



On October 17th, mourners gathered in Gan Yavne for the funeral of the Kutz family, all shot to death during the attack that Hamas called the Al-Aqsa Flood. Livnat and Aviv Kutz and their three children were buried together. Photograph by Peter van Agtmael / Magnum for The New Yorker

LETTER FROM ISRAEL

IN THE CITIES OF KILLING

*The Hamas massacre, the assaults on Gaza, and
what comes after.*

By David Remnick

October 28, 2023

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The only way to tell this story is to try to tell it truthfully and to know that you will fail.

On the evening of Wednesday, October 18th, with the entire Middle East in a state of mourning and outrage, I took a taxi to the information offices of the Israel Defense Forces, a heavily guarded compound in northwest Tel Aviv. Like many reporters, I'd accepted an invitation to see video evidence of the worst massacre of Jews in generations, certainly in the history of Israel—Hamas's rampage through Kibbutz Kfar Aza, Kibbutz Be'eri, and other communities near the Gaza Strip, extending to an outdoor electronic-music festival, Nova. At last count, the attack throughout what Israelis call Otef Aza —“the Gaza envelope”—had claimed some fourteen hundred lives; thousands were wounded, and around two hundred and twenty people had been kidnapped and taken to the Gaza Strip. Hamas gave the operation a name, the Al-Aqsa Flood.

The roads in Israel were nearly as empty as they are on Yom Kippur. The only thing that might slow you down was a siren, a warning that a rocket was headed north out of Gaza toward Tel Aviv and other cities. This happened multiple times a day. The protocol, known to everyone, was that you pull over, get out, lie flat on the road, cover your head, and wait a few minutes before moving on. I hadn't been in the country three hours before I was under an overpass on Highway 20, waiting it out. The usual commercial signage along the highway had been transformed, seemingly overnight. No Coke Zero, no Toyota. Now the billboards blared assertions of unity—"Together We'll Win"—and calls for the return of the hostages. Their photographs were everywhere. Earlier that day, the American President had arrived to meet with the Israeli Prime Minister. And, having delivered a message of ardent support flecked with notes of caution against being consumed with rage and making the kinds of catastrophic mistakes that the United States made in the wake of 9/11, the President was in the air again, headed back to Washington.

The night before, in Tel Aviv at a friend's house for dinner, I received a series of WhatsApp messages from Mosab Abu Toha, a thirty-year-old poet who lives with his wife and children in Beit Lahia, in northern Gaza. Lately, he's been staying with relatives in the Jabalia refugee camp, about a mile and a half away. Born in the Al-Shati refugee camp, in Gaza City, he left the Strip for the first time four years ago. He ended up studying for a master's of fine arts in poetry, at Syracuse University. Now Mosab, in one-sentence bursts, was saying that the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital, in Zeitoun, a southern district of

Gaza City, had been bombed by Israeli warplanes: “God help us.” He sent images—first of a burning building and a prostrate man, presumably dead, in the street—and he relayed reports of body counts:

“Between 200 and 300 got killed.”

Then: “More than 500 were killed in the hospital.”

Then: “More than 800.”

Then: “It’s now 1,115 people killed in the bombing of the hospital in Gaza.”

He was not claiming authority or proximity to the hospital but conveying the alarm on his own social networks. Later, Mosab sent a photograph of a dead baby cradled in the gloved hands of a medical worker. “Sorry to send this,” he added as a caption, “but this is one victim in the hospital’s massacre.”

The body of a Hamas fighter lies on the ground outside a burned home in Kfar Aza, a kibbutz near the border with Gaza. Photograph by Peter van Agtmael / Magnum for The New Yorker

Soon everyone at the dinner table was getting push alerts—from Israeli media, from the wires, from CNN, the BBC, the *Times*. The conversation went on at a very high pitch. As we ate, there were, as there had been night after night, echoing booms: rockets from Gaza. People paused, listened for a moment, and continued eating. These rockets, they had clearly judged, did not warrant a trip to the *mamad*, the reinforced safe room downstairs. Whether to seek shelter has long been a matter of expertise and routine. Later, some people wandered from the table to flip between Channels 12 and 13 on Israeli television. News anchors were now sharing statements from Israeli government sources denying that Israel had fired a missile or dropped a bomb anywhere near the hospital; in fact, they said, the responsibility for the disaster lay with Palestinian Islamic Jihad, an armed group that is smaller than Hamas but no less militant. It was a failed rocket launch, they said. Hours later, American intelligence agencies declared that their information was in accord with the Israeli assessment.

When I asked Mosab what he thought of the denials, he answered, “No one believes them.” He criticized as “unfair” President Biden’s statement suggesting that Israel wasn’t responsible, and added, “Well, what if it were?” WhatsApp messages kept my phone vibrating. “It was responsible for past massacres at schools,” Mosab wrote. “What did the American Administration do in response?”

Like every Gazan his age, Mosab had lived through countless air

assaults. One day when he was eight and out shopping for dinner, he looked up and saw an Apache helicopter fire into a high-rise. This was at the start of the second intifada, in 2000. Since then, he's lost friends and relatives; funerals and rubble are fixtures of life for him and his neighbors. When he was sixteen, in the midst of what the Israelis called Operation Cast Lead, he was hit in the head, neck, and shoulder with shrapnel during a bombing.

Mosab was not inclined to defer to the intelligence assessments of the Israelis, any more than Israeli officials were apt to accept discussions of the blockade of Gaza and the occupation of the West

Podcast: The New Yorker Radio Hour

[David Remnick talks with two sources about the October 7th attacks.](#)

Bank as “context” for the massacres in the south. There were, of course, facts—many of them unknown—but the narratives came first, all infused with histories and counter-histories, grievances and fifty varieties of fury, all rushing in at the speed of social media. People were going to believe what they needed to believe. And so, while the Israelis and their allies were relieved by the intelligence reports of a disastrous misfire by Islamic Jihad, the Palestinians and most of the Arab world were having none of it. The funerals went on. The Israeli bombing of Gaza—with thousands dead, hospitals at the brink of collapse, infrastructure crumbling—intensified. So did the mobilization for an Israeli ground offensive. There were skirmishes between Israel and Hezbollah on Israel's border with Lebanon, threats from the ayatollahs in Iran, American warships in the eastern

Mediterranean.

