks a lot like a film set, where you control the actors, and you can yell, "Cut" at any point.*

*But real wars (especially when the one controlling the enemy is unreasonable) become tragedies of serial mistakes. An endless string of crappy decisions.*

*Endless.*

*Endless.*

*Endless.*

*Endless.*

*Endless.*

*Endless.*

*Endless.*

On July 31st, Israel (allegedly) killed Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas political leader and one of the minds behind the October 7th attacks.



Adina Chelminsky  
@AdinaChel



Haniyeh is primarily responsible for the subjugation of the Palestinian people since 2007. His main legacy is not the damage he caused in Israel, but the harm he inflicted upon the Palestinians he so claimed to defend.

Because of him and his Manichean and manipulative strategy, the international funds that Gazans so desperately needed were diverted for war purposes. Because of him, entire generations have been indoctrinated into a culture of death.

4:59 AM · Jul 31, 2024



**Adina Chelminsky**  
@AdinaChel



Media outlets portray Haniyeh as the star negotiator of the conflict. As if he had been some Swiss banker with moral character or honor.

He was a predator, a manipulator without the slightest intention of solving the conflict. Neither for the hostages nor for the Palestinians.

7:49 AM · Aug 1, 2024

# TERRORISM (TAYLOR'S VERSION)

AUGUST 9TH, 2024

The two news items that have dominated my algorithm this year have been the phenomenal and roaring success of Taylor Swift (#respect) and, obviously, the issue of Islamic fundamentalism and its footprint not only in the war between Israel and Gaza, but also on the streets of the world.

Oh, the sad irony of both topics converging today in the same news headline!

TAYLOR SWIFT'S VIENNA SHOWS CANCELLED AFTER DISCOVERY OF A PLANNED TERRORIST ATTACK. And yes, the perpetrators were affiliated and coordinated by Islamic fundamentalism. And yes, they did find bombs and plots for mass vehicle-ramming attacks. And yes, imagine how serious and alarming the matter must have been for the authorities to cancel the concerts even with the terrorists in custody.

*Be careful what you wish for, it may come true.* Because this, ladies and gentlemen, is what it means to globalize the Intifada.

This is what the banners held during protests and the hashtags posted on social media ACTUALLY endorse. This is what the (erroneously) called Islamic "resistance" that so many in the West advocate for is all about.

This is what Islamic fundamentalism is: ISIS, Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, Iran... All cut from the same cloth, all ready to achieve their goals by any means possible.

Let's see if this finally helps all of those who shout in the streets and on social media understand who the enemy that we are ALL facing is and what they're capable of. Let's see if now those who think the issue of Islamic fundamentalism is someone else's problem (i.e., of Israel and the Jews) understand that this is everyone's issue.

Let's see if now those young people who are passionate about defending the "weak" (and boy, do the fundamentalists play that part extremely well) understand what it is they are defending. Let's see if now that this is hitting them where it hurts, they finally open their eyes.

Let us use this worrying event to say things as they are, without political correctness. Because this is not the time for political correctness, it is time for awareness.

Islamic fundamentalists are not only against Israel and Jews (which, sorry but, that should be enough reason to fight them), they are against all Western values and freedoms. In old Tehran, in Kabul, in Gaza, in Judea and Samaria, in London, in Paris...

Conquering Israel, from the river to the sea, is a stepping-stone to all the rivers and all the seas.

Islamic fundamentalists have no respect for anyone's life. The end justifies any means. The average audience at Taylor Swift's concerts are girls and teenagers. They were the target of this attack. They were aiming to sow terror by killing the most innocent.

This is what supporting the Intifada means, this is the resistance that Islamic fundamentalism talks about. This is it, not the one sugarcoated on social media.

And I do feel great sadness for the moderate Muslims who we lump together with the fundamentalists and who are currently suffering the most terrible Islamophobia, but the absence of their voices in protest perpetuates the problem.

It's time for us all to raise our voices. Silence is an accomplice and ally of terror. I don't mean raising our voices for Israel, I mean raising our voices against the risk we are ALL facing. Israel is just the canary in the coal mine.

