

October 7 anniversary: A show of solidarity in Dallas gives me hope

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By: Rabbi Ari Sunshine

It is exactly one year since the horrific attacks in Israel began, in which 1,200 people were brutally murdered and 250 were taken hostage into Gaza, [including babies and the elderly](#).

I vividly recall that morning one year ago. It was a Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, and that night would begin one of the most festive Jewish holidays of the year, honoring the completion of our annual cycle of reading the Torah.

None of my experiences during my more than 20 years in the pulpit could prepare me for how to celebrate a joyous festival in the immediate aftermath of the greatest mass murder of Jewish people since the Holocaust. We decided to honor the dead with special prayers, and to honor the living by proceeding during our holiday celebration on Oct. 8 to dedicate our brand-new playground, the David A. Segal z”l Family Simcha Play Center. By investing in the joy of our children, we refused to let the terrorists win. I remain proud of our commitment to our children’s and our people’s future at a time when others sought to destroy it.

My synagogue is excited to spend our resources on places for our kids to play and grow. However, all too much of our time, energy and dues, which run into the thousands of dollars per family per year, are focused on security. It’s no wonder. Many here in North Texas remember when a gunman took [a rabbi and three congregants hostage](#) in Colleyville in 2022. This followed the [fatal attack on a synagogue](#) in Poway, Calif., and the horrific [Tree of Life Synagogue massacre](#) in Pittsburgh, where 11 congregants were murdered.

These threats have only increased in the past year. According to a [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) press release in June, “The rise in hate crimes and other forms of targeted violence has increased sharply since the Oct. 7, 2023 terrorist attacks against Israel.”

FEMA also addressed how the government is helping to keep my community safe: “In light of the changing threat environment, the Nonprofit Security Grant Program has become a more important resource to faith-based institutions and nonprofit organizations to strengthen their security posture.” These NSGP funds are critical to ensuring that Jews in Dallas can gather safely, but more money must be allocated to [meet the demand](#) caused by this surge in attacks on the Jewish community.

On college campuses more should be done as well. This past year, the University of Texas at Dallas campus [was taken over by several protests](#), which featured graffiti vandalism that contained [antisemitic rhetoric](#) and often condoned violence. One of my children attending an out-of-state university has also faced similar protests on her campus. Many young Jews in our community have expressed feeling unsafe and marginalized.

These are issues we've had to address with our high school students as well. In our religious school classes for teens, we devoted several sessions to explaining what happened on Oct. 7 along with its broader historical context. We've prepared them for the unfair burden thrust upon them in this environment. At one point, I remember telling them, just as I have said publicly to our adult synagogue community:

"I know you didn't ask for this, but you are now ambassadors for Israel and the Jewish people. That is a role that you must now play, because there are not enough people standing up for why Israel — the only Jewish state in the world — has a right to exist, and why that state has a right to defend itself and its citizens from harm. Our homeland of Israel has been at the heart of our Jewish souls, scripture and prayers for multi-thousand years, and it remains vitally important to Jewish people around the world today. We cannot let that be ignored or forgotten."

But I also told our students and adult congregants that we aren't alone. In the wake of the Oct. 7 attacks, my congregation is grateful that the broader Dallas community has stood by our side. Immediately following the horrific event, the Dallas [City Council](#) unequivocally condemned Hamas' attacks on Israel and [thousands of people](#) gathered to show support, including Mayor Eric Johnson and faith leaders like my friend and colleague the Rev. Richie Butler.

When Dallas City Council member Cara Mendelsohn's [home was vandalized](#), including graffiti with a symbol [used by Hamas to mark targets](#), Mayor Johnson correctly called it out as [blatant antisemitism](#). These powerful displays of unity have reinforced that we do not stand alone, and that we draw strength from our allies across faiths and backgrounds.

As I reflect on this past year, this solidarity gives me the most hope. It reminds me that no matter what happens in a war half a world away, in Dallas we know that targeting a faith community is never an acceptable response.

Rabbi Ari Sunshine is a senior rabbi of Congregation Shearith Israel in Dallas.