The cab dropped me off at the I.D.F. compound in Ramat Aviv. A soldier in a guard booth shoved aside an aluminum container of takeout macaroni, inspected my passport, and took me up to the second floor. I entered a large open-plan room filled with young officers and younger soldiers working intently at their phones and laptops, delivering the Israeli position to media around the world. For a week, their priority had been to make sure that everyone knew about the atrocities in Otef Aza. Now the task was to put out intelligence on the hospital bombing and, no less essential, to slam the foreign media, whose early push alerts and headlines had blamed Israel. “For the last ten days, we have been continuously asked about whether children were beheaded, not only murdered,” one reservist, Yair Zivan, who is a diplomatic adviser to the former Prime Minister Yair Lapid, told me. “Yesterday, these same news outlets didn’t wait for one moment before reporting that Israel was responsible for the bombing of the hospital. Where does that come from?”

I was led to a large, windowless conference room and took a seat. There were three bowls of snacks—peanuts, walnuts, and sugar cookies—and complimentary I.D.F. notebooks. Across a table sat two men: Amnon Shefler, a lieutenant colonel and a senior I.D.F. spokesman, and, hunched over a laptop, Mattan Harel-Fisch, who had compiled video of the massacre from closed-circuit security cameras, from GoPro cameras and cell phones that the Hamas gunmen used to record what they did, and from social-media clips posted by both Hamas and its Israeli victims. The compilation he was about to show was forty-three minutes long. But, Harel-Fisch said, there was endless material: “I am now making a second movie.” The video would be shown on a flat-screen on the wall to my right.

The officers were more than aware that they would be accused of propagandizing. They did not much care. As Anshel Pfeffer, a columnist for *Haaretz*, had written a few days before, what took place on the morning of the 7th was “the greatest massacre of any Jewish community in the historic Land of Israel since the Middle Ages.” Demands for vengeance were commonplace.

And yet who would prevent another march of folly? Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had always fancied himself his country’s Churchill and kept a framed portrait of Britain’s wartime leader near his desk, next to one of Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism. In speeches against appeasement, Netanyahu quoted his hero on the “confirmed unteachability of mankind.” But Churchill, for all his flaws, did not bring a collection of messianic zealots into his cabinet; he did not lead a country while being under criminal

indictment; he did not leave the security of the state vulnerable to bulldozers and armed men on motorcycles.

Netanyahu has been heckled by reservists and vilified in the press. A poll published in the newspaper *Ma'ariv* six days after the massacre showed that forty-eight per cent of Israelis preferred that Benny Gantz, a phlegmatic retired Army general and a centrist politician who was brought into a new unity government, lead the country; only twenty-nine per cent preferred Netanyahu. The same paper also reported that eighty per cent of Israelis wanted Netanyahu to take responsibility for the security failures on October 7th, as leaders of the I.D.F. and the Shin Bet, the country's internal security service, had done. Netanyahu, who cannot bear to express repentance or regret for his government's failure, or even to show compassion for the bereaved—something that, many Israelis noted, Biden was able to do—is unlikely to step down or step back.

Harel-Fisch said that the footage was horrifying. There would be extended clips of stalking, shootings, abductions, torched houses, burned corpses, terrorized children, dead children, dead infants, mutilation, jubilation. Before the viewing started, Shefler wanted to make one last point. He had just come back from a stint in the U.S., studying at the Kennedy School of Government, at Harvard. He said that he found his fellow-students “frozen” when it came to discussing the Israeli-Palestinian issue, scared to get into its history lest the discussion go sideways. But while the shades of gray were important, he went on, there were times when “some things are black and some things are white.”

Shefler excused himself and left the room. Harel-Fisch turned out the lights. He tapped a key on his laptop and the horror show began.

The night flight from J.F.K. to Ben Gurion Airport, six days earlier, was packed. On the El Al check-in line, a complicated security process even under normal circumstances, the passenger behind me, a man of late middle age, had perched on his suitcase what appeared to be a shrink-wrapped machine gun. I stopped worrying about the tube of toothpaste in my carry-on.

“What is your business in Israel?” the security person asked.

I landed in time for dinner with friends outside Tel Aviv on Friday. Later that night, Avichai Brodutch, a father of three, from Kibbutz Kfar Aza, was trying to sleep at his parents’ apartment south of Tel Aviv. Brodutch is forty-two, an exceedingly modest man, a grower of pineapples who had turned to studying nursing. In the dark of his room that night, he stared at the ceiling; as he told me the next day, his mind was “spinning.” He’d taken half a Klonopin. It did him no good. His wife, Hagar, and his children—Ofri, Yuval, and Uriah—were hostages in the Gaza Strip.

Early on the morning of October 7th, Hamas fighters swarmed the lush grounds of Kfar Aza. According to documents recovered by the I.D.F., they carried accurate maps of their targets and detailed battle plans: “The subordinate cell advances with the securing forces. . . . They must shoot down as many victims as possible, take hostages and take some of them to the Gaza Strip using various cars.” After

roughly two years of planning, the fighters—led by members of the Nukhba, elite forces of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades—breached the border fence around Gaza, and more than fifteen hundred of them sped toward the kibbutzim, on motorcycles, in pickup trucks with mounted machine guns. Some went over the border fence on paragliders. After getting past the yellow gate of Kfar Aza, they went house to house, peeking in windows, testing doors. Their pace was methodical. To smoke people out of their safe rooms, they set fire to spare tires. To prevent escape, they torched cars. Then the real killing began.

Around seven hundred and fifty people lived in the kibbutz of Kfar Aza. After the massacre, most of the houses were bullet-pocked ruins, caved in, blown up, or torched. Photograph by Peter van Agtmael / Magnum for The New Yorker

Avichai Brodutch stands outside the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv. His wife and three children were kidnapped by Hamas in the attacks on October 7th, the day after Brodutch's eldest child celebrated her tenth birthday.

Photograph by Peter van Agtmael / Magnum for The New Yorker

In the chaos, Brodutch lost contact with his family. Only hours later did he learn that they were missing. Soldiers sorted through the corpses strewn around the grounds—many of them burned and blackened. In the days after the massacre, Brodutch was told that the bodies of his wife and children had not been found, and that a witness had seen them being led away, presumably en route to Gaza. When Brodutch heard this, he recalled, “I felt like I’d won the lottery.” His family was alive.