To quote and edit a Taylor Swift lyric: *So it's gonna be together or it's gonna go down in flames.*

# KADISH: SANCTIFICATION

AUGUST 29TH, 2024

The Jewish rite of mourning is thousands of years old. Not much has changed since the first Jews buried and mourned their dead to how we act now in the face of death. The time frames are structured (the first stage lasts a week, then 30 days, then 11 months) and the traditions for each stage are ironclad.

For non-Jews, it may seem like a very strict process. For me, as I know no other way to mourn the people in my life who have died, it is a process that gives me comfort and allows me to move on. The Jewish prayer of mourning is called *Kaddish*, which means "sanctification."

This prayer is said when someone dies. It is said on the day of their death. It is said daily during the week-long mourning period (Shiva). It's said during all prayers, every day, for up to 11 months after a person's passing.

The Jewish mourner's *Kaddish* does not speak of the person who passed away. Not a word. It is a praise to God. An oath through which we the living, despite the pain of a loved one's death, reassert our unwavering faith in God. *Itgadal be itzkadash shemei rabam*. Praised and hallowed be His name.

Eleven months after the date of death (burial), the official mourning ends, *Kaddish* is no longer said, a chapter closes, and life starts anew for the bereaved. A few days before the 11 months of mourning are up for the 1200 killed on October 7th, a few days before 1200 families stop saying the mourner's *Kaddish*, I find no words of closure. I find no words to mark the end of the tragedy and the restart of life.



Because the Jewish people, all of us, have lived through 11 months of collective mourning. A mourning that will end in a couple of days, and that should mean that life will regain some normalcy.

But today I find neither solace, nor calm, nor hope. I can't seem to forgive or forget.

I don't see how the direct bereaved (the relatives), or the supportive bereaved (all other Jews) can close this shattering and tragic chapter, or how Israeli society and Gazans can resume their lives. There's been no closure. Only more fronts opening.

Eleven months later there are still another 108 families who do not know if their loved ones, captive in Gaza, are dead or alive. Whether they will eventually need to bury them and begin their mourners' *Kaddish*.

The inevitability of this deadline overwhelms me and fills me with sadness. Again. That constant sadness that's always with me, with all of us. The 11 months will be up, the official end of mourning, without the restart of life. For anyone.

There are no winners in war, I must have written that hundreds of times. I don't know any Israelis or any Jews (in their right mind) who aren't struck to the core by the tragedies we see on both sides of the border.

The decision-making around what's best, in the face of such a complex situation, is always devastating. Stay in Gaza until the hostages are rescued at an enormous human cost? Let Hamas continue to destroy Palestinian lives? Attack Lebanon to defeat Hezbollah?

Decisions are either bad or crappy (and no, no one would listen to me if I had an idea about what to do next). The first time I went to Israel, 3 weeks after October 7th, the situation was tragic and overwhelming but seemed contained and finite. It will be over by the first quarter of 2024, experts predicted.

The first quarter of 2024 came and went, followed by the second. Now the third quarter is about to finish, and I see no end in sight. The war is just getting more and more complicated. More tragic.

And as much as I disagree with many policies of Netanyahu's administration, each passing day I become more convinced that fighting irrational agents (such as Sinwar, Hamas and its enablers in Iran), who trade in the flesh of their own people as if they were bargaining chips for the sake of meeting their war objectives, makes any logical negotiation impossible and even precludes the minimum humanitarian standards of warfare.

How do we find closure for this mourning?

I don't see any potential end to global antisemitism either. It's actually worse than ever. I am sick and tired of the attacks on social media, of cancel culture, of the tongue-in-cheek questions in the most inappropriate places. I am sick of everything my children have

to bear at school, of the violence in the streets and the indifference of so many people.

How do we find closure for this mourning?

I am done with the anonymous and emboldened haters, with the useful idiots who take the streets without knowing why, and with the cowards who don't speak up.

I am sick and tired of how we Jews have to constantly justify who we are, what we stand for and Israel's right to exist and defend itself.

I am done with trying to explain to deaf and blind people in the West (indoctrinated and ridiculous masses that stand for what is popular instead of what is right) that the real enemy, EVERYONE's enemy in the West, is Islamic fundamentalism. That no one is spared from its wrath.

