

One year after Oct. 7, antisemitism is still all too common

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Several years ago, a young man from our Jewish community here in Houston wanted to give back and help make the world a better place, so he decided to join an overseas volunteer program after he graduated from college. When it came time to sign up, however, COVID had shut down the organization's operations. So he enlisted with the Israel Defense Forces instead to help keep the people of Israel safe.

He had only a few months left in his service in an elite IDF combat unit on Oct. 7, when Hamas invaded southern Israel and began slaughtering civilians. He happened to be in the middle of a training exercise that morning, so his helicopter was quickly redirected to one of [the many Israeli communities that was under terrorist assault](#).

His chopper was the first to arrive on the scene. It was fired upon as it closed in on the area and had to make an emergency landing. When he got off the helicopter, he was immediately shot. The bullet cut into his flesh but miraculously missed his heart. The medic next to him was able to keep him alive until he could reach a hospital, where he went through multiple surgeries. After months of rehab and completing his military service, he came back to Texas to continue his academic studies.

There are clearly many remarkable aspects to his story, but one of the most disheartening is the reason we didn't name the young man and that he doesn't want to describe his experience publicly: After risking his life to save civilians from a terrorist assault, he's afraid of the personal attacks and social ostracism he could face on campus as [antisemitism has roiled universities](#) here in Texas.

What does it say about our world when this is the response to someone who by any measure is a hero? And what does it say about our own state when scorn and hate greet members of the Jewish community who work to protect their fellow Jews?

The scope of the challenge is astonishing. As the CEO of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations William Daroff pointed out in a [recent op-ed](#), [Hillel International](#) has documented over 1,800 antisemitic incidents on college campuses since Oct. 7, the highest number ever recorded in a single academic year. "This staggering statistic represents countless Jewish students who face harassment, intimidation, and violence simply because of their identity," Daroff wrote.

More can be done to keep our students safe. The U.S. Senate should [listen to the Jewish community](#) and pass the [Antisemitism Awareness Act](#), which already passed the House of Representatives earlier this year in an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote. The act would give the Department of Education the ability to enforce federal anti-discrimination laws in order to protect Jewish students.

Away from campus, the Houston Jewish community has experienced support and solidarity from many of our local officials, fellow clergy and non-Jewish neighbors over the past year. In particular, the Houston Police Department has been extremely dedicated to our security and well-being. These are people who truly care about us and ensure we're safe. Many have even learned some Hebrew and Yiddish words of greeting.

Still, there's a limit to what public services can provide. Given the very [serious threats to Jewish safety](#) here in Houston, we are forced to devote huge amounts of our budgets to creating a safe environment for our members, whether it's installing fences and cameras along the perimeter of our properties or panic buttons in the sanctuary in case of an emergency. We also hire off-duty police officers to be present whenever people are in the building.

And yet, each Sabbath, we have congregants who join our services online instead of coming in person. Many of these people don't feel safe entering a Jewishly identified building. Congress has designated funds for security enhancements to help nonprofit organizations at high risk of a terrorist attack by creating the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, but according to the Jewish Insider, [fewer than half](#) of applications for that funding were fulfilled in the 2024 grant cycle. We need to do better.

During the Jewish High Holidays season our security costs only increase. We are blessed with large communities, but in the past that means we've each had to spend over \$100,000 per synagogue just on security for these services. That's only a fraction of our annual security costs, and this year it will surely be higher. It's a price we must pay for the much more valuable cause of gathering and praying together.

When we do assemble, we will tell our congregants that we need to stay the course as a community. We need to stay unified. We need to give people a sense of security, a sense of confidence, a sense of hope. And we need to keep finding ways to contribute to making the world a better place.

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