Now, in his sleeplessness, he needed to do something, anything, to make sure that his wife and children were not forgotten. He got up, showered, and dressed in donated clothes: shorts, a T-shirt, and Crocs. He collected his dog, Rodney, a chocolate-brown Ridgeback, and drove to Tel Aviv, getting out at the Kirya, the I.D.F.'s headquarters, on Kaplan Street. This was where, since January, tens of thousands of Israelis had assembled every week to protest the Netanyahu government's plan to reduce the authority of the Supreme Court. At around three, he sat down on a plastic chair next to a sign that he'd drawn reading "*HaMishpacha Sheli Be'aza*": "My Family Is in Gaza." Brodutch's brother, who was visiting from Canada, posted a picture of him and sent it to their WhatsApp groups. By daylight, a small crowd had gathered around him. By late morning, when I arrived, there were hundreds of people, many of them chanting slogans calling for Netanyahu's resignation. Another slogan was "*Hayom!*" "Today!" As in, Bring the hostages back today.

The victims of the Hamas attack—the dead, the survivors, the kidnapped—were not settlers or fanatics; they were, in the main, the liberals of Israel, a breed that still speaks (with caveats and shades of difference) about peace and two states for two peoples. They tend to loathe Netanyahu for his hubris and corruption, his disdain for the Palestinians, his attempt to diminish the Supreme Court, and his alliance with such lurid reactionaries as his national-security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, and his finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich. Some of the survivors were not especially political; some had come to the previous Kaplan Street demonstrations. They joined groups like

Achim Laneshek, or Brothers in Arms, reservists who marched against Netanyahu. After October 7th, they put aside protest for rescue work.

Brodutch sat down with me on a bench to talk, but every few minutes someone would come up and hug him, hard, shaking with grief and fury. People kept bringing him clothing, drinks, food: kugel, couscous, a pile of meatballs. Brodutch was touched and embarrassed, but, even in his gratitude, he could not eat. To please one visitor, he ate a teaspoonful of pomegranate seeds. His smile was sheepish, his eyes full of hurt, though he could not manage to cry, much as he wanted to.

“I don’t know what my state of mind is,” he said. “There is so much grief, so much love.” The night before the attack, Ofri, his eldest child, had celebrated her tenth birthday at a restaurant near the kibbutz. “We were meant to have the birthday cake on Saturday,” Brodutch told me. “It’s probably still in the fridge.”

A paratrooper named Ido Buhadana tapped Brodutch on the shoulder. Brodutch recognized him immediately. On their rampage, Hamas fighters had not only managed to blind the Army's surveillance systems and break through the forty-mile-long border fence at more than twenty points; they also stormed at least eight military bases and killed dozens of soldiers who might have been able to beat back the onslaught. Buhadana was among the reservists who made it to Kfar Aza that day, first to hunt for remaining terrorists, then to search for survivors. Now he, too, was shaking with emotion. After a while, he wiped the sweat from his head and the tears from his face, and sat down. "If you are speaking by proportion, this is way worse than 9/11," he said. "The world should know how cruel these people are."

The scene outside the I.D.F. headquarters was an open-air shiva, part of a *national* shiva. So many well-wishers were descending on Brodutch that he finally asked to take a break, and headed off with his brother. When we met again, a short while later, Brodutch made it clear that he wanted to deliver a message that was out of keeping with the dominant emotions of the day—the hunger for vengeance, the outrage at the failure of the Israeli government to protect its citizens. Brodutch allowed that the state had failed: "This is a colossal disaster that will be investigated in years to come." But he was painstakingly deliberate in his comments about his family's kidnappers. His wife and his children were in the hands of Hamas, and Hamas was keenly aware of what was being written and said about the organization abroad, including in Israel. Every time Israel dropped a bomb, he

worried that it might kill his family. “I have to hope that there is someone watching over them,” he said. “It was overkill by Hamas. I don’t think they thought things would go that far. At least, I want to believe that. Their religion is peaceful. No religion can be successful for long if it is not peaceful.”

He was terrified by the prospect of a ground war. “We are going the wrong way,” he said. “We’ve had a sign from God, and if we read it as a sign to go to war that is one thing. We should be sending humanitarian aid to women, children, and the elderly. Hamas believes that women, children, and the elderly should not be attacked, but something on their side went very wrong. I don’t think they thought this attack would be so easy, and they just *lost* it.”

Uriah, his youngest, is four and a half. Brodutch said that he imagined his son would be “causing havoc wherever he is,” and that, maybe for that reason, Hamas would lose patience and let him be the first one released. “I’ve seen military conflict for years and years,” he said, “and it solves nothing.”

On a trip to Gaza during the second intifada, I met one of the founders of Hamas, a former surgeon named Mahmoud al-Zahar. This was 2001, and al-Zahar was fifty-seven. “‘David,’” he said. “That’s a Jewish name, isn’t it?” Hamas, a radical, religious rival to the Palestine Liberation Organization, was determined to free “the whole of Palestine.” Hamas might consider a two-state solution, but only as a *hudna*, a ceasefire. The ultimate goal, al-Zahar said, “is to establish an Islamic state in Palestine, in Egypt, in Lebanon, in Saudi

Arabia—everywhere under a single caliphate.” Certain conclusions followed from this: “We will not tolerate a non-Islamic state on Islamic lands.”

In Sderot, a small coastal city about half a mile from Gaza, the Israeli military's Iron Dome air-defense system intercepts an incoming rocket from Gaza. Photograph by Peter van Agtmael / Magnum for The New Yorker

The spiritual leader of Hamas, an outgrowth of the Muslim Brotherhood, was a Gazan sheikh named Ahmed Yassin, who, in the years after the 1967 Six-Day War, established a range of social-service organizations in Gaza, which had just become Israeli-occupied territory. In those days, many Israelis shopped in Gaza City or went to the beach nearby; tens of thousands of Gazans commuted regularly to jobs inside Israel, a practice that Yassin feared would be corrosive to the moral values of young Muslims. He stressed *da'wa*, the call to God. But, as a way of keeping militants within the fold and of keeping pace with the P.L.O. as a force of resistance, Yassin sanctioned the import of arms and the formation of nascent militia groups. In 1987, when the first intifada began, in a Gaza refugee camp, Hamas—an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya, the Islamic Resistance Movement—was born. Four years later, Hamas established its military wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Led today by Mohammed Deif, who was born in a refugee camp in Khan Yunis, in southern Gaza, the Brigades have been behind countless military operations against Israel over the years, from car bombs to suicide attacks, though never anything as tactically intricate or as ambitious as Operation Al-Aqsa Flood. Among the stated objectives of the massacre, a Hamas leader said, was to free Palestinian prisoners in Israel and to protect the Al-Aqsa Mosque from desecration, but many suspected ambitions that were wider in scope, including scuttling a rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The original Hamas charter, or covenant, was a nine-thousand-word

treatise adopted shortly after the group's founding. It was filled with antisemitic conspiracy theories, all the traditional tropes of cunning, greed, and world domination: the Jews started the First World War, it asserted, in a scheme to topple the Islamic Caliphate, and they started the Second World War in order to make "huge profits from trading war materiel." The Zionists, who had replaced "the state of truth" with "the state of evil," aspire to "expand from the Nile to the Euphrates," while Hamas "strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine."