How do we find closure for this mourning?

I am tired of the tragedy of war, of not finding a path to peace (or, at least, to an entente cordiale). I am tired of seeing the heartbroken faces of the mothers on both sides who do not seek vengeance, but mutual understanding.

How do we find closure for this mourning?

I believe we will never find closure for the tragedy of October 7th. It will be a perennial mourning. It will not end after 11 months, even if we stop reciting *Kaddish*. Once we do stop reciting *Kaddish* for the dead, where will we find solace?

Perhaps we simply must replace it with another prayer.

I found this phrase in the Talmud (the book of Jewish law). A phrase that does not praise God but cements our place as human beings on Earth, our power to make the world a better place... and, perhaps, this will also serve as a source of solace.

I think we must repeat it every single day:

*Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly now, love mercy now, walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.*

*Itgadal be itzkadash shemei rabam.* Praised and hallowed be His name.

# GENOCIDAL ZIONIST

AUGUST 30TH, 2024

Oh, the things you can find about yourself on social media.

Apparently, I am: That Jewess. That genocidal bitch. That Zionist. The murderer of Christ (I allegedly nailed him to the cross... Are we really still fighting about that after 2000 years?). A Mexican oligarch. The subduer of the Mexican people. The foreigner. A trashy bourgeois (I take issue with the *trashy* part). Christian blood drinker. Fascist. White lady. Conservative. Posh. Thief. Crook. Stinky. Ugly. Looks like a man. Transsexual. Dyke. Badly fucked. Slut. Too skinny. Too fat. Looks like a *muppet*. Looks like my f... mother. Old. Wrinkled. Unbearable. Insufferable.

No wonder I end up exhausted every night. Hello, allow me to introduce myself. I am all of the above. I'm at your service (because you may call me everything, but impolite).

Although the archaic insults I get may seem far-fetched and childish, they are my daily bread.

I deal with haters, trolls, bots. With folks emboldened by the anonymity of social media, and with ordinary citizens (emphasis on the *ordinary*) who dispense short arguments and long insults.

Some of the epithets are related to my political standing (something that many of us are used to), but most of them have to do with the fact that I'm Jewish.

That Jew.

And, although I'm used to it by now, as it comes with the territory of being a semi-public figure, the lengths people will go to never cease to amaze me.

I don't really mind that it's directed at me. It concerns me because of what it unveils: the antisemitism of a huge number of people (which is no surprise but has multiplied over the past year) and the level of discourse on social media, which spills over into real life.

Insults have very little effect on me. Anyone who deals with teenage children knows that they can dish out much more incisive and hurtful words. But they do pique my interest in a social, pedagogical and anthropological way.

I am concerned about the fact that these insults are also directed at other Jewish people who a) have less experience with this kind of attacks, b) are quicker to anger and/or c) have a less reliable support system.

And I know these words can be cutting. How did we come this? What is the limit to the insults we can hurl at a stranger just because they are, in this case, Jewish?

What level of idiocy can a person have to think that calling someone a "genocidal Zionist" is going to solve one iota of the chaos and tragedy in Gaza? How long before the protective cloak of social media crosses over to the real world?

Questions with no answers.

Now, within all this mess, there's the other side of the coin. The people who, out of the goodness of their hearts, many without even knowing me or perhaps while disagreeing with many of my opinions or political views, put a stop to this hatred, *defend* me or send me messages of support.

Now, every time I'm attacked on social media (which is becoming increasingly frequent and aggressive), instead of freaking out, I feel grateful that there are still people out there who know what is right in such a complicated world, and who are willing to stand up for it.

Since it's Friday, I'll allude to what I proudly am: *Shabbat Shalom* to all.

After the bodies of 6 hostages were found, shot point-blank a couple of days earlier, a tirade of "who's to blame" started on social media.

Whose fault is it that a ceasefire and hostage release deal was not reached in almost a year... or that they weren't rescued by the military while still alive?



