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# Jewish Federation<sup>®</sup>

OF GREATER ROCHESTER



Dear ,

It has been a week of extreme feelings and emotional whiplash: anger, sadness, exhaustion, gratitude, generosity, incredulousness, love, hate, anxiety, fear, helplessness, and strength – back and forth.

The week began with a board meeting discussing the increased need for community security measures and the immediate needs on the ground in Israel. On

Tuesday, Rick Goldstein and I spent the day in Washington with Jewish community leadership from Israel and the United States.

The meetings we attended felt like being a part of a seminal moment in Jewish history in which Rochester participated. These are the moments like the Six-Day War, the march on Washington to release Soviet Jewry, and the Ethiopian airlift that mark a generation. Our generation's indelible scar is etched sorrowfully in our collective souls – October 7, 2023.

In Washington, we listened and wept with a young woman, Noa, who survived the Nova Music Festival mass slaughter. As she shared her harrowing story, we all recalled memories of Holocaust survivors to whom we promised, never again. Her story was gruesome, inconceivable, and barbaric and Noa amazed us with her strength and fortitude. One sentence she said will stay with me forever, "You may not see any scars on my body, but there will be a scar on my soul forever." Her words ring in my ears and still hang in the air.

Together in Washington, our Federation system collectively in one hour raised \$388 million of the \$500 million pledged to support Israel. It was remarkable to experience the generosity of spirit from donors and communities from all over the United States. We were able to gather and support Israel because Israel has existed for 75 years. Israel's existence has created the opportunity for Jews in America to flourish and now is our time to use our resources and our strength to continue to keep Israel strong. We are Israel and Israel is us.

From participating in a session with our Jay Birnbaum leadership development participants to speaking with parents, students of all ages, and teachers the utter disgust and deep concern over the blatant displays of antisemitism in our community are very real. Posters calling for an end to Israel apartheid, genocide, and ethnic cleansing have appeared in Brighton, Pittsford, Mendon, Webster, West Irondequoit, Penfield, and more. All of us are experiencing an insidious and virulent form of antisemitism that is couched in the denial, delegitimization, and dehumanization of Israel. We see it in our public schools, from Rochester city council members, local judges, Brighton town board members, students, friends, colleagues, and community members.

On Tuesday in her remarks, scholar Deborah Lipstadt said that it took 20 years for people to deny the Holocaust and it has only taken two days for people to deny barbaric terror attacks against Israel. I said in my reflections at our community vigil that there will be a war on another front, and it is now here at our doorstep. While we successfully worked with WXXI to pull the plug on the Witness Palestine film festival, this does not remove the venom of antisemitism in our communities. This is one little success in a war that is raging.

On college campuses and in cities across the United States and the world, including Rochester, a tsunami of Jew-hatred is washing over us. Rallies that are publicized as Pro-Palestinian are actually a hate fest of Jew-hatred and anti-Zionism. If you haven't seen [this video](#), it is worth watching. This is Professor Shai Davidai a professor in the business school at Columbia speaking out against hate on campus and what has allowed it to flourish. He is remarkable.

Closer to home we learned of Cornell professor Russell Rickford who blatantly supported Hamas's actions in Israel. He has not been fired and his slap on the hand was that he had to issue an apology. Can you imagine what would have happened to any other professor who spewed such hatred against any other minority? [Students Want Cornell Professor Fired for Saying Hamas Attacks](#)

[Were 'Exhilarating' \(businessinsider.com\)](https://www.businessinsider.com)

At our events with Noa Tishby this week we discussed ways to combat this and stand up to the hatred, including from those within our very own Jewish community. There are Jews among us who ironically do not realize and understand that it is actually because of Israel that they can speak freely about their support of an anti-Zionist agenda. They not only believe but promote the notion that these brutal terror attacks are the fault of Israel. Interestingly these are the same folks who remind us not to blame the victim. I would like to see them try to speak freely in Gaza. I would also like to remind them that they, too, would have been murdered, raped and held hostage by Hamas.

General Sherman said, "War is hell." What is our armor and artillery in this war? The answer is simple – truth, history, and our people's utter determination and perseverance. How can we arm ourselves? I believe there are several ways:

1. Play offense – not defense. In other words, often it feels uncomfortable to speak up and speak out. Don't wait to respond, let's share our beautiful history by inviting people in. Bring your friends to educational programs (several are in the works). Have a Shabbat dinner and talk about what Israel means to you and our history over your favorite beverage or meal.
2. Educate yourself – there are great resources, online and in print. Check out resources with the Hartman Institute, Noa Tishby's book, and we will be offering a series of programs, too. An appropriate Google search will provide a wealth of good information. Please call or reach out to me, if you have any questions. I am always happy to teach and respond.
3. Wear your Judaism and the State of Israel with pride. Show up for programs and events. Be with our community. Terrorism wants to scare us into hiding our identity. Let's all be proud Jews. Speak out.
4. Continue to say thank you to all of the public officials who express their support of Israel. Call out those who do not. The same goes for community leaders. Please remember to support those who support us and share who they are with family and friends.
5. Keep reminding our world that there are 203 hostages being held captive by Hamas. When one is in captivity, we are all captive. We will not rest until they are home.

In the days, weeks, and months to come, we will continue to galvanize our

community and support each other. We will survive this dark chapter in our Jewish history, too. How do I know this? Because we always have, and we have no choice. We are all survivors. We may have more scars on our soul, but we will endure.

Shabbat shalom.



Meredith



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