Hamas, in its first decade, established no caliphate, but it did help propel the ascent of the right in Israeli politics. After Israel and the P.L.O. signed the Oslo Accords, in Washington, in 1993; in Cairo, in 1994; and in Taba, Egypt, in 1995, Hamas tried to undermine progress toward a binding two-state resolution. The organization, which condemned the P.L.O. for having recognized the state of Israel, backed a string of suicide bombings in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and elsewhere. Israeli militants, too, sought to sabotage the accords, and in 1995 a young right-wing zealot assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Israeli voters at first seemed likely to turn to a candidate from Rabin's Labor Party, Shimon Peres, who had received a Nobel Peace Prize, along with Rabin and Yasir Arafat, for his role in conceiving the Oslo agreements. Hamas, in a sense, was the spoiler. Playing on the fears of the people, Netanyahu and his Likud Party won with the support of conservatives, settlers, the ultra-Orthodox, and the Mizrachi, Jews with origins in the Middle East and North Africa. During the campaign, he made sure to be overheard when he told a

spiritual leader of the Sephardim, Rabbi Yitzhak Kaduri, “Leftists have forgotten what it is to be Jewish. They think they will put security in the hands of the Arabs—that Arabs will look out for us.” He won the election, and though he has spent occasional periods in the wilderness, he has now been Prime Minister for a total of sixteen years, longer even than David Ben-Gurion.

In Netanyahu’s first term, I spoke at length with him in Jerusalem, and even interviewed his father, Benzion, a reclusive scholar of the Spanish Inquisition whose sense that Jewish history is in perpetual danger of coming to an end exerted a powerful influence on his son. “The Jewish people have had a history unlike any other people’s because they lacked the elements of national survival,” the Prime Minister told me. “On the other hand, they didn’t perish completely. They perished *mostly*. They were about ten per cent of the Roman Empire at the time of the birth of Christ, so by any calculation they should be about a hundred and twenty million and not twelve million. . . . What happened after the worst catastrophe in our history is that we somehow amassed the national will to reforge a vital center for Jewish life here in Israel.” Netanyahu’s sense of the state and of himself as its unillusioned guardian was clear: “You have to protect yourself. This is what the Jews didn’t have. They didn’t have the means to protect themselves against evil, the baser impulses of mankind. And they paid a price unlike any other people. We now have the means to protect ourselves.”

In 2005, Ariel Sharon, a Likud Prime Minister known as the Bulldozer, defied much of his right-wing constituency by evacuating

the Israeli settlements in Gaza. The aim of disengagement was to yield a rough peace and make Israel more secure, but the following year Hamas rose to power, winning legislative elections and, after a military confrontation, ousting the Palestinian Authority from the Gaza Strip. There have been no elections since.

Although the occupation had, in the Israeli view, ended, Gaza remained under siege and blockade, and a spiral of violence deepened the immiseration of daily life. In December, 2008, following a period of Qassam rockets and counterraid, Israel launched Operation Cast Lead, which killed at least a thousand Palestinians, devastated civic infrastructure in Gaza City, and left many thousands homeless. In 2012, Israel responded to Hamas rocket fire with eight days of air strikes; at least eighty-seven Palestinian civilians were killed. In 2014, after Hamas abducted and murdered three Israeli teen-agers, Israel commenced a seven-week assault, killing more than fourteen hundred Palestinian civilians.

In 2017, Hamas toned down its rhetoric. Despite its authoritarian rule in the Strip—its suppression of the Palestinian Authority and any other rival for power—the group asserted in Article 28 of its updated manifesto that “Hamas believes in, and adheres to, managing its Palestinian relations on the basis of pluralism, democracy, national partnership, acceptance of the other and the adoption of dialogue.” The new document said that Hamas’s fight was with Zionism, not with the Jewish people as such, but it unhesitatingly reaffirmed its ultimate ambition of eliminating the “Zionist entity.”

As the Israeli right solidified its hold on power, some in the country came to view its draconian anti-Palestinian policies with repugnance. Yair Golan is a retired Army general in his early sixties; he is graying yet as trim as a blade. He was an infantry commander during the second intifada, and then led the Judea and Samaria division, in the West Bank. But he grew increasingly disgusted with the military’s treatment of Palestinians, and he did not keep his views to himself. A speech that he delivered seven years ago at a Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony at Kibbutz Tel Yitzhak caused a furor. Golan, who was then the deputy chief of staff of the I.D.F., warned that Israeli society had grown callous to “the other,” and said, “If there is something that frightens me in the memory of the Holocaust, it is identifying horrifying processes that occurred in Europe, particularly in Germany, seventy, eighty, and ninety years ago, and finding evidence of their existence here in our midst today, in 2016.” He referred to an incident in Hebron in which an I.D.F. sergeant was filmed shooting a Palestinian who had stabbed an Israeli soldier but

had already been subdued and was prostrate. “There is nothing easier and simpler,” Golan said, “than behaving like a beast, becoming morally corrupt, and sanctimonious.”

Although Isaac Herzog, now Israel’s President, praised Golan for his “morality and responsibility,” Netanyahu blasted Golan’s reference to the Holocaust as “outrageous,” and there were countless calls for the general’s resignation. In the end, he walked back his comments somewhat, but his disenchantment was such that he joined Meretz, a political party to the left of Labor, vowing to battle the annexation of the West Bank.

I ran into Golan at the studios of Channel 13, near Jerusalem. He was there to tell the story about what he did on the morning of the massacre. As a reservist, he threw on his uniform, got his gun, drove to a military outpost in the city of Ramle, and asked to be an “envoy.” He made his way south and started getting calls from people whose friends or family were in the area, some of them at the Nova festival, in Re’im. The calls came first from his sister and from a reporter at *Haaretz*—both of whom had relatives hiding from the attackers—and then from others. He rescued them all, pulling them from behind bushes and trees and shuttling them to safety. Suddenly, he was all over the news.