Adina Chelminsky  
@AdinaChel



Yes, I have huge (HUGE) criticism against Netanyahu's administration, but let's make one thing clear:

The main culprits for the start of this war, for the war not ending and for the hell Palestinians are living through are HAMAS AND THE ENABLERS BEHIND IT. Iran, with money and ideology, and the useful idiots who justify its actions on the global stage.

8:04 AM · Sep 1, 2024

# ISRAEL-GAZA: NO EUPHEMISMS

SEPTEMBER 9TH, 2024

*You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in the court of public opinion.*

This is what law enforcement officers say in crime movies when they read an arrested criminal their rights (it obviously sounds more convincing coming from Robert DeNiro or Morgan Freeman).

As I write this piece, these words come to mind. In this increasingly complicated world, taking a categorical stand for what you believe in has become almost a criminal act.

I know I'm getting myself into deep and swampy waters here, I could save myself the rampage and controversy of being who I am, but I think (I am certain) that it's important, almost a year after the 10/7 attacks that I've tried so hard to explain, to reiterate my positions with no euphemisms.

In many cases, these are the same as they were on the first day of the conflict. In others, they have become more nuanced, and in others, they have become more entrenched.

I will waive my right to remain silent and state them all now:

1. In such a long and complex conflict, no one is guiltless. Everyone is deeply implicated in the matter.
2. This is not a conflict over land or ownership. If it were, it would have been resolved 70 years ago. It is a conflict around ideology and manipulation. If it were about *territorial colonialism*, the conflict would have ended in 1950.

3. The 10/7 attacks were barbaric. Period. There is no way to call them resistance or justify them. And yes, they were organized by Hamas, but a portion of the Palestinian civilian population participated in their execution. Not all Palestinians, obviously, but it's impossible to analyze the 10/7 attacks without including the complicity of a certain part of the civilian population.
4. The kidnapping of 254 hostages (many of them taken as corpses already) is an act of unmitigated cowardice and emotional terrorism. There is no justification for it. The fact that to this day, almost a year later, 101 are still in captivity is inconceivable.
5. Although the world does not want to say it or accept it, the sexual violence acts committed were a direct and explicit weapon of war.
6. Israel has the unequivocal and undeniable right to exist and to defend itself (we shouldn't even be having this conversation). It is a full-fledged democracy that equally protects the 20% of Arab citizens who live there. No, it's not a perfect democracy. Yes, there are differences (social rather than political) in the Jewish-Muslim relationship, but it is a democracy that is regulated and evolving, where Arabs, particularly women and minorities, live with rights and protection, something that does not exist in any other Muslim country.
7. The issue of Gaza and the West Bank has been extremely poorly handled, for whatever reason. It is an issue where colossal mistakes and omissions have been and are still being made by Israel (in terms of its management). It is easy to speak from here (thousands of miles away) and in retrospect about what "should have been done", but there's no doubt that errors were and are still being made. We must own up to them so we can analyze and correct them.
8. The darkest shadow over the Palestinian people's lives is Hamas. Since the Gaza region was granted autonomy in 2007, Hamas has dedicated itself to terrorizing, subjugating and indoctrinating entire generations of Palestinians into hatred. Hamas leaders, who live comfortably in their million-dollar houses in Qatar and Dubai, don't give a damn about the Palestinian population they so claim to defend. To them, they are simply cannon fodder and a tool for media manipulation.
9. Haniyeh (now deceased) and Sinwar are non-rational agents (I would include other adjectives, but I better keep those to myself). Therefore, it's impossible to talk about negotiations or deals as one does when talking to rational beings.
10. UNRWA is a Hamas proxy organization that has everything but the Palestinians' best interest in mind.
11. Hezbollah is quite formidable when it comes to aggression, scheming and continuing the conflict. The number of rockets it has fired into Israel, particularly since the beginning of the conflict, is unprecedented. Nasrallah is an imminent danger to the region.



