

Local Jewish community in need of support more than ever

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By: Rabbi Jacob Herber

Hayim Katsman died a hero. As a Hamas terrorist invaded his community and murdered civilians, his final act was to use his body to [shield](#) his neighbor from a hail of bullets. Sadly, the young man who had committed his life to Israeli-Palestinian peace and coexistence was murdered on Oct. 7, 2023.

Katsman's tragic and heroic death struck a nerve here. In 2021 he completed his Ph.D. at the University of Washington and had taught Hebrew locally at a synagogue. He was more than just a number, one of the 1,200 murdered by Hamas in a single day last year; he was a part of our community.

It has been difficult for Americans to fathom the depth of the depravity of the [murders](#), [rapes](#) and [kidnappings](#) last Oct. 7. It has been difficult as well for Jewish Americans to adapt as a new wave of antisemitism was unleashed. Across the United States, people felt emboldened to attack Jews. Our community [was on edge](#) and soon felt that pain directly.

Just before Thanksgiving, Jewish communal institutions were [targeted](#) with suspicious packages to intimidate our community. My synagogue in Mercer Island was [covered](#) with red paint and anti-Israel messages, causing tens of thousands of dollars in damage. Targeting a religious institution for the actions of a foreign government is textbook bigotry and it must never be tolerated.

Local leaders reached out to offer their support. The Muslim mayor of Mercer Island and his Jewish deputy mayor [condemned](#) the attack. That Friday night, U.S. Rep. Suzan DelBene and some leaders from other religious communities attended our service of comfort and solidarity. U.S. Rep. Adam Smith condemned the attack, and his house was [vandalized](#) shortly after. But overall, the outreach from other religious leaders was disappointing. We felt vulnerable, targeted and alone.

Seattle's Jewish community has reason to be worried. Temple de Hirsch Sinai was [defaced](#) on the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day with neo-Nazi, anti-Israel graffiti. After Oct. 7, anti-Israel protests targeted Jewish neighborhoods, and some demonstrations at the University of Washington and in Seattle got ugly.

These incidents weigh heavily on a Jewish community still scarred from an episode in 2006 when a gunman forced his way into the Seattle Jewish Federation armed with two guns, ammunition and a knife. He [held a gun](#) to the back of a 14-year-old girl to get into the

building. The gunman reportedly said “I’m angry at Israel” before beginning his shooting spree. The gunman shot six women, including one who was five months pregnant, killing one and shattering the Seattle Jewish community’s sense of security.

Now, many congregants have considered taking the mezuzas off their doors or avoiding wearing anything that would identify them as Jewish in public. Our synagogue has increased our security measures with cameras and armed guards. We had to raise dues to cover repairs to our building and these other costs.

We are grateful for federal funds from the federal Nonprofit Security Grant Program, but current levels are insufficient. According to a [recent report](#), under half of NSGP applications were funded in 2024. In that report, the CEO of the Anti-Defamation League stated that “the demand for security resources currently far outstrips available resources.”

I implore our elected officials to do everything they can to designate funds to allow the Jewish community, like any other, to be able to gather safely without incurring an “antisemitism tax.”

These events have been devastating, but they have also made us stronger. After our building was vandalized, the father of a girl about to have her bat mitzvah spent hours removing the red paint. Nobody asked him to do it. He just showed up to help.

It was a powerful example of taking personal initiative to fix what’s broken. This is a model for our broader community. We can disagree on policy decisions, but when people are careless with their language it is easy for intended criticism of the Israeli government to [manifest](#) in hateful antisemitic speech, and ultimately actions, against Jews as a people.

It is never acceptable to harass someone walking on the street with a yarmulke, or threaten a Jewish place of worship. State and federal legislators, university administrators and all citizens must respond promptly and forcefully to address these incidents when they happen. And we need financial support to cover the added security costs to ensure that Seattle’s Jews are never attacked again.

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