On October 21st, in southern Gaza, a medical worker cradled a victim of an air strike, one of many air assaults on Gaza in the previous two weeks. Photograph by Fatima Shbair / AP

As we sat together, Golan talked about the depths of the Israeli failure. About officials who thought that by “shrinking the conflict” they could maintain the status quo indefinitely. About the complacency engendered by high fences and a security system overly reliant on “startup nation” technologies and the Special Forces. About the failure of Netanyahu and his intelligence and military bureaucracies to heed warnings of imminent danger, in Gaza and beyond. About the moral deficits of a government obsessed with protecting its Prime Minister from criminal prosecution and indifferent to the corrosive effects of the blockade of Gaza and the occupation of the West Bank. All these factors helped open the way to the October 7th massacre, he believed, and to a war being led by an untrustworthy leader.

“When you have a crisis, like Pearl Harbor or September 11th, it is a multidimensional crisis, a multidimensional failure,” Golan said. Netanyahu, who in 2009 was elected for the second time, after Operation Cast Lead, “made a terrible strategic mistake,” Golan went on. “He wanted quiet. So, while Hamas was relatively quiet, Netanyahu saw no need to have a vision for the larger Palestinian question. And since he needed the support of the settlers and the ultra-Orthodox, he appeased them. He created a situation in which, so long as the Palestinian Authority was weak, he could create the overall perception that the best thing to do was to annex the West Bank. We weakened the very institution that we could have worked with, and strengthened Hamas.”

Golan was referring to a strategy of Netanyahu's, deployed over the past fourteen years, that is known as the "conception." Its aim was to weaken the Palestinian Authority, which sought territorial compromise, by bolstering its enemy Hamas. While refusing to engage the P.A. and its leader, Mahmoud Abbas, in any serious negotiations, the government permitted hundreds of millions of dollars from Qatar to stream into Hamas's coffers and increased the flow of work permits for Gazans with jobs inside Israel. It wasn't that Netanyahu cared one way or another about the poor of Gaza; it was, in his view, a matter of strategic guile. But, as Golan's old boss Gadi Eisenkot, a former I.D.F. chief of staff, told *Ma'ariv* last year, Netanyahu carried out this strategy "in total opposition to the national assessment of the National Security Council, which determined that there was a need to disconnect from the Palestinians and establish two states."

Israeli security forces in Jerusalem block an entrance to the Al-Aqsa Mosque while residents of the Old City pray outside its doors. Photograph by Peter van Agtmael / Magnum for The New Yorker

One aspect of Netanyahu's Churchill complex is his colossal self-assurance, and he was unflinchingly confident in his "conception." As he reportedly put it in a Likud meeting, "Anyone who wants to thwart the establishment of a Palestinian state must support bolstering Hamas and transferring money to Hamas. . . . This is part of our strategy." Last December, he told an interviewer for Saudi television,

“I think my record speaks for itself. The last decade in which I led Israel was the safest decade in Israel’s history. But not only safe and secure for Israelis, also safe and secure for the Palestinians.” It was a litany of bad faith, deception, and delusion, with disastrous consequences.

“I commanded Judea and Samaria from 2005 to 2007,” Golan told me, referring to the West Bank. “The most frustrating thing to me is the inability of anyone to envision how these two peoples can live together. We are not going anywhere. And they are not going anywhere. Occupation is not a solution. Our peoples should both be led by sensible majorities, but both peoples are being led by their extremists. This is the challenge of Israel.”

In the meantime, there was the spectre of a land war. Golan argued that this could not be avoided: “To recover our villages and kibbutzim in the south, we need one-hundred-per-cent security in the area. To do that, you need to make the military of Hamas irrelevant. There will be an ongoing operation, attacks all the time. In the next few days, you will see only the first stage of that war.”

Before he hurried off to his next appointment, I asked him about the prospects of a multifront war: with Hamas, in Gaza; with Hezbollah, on the border with Lebanon; with Iranian proxy militias coming from Syria and Iraq; even with Iran itself. He put the chances at “ten or fifteen per cent.”

In school or beyond, nearly every Israeli encounters Hayim Nahman

— Bialik’s 1904 poem “In the City of Killing,” written in Hebrew just after the pogrom in Kishinev, in the Russian Empire’s Pale of Settlement. After a local antisemitic newspaper published reports that Jews had murdered a Christian child in the area to use his blood for Passover matzo, mobs led by priests went on a rampage, with cries of “Kill the Jews!” A historical commission, in Odesa, assigned Bialik, a young Hebrew teacher, to travel to Kishinev and interview survivors for a kind of oral history. The poem became a rallying cry against the tsar and the Russian Empire, and, eventually, for Jewish national pride. Inspired by Bialik’s words, many Russian Jews left for Europe, the United States, and Palestine.

Get up and walk through the city of the massacre
And with your hand touch and lock your eyes
On the cooled brain and clots of blood
Dried on tree trunks, rocks, and fences; it is they.
Go to the ruins, to the gaping breaches.

Forty-nine Jews were massacred by the mob in Kishinev. It is hard to know what the fourteen hundred killed in a single day in Otef Aza will mean. Unlike the Jews in the Pale, Israel is hardly defenseless. But it is vulnerable, and it was plain that this massacre would influence the collective psyche—and the politics—of Israel for years to come.

A week after the events of October 7th, an Israeli journalist and friend arranged for us to travel about an hour south from Tel Aviv to Kibbutz Kfar Aza. Once we passed the coastal cities of Ashdod and Ashkelon, we veered east, away from Gaza and into an area heavily

guarded by I.D.F. soldiers. In the fields near Gaza, troops, tanks, and armored personnel had started to establish positions for the planned ground invasion.

An I.D.F. press officer gave us bulletproof vests and Kevlar helmets. There had been no exchanges of gunfire in a few days, no evidence that Hamas fighters remained in the area, but an officer cautioned, “This is an active scene.” Founded in 1951, Kfar Aza was a prosperous kibbutz with two businesses on the site, one that made a dye for plastics, another that provided lighting and sound systems for events. Around seven hundred and fifty people lived there, with kindergartens, a gym, a swimming pool, and a cemetery. Now most of the houses were bullet-pocked ruins, caved in, blown up, torched. Earlier that day, the grounds had been cleared of the last cadavers, but the stench of death lingered. We were told there had been so many corpses, often burned or mutilated, that the young I.D.F. soldiers could not bear the work and called in ZAKA, an organization of religious volunteers who, with meticulous care, collect bodies, body parts, and even blood, and give the dead a proper burial according to Jewish law. I’d seen a video in which a volunteer poured cold water on one of the burned corpses. I asked why. To cool it off, I was told, so that when it is placed in a plastic collection bag the bag doesn’t melt.