12. Iran is the main funder and perpetrator of this conflict and the main responsible for the impossibility of finding a solution. It is also the main sponsor of terrorism in all Western countries and against all religions. It's impossible to negotiate and reach agreements when there's a force as macabre and irrational as this government behind all "peace" efforts.
13. No, I don't love Netanyahu, I think there are many things he could have done differently (A LOT), but I'm also not sure if another prime minister could have acted very differently in the face of this situation and this enemy (enemies). Yes, I do think he has to leave the administration as soon as possible, but I don't know who could replace him. Perhaps a new leader will have a different language and *M.O.*, but the reality and choices this new leader will face are not much different from those faced by Bibi and, deep down, I'm not sure the answer could be much different.
14. The trade-off Israel faces between obliterating Hamas and rescuing the hostages is heartbreaking. It's a lose-lose situation.
15. Inside Netanyahu's government there are despicable figures (be it Ben Gvir or Smotrich) that should be expelled from any political process and discussion. With them in the Israeli coalition government, the chances of peace are almost nil. Their acolytes in the streets are also a hindrance to the peacemaking process.
16. People in the West do not understand the dynamics of the Middle East (it's a tough neighborhood), and the decisions that must be made under this kind of pressure are often incomprehensible. No, I am not justifying the war at all, but all the alleged Israeli government's actions in this ecosystem must be taken with a pinch of salt.
17. Each death, every single one, hurts deep in my soul. Israeli or Palestinian.
18. War is bullshit. There are no winners.
19. Urban warfare, which is being waged right now, is worse bullshit.
20. The relatively few civilian deaths in Israel are due to the civilian protection mechanisms in place (such as shelters and the Iron Dome) aimed at protecting the population. Hamas does the opposite. Instead of protecting the civilian population, it exposes them to danger.
21. There is no genocide. There is no apartheid (however flashy those words may sound). There is **UNDENIABLE** tragedy and many mistakes. But we must use the right words if we want to find the right solution.

22. Egypt is a total jackass to Gaza. So are the rest of the Arab countries. They could have done so much, and instead they did so little.
23. The death toll (and footage) provided by Hamas is completely manipulated. Let me go back to my previous points: Whether they're 10,000 or 1000 or 2, all deaths are terrible, but media manipulation is also terrible.
24. No other country in the world is subject to such public scrutiny and judgment as Israel and its military. In no other conflict in the universe is one side expected to provide internet service, water, and vaccines to its enemies. Israel has not done everything in its power to prevent a humanitarian tragedy, but it has done something. Having Hamas handing out aid is like having the big bad wolf in charge of feeding the sheep.
25. Yes, the Israeli army has a moral code, but in the midst of war even the most moral army makes mistakes and commits crimes. And they must be unequivocally detected and punished (as they have been).
26. No, there was no plot by the Israeli government to let the October 7th attacks occur. It was a series of military mistakes that led to the events of that day: contempt, failure to listen to information, strategic errors and human stupidity, but there was NO plot.
27. I completely agree with shouting, "Ceasefire", but those calls have to be directed at the right people and under the right conditions.
28. If the world's activists on the streets, in governments and in the media were truly pro-Palestinian, they would be shouting against Hamas, not waving its flag and chanting its slogans. These so-called "activists" are useful idiots whose actions do nothing to help the situation. A significant part of their activism on social media and on the streets is manipulated and paid for. They are not idealists. They are, again, useful idiots.
29. There is no such thing as anti-Zionism. It is antisemitism. Sorry. Criticizing the war is obviously not antisemitic, doing so on the basis of double standards is. You have to be very careful with the narrative you follow.
30. Antisemitism is a virus that, much like shingles, is latent inside many people and flares up in times of conflict with Israel.
31. Islamophobia towards moderate Muslims is inexcusable.
32. There is a blatant double standard surrounding the conflict and the deaths in the Gaza war. There are no international voices or mass demonstrations defending other world conflicts (Syria, Yemen, Sudan) where the war is much bloodier, but Jews/Israel are not involved. Whataboutism? Sure, what about it?

33. Public dialogue in the world has become impossible. How can we, from Mexico or any other country, demand a productive negotiation instead of armed hostilities when indirect dialogue on the subject is IMPOSSIBLE here.
34. The solution is, eventually, two states living, if not in peace, then in an entente cordiale. Where economic growth and logical (or secular) religiosity guide political and social action.
35. The chances of the conflict ending soon are practically zero. Even if the war ends, the aftershocks (and bloodshed) will last for years. Rebuilding efforts will be a tortuous and costly path.
36. In the words of Jon Polin and Rachel Goldberg (parents of Hersh Goldberg-Polin, a murdered hostage): There is an excess of agony in the Middle East. In the contest of who suffers the most, there are no winners.
37. If only I was a fiction writer. Life would be less tragic.

