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OPINION

Stop annihilating innocent Palestinians in my Jewish name

**David Leser**

Senior freelance writer

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I was asked yesterday morning how I was feeling, and I assumed – correctly – the question was being asked of me because I am Jewish and [Israeli forces had just entered Gaza](#) for the so-called “second stage of the war”.

I paused, then told this person I was feeling bereft and appalled and overwhelmed and terrified all at once.



An injured child in Al-Aqsa Hospital. GETTY

I was feeling this could be the end of Israel as a Jewish homeland, and the end of the lives of those held hostage by Hamas; and I was feeling that this could also be the end of the lives of thousands more Palestinians in Gaza because Israeli soldiers were doing two things simultaneously – acting in self-defence while killing en masse in the name of self-defence.

I was feeling that Hamas had laid a giant trap for Israel and that Israel, led by a [prime minister who should be in prison](#), was possibly making the greatest strategic and moral mistake of its 75-year existence.

I was feeling it was only a matter of time before Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite militia to Israel's north, began unleashing more of its 200,000 rockets on Israeli towns and cities and that Israel might soon be finding itself fighting on multiple fronts.

I was feeling that [US President Joe Biden](#) was making a catastrophic error by aligning his country so unambiguously with Israel when – apart from destroying Hamas – Israel's goals remained ill-defined. Who, for example, would rule the ruins of Gaza after this?

I was feeling like this was where the American empire – with its own criminal running for re-election next year – might come to die given the countless empires that had foundered in this cradle and graveyard of civilisations.

I was feeling that the decades-long stand-off between Israel and Iran might now be about to play itself out, if not in the valley of Armageddon north of Jerusalem, then somewhere close by.

I was feeling like we were seeing the pieces of a hellishly complex only-in-the-Middle East puzzle finally assembling themselves – America behind Israel, Iran behind Hamas and Hezbollah, Russia behind Iran, China behind Russia? – and that this was what the beginning of global confrontation looked like.

I was feeling like the virus of antisemitism was now spreading with lightning speed – Islamophobia too – and that for the first time in my sheltered, privileged life I could access – deep in my waters – the collective historical trauma of being Jewish – that nowhere was really safe because for Jews, rejection, exile, wandering, murder and eradication – was always part of the world’s blueprint.

I don’t call that a rational feeling, but I don’t call it irrational either.

Among all these inchoate moods and senses, I was also feeling that the omens had been scrawled in the heavens from the time the state of Israel was established in 1948. How could you possibly realise one people’s redemption and return at the expense of another’s?

If you were Jewish then, of course, the creation of modern Israel was a miraculous restoration of a historically wronged and traumatised people to their ancient birthplace. If you were Palestinian then, this was the catastrophe – *the Naqba* – because the creation of Israel had resulted in hundreds of thousands of their own being expelled or forced to flee into refugee camps and neighbouring Arab states.

And here we were again – 75 years later – with another Naqba as Israel forced millions from their homes in the wake of Hamas having decided on October 7 to open the gates of hell. Yet there was another feeling here, too – that long before Hamas ever formed in 1987, the denial of Palestinian freedom always stood at the heart of this ageless conflict, and no peace treaties with Arab states, no Jewish settlements on occupied Palestinian land, no Israeli bombing campaigns, no intellectual sophistry could obviate that fact.

I am outraged and sickened by the atrocities Hamas perpetrated on October 7, by the rapes and abductions and the wanton slaughter of babies, children, the elderly, the disabled, pregnant women. I am also outraged – shocked to the core in fact – by the failure of some on the left to condemn these abominations.

But as a Jew I cannot stay silent in the face of the horrors now being inflicted on the people of Gaza by a lawless Israeli prime minister largely responsible for the disaster that has befallen his country. Albert Einstein once said, “No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it”. In other words, you cannot kill the power of an idea with the force of bombs, and you cannot starve, besiege and terrify millions of innocent Palestinians as retribution for the atrocities of an abhorrent and murderous organisation such as Hamas.

I don’t know how to eliminate Hamas’ leadership, but I know it can’t be done like this. This is not what the Jewish people I know stand for; nor is it what the survivors of centuries of persecution would ever imagine doing to another benighted people. Surely not?

In my darkest moments, I feel like this is the coming together of forces beyond anyone’s power or imagination to solve, perhaps the end of something, or the beginning of the end of something else. It is a war waged on children by adults, a war waged on the future by the past, and it is a war that the world needs to stop right now ... and, yes, that means Australia, too, joining the family of nations on a United Nations vote calling for an immediate truce in Gaza.

You ask me how I feel? Not surprisingly, I also feel the terrible beauty of this moment. I see the jacarandas here in Sydney flowering at their most brilliant purple blue, and to my eyes they have never looked so exquisite. I see an October hunter’s moon in all its bright plumpness and I see lovers holding hands on the beach, parents with their small children, and they have never seemed so bound to one another as right now.

I see – and can still drink in – the spectacle of Paul McCartney on stage a few nights ago, singing the last lyrics of the last song the Beatles ever wrote, and I can feel the earth shifting on its axis,

opening a narrow skylight of hope on the world.

*And in the end the love you take
is equal to the love you make.*

David Leser is a former Middle East correspondent and regular contributor to Good Weekend.

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David Leser is an author and journalist. He is a regular contributor to and former staff writer with Good Weekend.