One of our guides was Golan Vach, a reserve colonel in the I.D.F.'s Home Front Command search-and-rescue unit. In a long career, he had gone on missions in the wake of all manner of disasters, in Haiti, Brazil, the Philippines, and Surfside, Florida. In February, following the earthquake in southern Turkey that left more than forty-five thousand dead, Vach and his team pulled nineteen people from the rubble, and received a commendation from the President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Vach, a lithe, purposeful man in his late forties, led us from house to ruined house, describing the battles fought by local security, soldiers, and police who, though under-armed and outmanned, had raced to Kfar Aza and rescued whomever they could until the Army arrived in force. That took many agonizing hours, and, for long periods, the Hamas fighters were able to take their time, killing, burning, collecting hostages.

Vach led us into one ruin and described two women who'd been found there, both naked, their hands bound behind their backs, shot in the head. Elsewhere, he said, he had found butcher knives, a decapitated soldier. He pointed to scraps of Hamas gear on the ground: a singed Kalashnikov clip, an abandoned battle vest, a paraglider. He was getting accustomed to questions about a dead baby he had carried out of a house. "People ask me why I didn't take a picture," he said. "I said,

‘I’m sorry, I, too, have my limits.’ ”

Then, unprompted, he took out his phone and started showing me photographs he did take, one corpse after another. “Wait,” he said, swiping. “You will see the pile. They brought gasoline with them. Their intention was to burn.”

In some parts of the world, I said, people will say it’s all fake, it’s all *hasbara*, government propaganda. Vach looked at me unblinking. “Some people say that the Holocaust didn’t exist, right? How do you respond to such people?” he said. “I have pictures. But unless those people will be here and see with their own eyes, I guess they will not believe. But these people also, if they would see it with their own eyes, they would say that we faked the situation. So it doesn’t matter.” His shoulders slumped. His hands slapped to his sides, and he looked around once more at the ruins. “This is evil.” In the near distance, from Gaza, we could hear rockets, Iron Dome interceptions, and Israeli jets.

In a hospital in Khan Yunis, in southern Gaza, medical staff treat a boy's injuries.
Photograph by Samar Abu Elouf / NYT / Redux

Most of the evacuees from Kfar Aza were taken to a hotel on the grounds of Kibbutz Shefayim, on the Mediterranean coast, north of Tel Aviv. I arrived one afternoon to see yet another mass shiva—a sombre picnic taking place on the lawn, families huddled together, eating, carefully eying their kids kicking a soccer ball, playing tag.

Inside, in a conference room off the lobby, a woman from Kfar Aza named Yael Felus had helped set up what she called a “war room.” A dozen people were there, working phones and laptops, to arrange psychiatric care, to organize buses for funerals, to distribute clothes and food. Felus had grown up in Sderot, a coastal city about a half mile from Gaza. “I needed a quieter place,” she told me. “So I went to Kfar Aza. It seemed like a good place to raise my kids.” Now, she said, she would go back only “if they flatten Gaza and they go to live in Egypt.” She knew how that sounded and didn’t seem to care. How could she go back? Before sending me to meet survivors from the kibbutz who were milling around the lobby, she said, “Most of my friends are dead.” She tried to count them all on her fingers, then gave up.

I met a woman named Roni Stahl Lupo, who was born at Kfar Aza in 1972; she knew nearly everyone who had died there. She, too, could not give an accurate count. She and her husband have three children and run a small business, designing industrial kitchens. Her sister, Ziv Stahl, is the executive director of Yesh Din (There Is Law), a human-rights group. Her family had barely escaped Kfar Aza alive. Before her daughter and her boyfriend fled the kibbutz grounds, Hamas gunmen

shot at them, hitting the boyfriend twice in the hand. Lupo had lived through countless rocket attacks over the years, but now she was unsure whether she would stay in Israel at all.

“During the demonstrations against this government, I began to feel that I’m no longer part of the majority of this country,” she said. “Morally, socially, this is not my Israel. I’m left-wing, Ashkenazi, a kibbutznik, and secular, and this is not the identity of Israel any longer. My contract with this country is over. It’s broken.”

She was both enraged at Hamas and deeply anxious about the bombing of Gaza and the ground incursion taking shape near her old home. “I keep thinking that these operations will happen because of me, someone will be killed because of me,” she said. “And I cannot live with that.”

One morning, I visited Sari Nusseibeh, in East Jerusalem. A scholar of early Islamic philosophy who had been an informal adviser to Yasir Arafat, Nusseibeh was born in Damascus and lives in Sheikh Jarrah, a Jerusalem neighborhood that has been under assault and encroachment by settlers and the Israeli government for years. His family is distinguished in the extreme. For centuries, the Nusseibehs have been Muslim custodians of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, in the Old City. Nusseibeh’s father, Anwar, was the governor of Jerusalem and Amman’s Ambassador to the Court of St. James’s. Nusseibeh, who is seventy-four, has always been a distinctly moderate voice in Palestinian public life, with friends all over the scholarly world. He is uncompromising in his insistence on

Palestinian rights, and, in his books, he evinces sympathy with Jewish history and Israeli anxiety. At the same time, his disapproval of violence—whether perpetrated by Israeli settlers or Palestinian suicide bombers—is absolute.

Nusseibeh's weariness and apprehension as we sat down were palpable. "We have made so many advances—in technology, A.I., medicine, everything except human relations," he said. "I knew there would be constant explosions for as many years as it takes for people to finally learn that there has to be another way, but not a confrontation like this." He shrugged. "No matter what, we will end up where we started, with the Palestinians and the Israelis living here together and needing to find a proper formula."

On the morning of October 7th, Nusseibeh had just returned home from dropping off his wife and his daughter at the airport when he heard sirens. "My first reaction was 'Hmm, interesting.' This happens every now and again, but then there were more sirens, then thuds, and the house actually shook. I thought, This might be serious."

At first, he sensed great pride among many in his East Jerusalem community as the news broke. Palestinians on motorcycles, in pickup trucks, and on hang gliders had managed something that not even foreign armies had done. In 1973, the Egyptian Army surprised Israel in the western Sinai and the Syrians wiped out Israeli tanks in the Golan Heights, but, for the most part, they did not get close to Israeli population centers. Many Palestinians initially celebrated the Hamas attack as a blow to Israel's sense of invulnerability. But then, as the

evidence of atrocities became common knowledge, Nusseibeh said, that elation curdled. Some even spoke of the incursion as a conspiracy, a guarantee that Israel would now turn so far to the right that the Palestinians would *never* get statehood. The images were shocking. One detail that struck Nusseibeh was more banal: ordinary Gazans trailing the armed terrorists into Israel and looting. In one video, I saw a Gazan calmly walking with a guitar he had stolen; others took flat-screen TVs and carried them back into Gaza. “It’s like in the wars in the Middle Ages,” Nusseibeh said. “People come behind the fighting to steal.”