EPILOGUE

# I CHOOSE TO BELIEVE

How can we end this year? How should I end this book?

Being realistic without being cold.  
Being optimistic without sugarcoating such a complex and painful situation.

Asking for peace without being stupid.  
Demanding justice without being radical.  
Not getting lost in numbers and statistics that eventually lose all meaning.

Speaking from the Jewish standpoint without underestimating other worldviews and realities.

How can we think of peace when things are so fucked up? Even if the war ends, finding a solution to the situation in Gaza (if such a solution even exists) will be a long, contentious, setback-riddled road.

How can we draw a line between Palestinians and Hamas when the oppression is so suffocating?

How can we keep our sanity in a world where there's no place for logic, reason and civil dialogue?

How? I simply don't know.

Then, I wondered if I should finish this book with a famous quote from someone renowned such as Churchill, Mark Twain or Gandhi...

one of those mythical figures you turn to when you can't find the words, to save yourself the trouble of thinking and writing.

I could hide my inability to sum up this year and picture the years ahead behind the words of a prominent person. Let someone else bear the literary responsibility of finishing this book.

And then, in one of God's mysterious ways (which generally involve a couple of Tequila shots), I found my answer: Chatting with my dear friend Tanya about how pathetic and impossible it seems to hope for a better future, given the complexity of the times we are living, she uttered four words — just four — that finally settled all debates in my head: "I choose to believe."

As it turns out, I choose to believe, too.

# ONE TINY SEED

RACHEL GOLBERG-POLIN  
HERSH'S MOM (2000-2024)

There is a lullaby that says your mother will cry a thousand  
tears before you grow to be a man.

I have cried a million tears in the last 67 days.

We all have.

And I know that way over there  
there's another woman  
who looks just like me  
because we are all so very similar  
and she has also been crying.

All those tears, a sea of tears  
they all taste the same.

Can we take them  
gather them up,  
remove the salt  
and pour them over our desert of despair  
and plant one tiny seed.

A seed wrapped in fear,  
trauma, pain,  
war and hope  
and see what grows?

Could it be  
that this woman  
so very like me  
that she and I could be sitting together in 50 years  
laughing without teeth  
because we have drunk so much sweet tea together  
and now we are so very old  
and our faces are creased  
like worn-out brown paper bags.

And our sons  
have their own grandchildren  
and our sons have long lives  
One of them without an arm  
But who needs two arms anyway?

Is it all a dream?

A fantasy? A prophecy?

One tiny seed.

# UNA DIMINUTA SEMILLA

Hay una canción de cuna que dice que tu madre llorará mil lágrimas antes de que te conviertas en un hombre.

Yo he llorado un millón de lágrimas en los últimos 67 días.

Todos lo hemos hecho.

Y sé que por allá

hay otra mujer

que se parece a mí

porque todas somos muy similares

y ella también ha estado llorando.

Todas esas lágrimas, un mar de lágrimas

todos saben igual.

¿Podemos tomarlas?

recogerlas,

quitarles la sal

y regarlas sobre nuestro desierto de desesperación y

plantar una diminuta semilla.

Una semilla envuelta en miedo,

trauma, dolor,

guerra y esperanza

y ver lo que crece.

Podría ser

que esta mujer

tan parecida a mi

que ella y yo podríamos estar sentadas juntas en 50 años

riendo sin dientes

porque hemos bebido mucho té dulce

juntas

y ahora somos tan viejas

y nuestras caras están arrugadas

como bolsas de papel marrón gastadas.

y nuestros hijos

tienes sus propios nietos,

y nuestros hijos tienen una larga vida

Uno de ellos sin brazo.

¿Pero quién necesita dos brazos?

¿Es todo un sueño?

¿Una fantasía? ¿Una profecía?

Una diminuta semilla.