In the Nuseirat market, in the Gaza Strip, people sell vegetables near buildings destroyed by Israeli air strikes. Amid Israel's siege on Gaza, food and water are in short supply. Photograph by Samar Abu Elouf / NYT / Redux

He despairs at the spectacle of bloodlust, the ecstasies of killing. But he is also convinced that Hamas and violent extremism, in general, will not recede without a political resolution. “It’s a mistake to think that Hamas is an alien being—it is part of the national tapestry,” he said. “It grows bigger or smaller depending on other factors. You can eliminate the guys running Hamas now, but you cannot eliminate it entirely. It will stay as a way of thinking, as an idea, so long as there is a Palestinian-Israeli conflict.” He went on, “People say there is more support for Hamas in the West Bank than in Gaza and the reverse is true in Gaza, that there is more support for the P.A. And it has to do with governance.” In fact, a survey taken shortly before the October 7th attack showed widespread disaffection with Hamas among Gazans. Both entities are riddled with corruption and plagued by a lack of basic competence. And they were crippled, above all, by the circumstances of occupation and siege. The P.A. was no more capable of taking care of the needs of Ramallah and Jenin, Nusseibeh argued, than Hamas was able to cope with the burdens of daily life in Rafah, Khan Yunis, and Gaza City.

Before we went our separate ways, Nusseibeh said he thought that Arab rulers, despite it all, had no taste for a multifront war, one that might pull in the United States. This was not the mid-century, when many Arab leaders still thought of Israel as temporary. But he was hardly optimistic—not in the short run, anyway. “I think people are crazy,” he told me. “Especially people in positions of power. They are crazier than the average person and can easily lead populations to

war.”

On August 10, 2006, three Israeli novelists—David Grossman, Amos Oz, and A. B. Yehoshua—called on the Israeli government to accept a ceasefire proposal to end the Second Lebanon War. Two days later, Grossman’s son Uri, a twenty-year-old staff sergeant in an Israeli tank brigade, was killed in a battle with Hezbollah. Grossman had been a peace activist for much of his adult life, speaking at demonstrations and publishing essays, alternately fierce and soulful, that were intended to pierce the indifference of his compatriots. “The Yellow Wind,” from 1987, was a collection of reported essays about the occupation (some of them published in these pages) which startled Israeli readers. When it was uncommon to do so, Grossman visited refugee camps and classrooms in the West Bank. While reporting on proceedings against Palestinians in an Israeli military court in Nablus, Grossman quoted the essay “Shooting an Elephant,” in which George Orwell wrote of an imperial police officer in Burma, “He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it.” The theme is common to both writers: in enforcing injustice, the colonist deceives, and destroys, himself. “To the End of the Land,” a 2008 novel imbued with the loss of Grossman’s son, is his masterpiece. I asked Grossman, who lives in Mevaseret Zion, in the hills outside Jerusalem, about his reaction to the events of October 7th.

“Of course, we felt something was wrong with the whole management of the country,” he said. “We felt that our Prime Minister invests all his time in his trials and doesn’t have enough time to take care of the

country. But no one could anticipate *this*.” He went on, “We saw a process that could have led to Hamas taking over Tel Aviv. We don’t ever want to think about catastrophe, but thinking about catastrophe is my profession, and we were very close to that. I will tell you frankly, when I am confronted with such evil, pure evil, I don’t want to live in such a world that allows such monstrosities. Just to be exposed to such things, to see the murder of children, women, pregnant women, babies—it is impossible to absorb it. The fifty-six years of occupation is terrible. I’ve spent my entire life writing and acting against it, and I see some friends at American universities and elsewhere trying to achieve some sort of balance. But evils cannot always be compared. Sometimes, I tell my friends, objectivity is a nice way to cover up cowardice, to say, ‘We are bad and they are bad.’ By doing so, you spare yourself, you refuse to expose yourself to the atrocities in front of you.”

We spoke of the Palestinians who argued that they had been forgotten. “First of all, they are right,” Grossman said. “And yet there

is something in the *joy* of killing, it just feels different. Hamas made a major mistake in 2005, when we evacuated. Around ten thousand settlers were uprooted. If, after our withdrawal, the Palestinians had started to build in Gaza using the financial support they were promised, if they had made Gaza a kind of test case on how to build a life again, if Gaza had become, if not the ‘Singapore of the Middle East,’ then at least a place where life could be developed, the next withdrawal would have come quickly. Instead, they chose another path. There were thousands of missiles aimed at us from Gaza in the next two years. And now, after they have done this, you start to think, Well, if you have such a neighbor, you had better be well equipped and suspicious all the time.”

In his view, the prospects for Israel, which just celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary of existence, were grave. “I think the task of being an Israeli will be harder now,” he said. “The need to protect this country will be an even more serious issue. We thought this was all behind us after signing agreements with various Arab countries and the Abraham Accords. But you cannot have an Abraham Accord and ignore the Palestinians. We shall see now how exhausting it is to be an Israeli, to be all the time on the alert for surprise and violence. Once more, we will have to be both Athens and Sparta. We will try to be tolerant and decent to our neighbors, not racist but pluralist, liberal, yet at the same time very tough militarily.”

In reality, Grossman knew, the political temper of the country was likely to grow increasingly distant from his view of the world. “I guess that Israel will become more and more right-wing, more and more

religious,” he went on. “Jewish identity will be narrowed to self-defense. There will be more and more adoration of the Army, even though the Army has failed. My cry out to my Prime Minister is this: You have Israel in your hands, this precious thing. You are responsible for this unique country. If this country fails, will history be generous again?”

Sam Bahour is an American-born Palestinian who moved from Ohio to the West Bank in the wake of the Oslo Accords, a generation ago. Thinking he was building a future state, he helped establish the Palestine Telecommunications Company, travelling frequently between the West Bank and Gaza. He lives in Al-Bireh, the West Bank town his father came from, and when we spoke he was furious about the way that settler harassment and violence and seemingly random arrests of Palestinians were rising fast. “We turn on the radio every morning and we don’t hear about the weather,” he said. “We hear about arrests.” Even more alarming, there were reports that dozens of Palestinians in the West Bank had been killed since the Hamas attack, some by settlers.

For Bahour, there was nothing utopian about demanding a political solution; it was only its denial that was impractical, as well as unjust. “We don’t ask for the moon,” he said. “We ask for a military occupation of fifty-six years to end. My fear is that this round, as much as it’s doing tremendous damage, physical damage, to Gaza and to the people of Gaza, it is also exposing the hypocrisy of the West and the international community. And, if we go on doing that, it’s a

free-for-all.”

In the West Bank and elsewhere, Bahour told me, “all the attention now is focussed on stopping the bombing in a small, intensely overcrowded place that is fifty per cent children. The entire civilian infrastructure is being torn up. I don’t know how anyone—an Israeli or a Jewish American or anyone—thinks this assault will make Israel safer. They are doing just the opposite. Ironically, what Hamas did could have the effect of saving Netanyahu, of keeping him in power. Everyone knows that the day that this war stops he will be out of government. So now he is someone with nothing to lose, much like the people in Gaza. And people with nothing to lose lash out.”

At the Shura Military Base, in Israel, the bodies of victims of the October 7th attacks are still being identified. Photograph by Peter van Agtmael / Magnum for The New Yorker

The scenes of Hamas fighters standing in triumph over the dead, taking selfies and shouting “*Allahu akbar!*,” recalled, for some, Frantz Fanon’s line that “the colonized is the persecuted person who is always dreaming of becoming the persecutor.” Now those scenes were giving way to scenes of a devastated Gaza. Like Nusseibeh, and like Grossman, too, Bahour was unequivocally opposed to the killing of civilians. At the same time, he said, “we have to be wise, wise enough to hold multiple thoughts in our heads. There is the thought that Gazans would breach the fence and break out of their open-air prison—that is one thing. But it is another thing that they went into villages and killed civilians the way they did. It is a horrific act and must be condemned. But I also can’t just have a knee-jerk reaction and think this is a story that started October 7th.”

The task of holding in one’s head multiple thoughts—multiple facts—was nearly impossible, particularly in the face of sloganeering and the allure of militancy. There is the thought that Israeli settlers, many of them armed, have stepped up their daily violence against Palestinian villagers, egged on by ministers in the Netanyahu government. That, though Israel is well armed and has powerful allies, it is also the size of New Jersey and faces multiple enemies—Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran—whose leaders speak regularly of the elimination of “the Zionist entity.” That the unemployment rate in Gaza is forty-five per cent, the water barely potable, electricity and food in short supply, the health-care system in ruins. That antisemitism has, yet again, grown in breadth, intensity, and violence. That contempt for Palestinians is

practically a norm in the current Israeli government, as when Smotrich, the finance minister, spoke at a memorial service in France and, standing in front of a map with Gaza, the West Bank, and Jordan melded into “Greater Israel,” declared, “There is no Palestinian history,” or when Ben-Gvir, the national-security minister, told journalists, “My right, my wife’s, my children’s, to roam the roads of Judea and Samaria are more important than the right of movement of the Arabs.” That many thousands of Palestinians have already been killed in the recent air strikes and well over a million have been internally displaced. There will be no end to it anytime soon: the funerals, the recriminations, the threats, the fear, the assaults.

There was also the grim fact that Hamas had, in the most brutal fashion, shattered the illusion that a state could provide Israelis the guarantee of security. As Yonit Levi, the news anchor of Channel 12 put it to me, “Every single Jewish nightmare came true.” And so what would come in return? The air strikes on Gaza were proceeding at an unprecedented pace every night—lethal and incessant—and a ground incursion could lead to a hellscape of urban warfare, another Fallujah. It was a familiar nightmare, reminiscent of what followed 9/11, in which a stronger nation pursues a policy that, while trying to defeat an enemy for carrying out an unspeakable massacre, kills countless civilians and ultimately inflicts untold and lasting damage on itself.

The day after my visit to Kfar Aza, I took a cab to the town of Gan Yavne, twenty miles from Gaza, to attend the funeral of all five

members of the Kutz family. Livnat and Aviv Kutz had been found dead together on a bed with their children, Rotem, Yonatan, and Yiftach. Throughout Israel, everyone seemed to know the story, that they had been discovered in a kind of final family embrace. Few knew that, over the wall, in Khan Yunis, nine members of the al-Bashiti family were reported to have been killed in an air strike. Killing was the common condition.

At Gan Yavne, mourners stared at the five graves, deep and sharply dug. As people gathered under and around the perimeter of a white tent that blocked the hard afternoon sun, a volunteer from ZAKA, a man of astonishing industry and fitness, kept hopping in and out of the graves, preparing them, lining up sacks of dirt, ordering things according to Jewish law. Pressing forward to get a little closer to the service, I spotted Mia Kraus, a teen-ager and an evacuee from Kfar Aza whom I'd spoken with at Kibbutz Shefayim. I reintroduced myself. "I remember you," she said shyly. Like everyone at Kfar Aza, she knew the Kutz family well.

More teen-agers from the kibbutz squeezed past the surrounding headstones and gathered tightly together, arm in arm with Mia in the first row behind the family's relatives. Her mind was here and *there*: one of her friends was kidnapped and later found dead. Mia was sixteen, the same age, I recalled, that the poet Mosab Abu Toha had been when he was nearly killed on the streets of Gaza. In Mosab's poem "The Wounds," he writes:

If, when the rocket fell, I had moved my head a bit

to watch a bird on a tree or to count
the clouds coming from the west side,
the shrapnel might have cut through my throat.
I wouldn't be married to my wife,
father of three kids, one born in America. . . .
I look around me, relatives circle my bed.
I watch them as they chat. I imagine them praying round my
coffin.

The funeral service began. When Mia and I had spoken at Kibbutz Shefayim, she told me that she could no longer be in a room with the door closed, not even the bathroom. It brought back the memory of hiding in her house for twenty hours with Hamas gunmen outside her door. Through a partially open window, she could hear their conversations. Somehow, the gunmen never came in. Her family survived. Yet she regularly found herself overtaken by crippling waves of fear.

The coffins were carried in and the names were read: one by one by one by one by one by one. At first, there was silence, but now a great communal lamentation convulsed the assembled. I have never heard such weeping as I did that afternoon. There would be many more funerals to come, many more convulsions of grief. But the sounds of lamentation never carry as far as those of rockets, missiles, artillery, bombs. As I was finishing this piece, Mosab messaged me, describing the nightly bombings in his neighborhood. A ground assault was imminent. "Any moment I may not be in this world," he said. ♦

Published in the print edition of

the November 6, 2023, issue.

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