

What It Means To Witness

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You truly don't understand a conflict or what a region is going through, until you've seen it with your own eyes, and heard the suffering told by the inhabitants. And even so, you still won't fully understand unless you are living in it. When I traveled to Israel in September, I did not go as a reporter or an activist, but as a witness. An outsider. The goal was to understand what life looks like and the different perspectives in a place where history, loss, and resilience coexist every day. And I saw it all.

In Israel, my first experience was visiting the Nova festival massacre site. People that were trying to free their minds from the stress of their own lives, by dancing, and enjoying a concert weekend were soon met with their worst nightmare when Hamas terrorists invaded the festival. Many lives were lost, and many who survived are forever victims to the violence they experienced. At the festival site, a beautiful memorial now stands



in honor of those who were lost, and survivor, Rita Yedid, stated with hope “we will dance again”.



Then we traveled to one of the kibbutz that were attacked by Hamas terrorists on October 7, 2023, Kfar Aza. On that day, many people were kidnapped, assaulted, and killed, an event that changed countless lives across Israel. When talking to a survivor of the kibbutz attack, Shachar, he stated how he does not

know if he should keep the destruction or rebuild, as rebuilding would lose the remembrance, but the destruction is too bad to bear. At the end of the day, outside my hotel room, I witnessed a protest for the hostages, with the statement “BRING THEM HOME NOW”. The people of Israel desire peace and safety.



However, I'm not only going to talk about the tragedies of October 7th, because when I was at this kibbutz, through my feet, I felt the rumbling of destruction in Gaza. Just 3 miles west of where I was standing, a city and many lives were falling. I could see the smoke of explosions rising just from looking at the outline of the strip. For the first time I felt fear, not just from the media's illustration, but in the air. I felt the conflict and violence through my feet, not just from the words in an article. I was listening to and watching a present time war. It was horrifying.

For what cause, under any circumstance, can the taking of innocent life ever be justified? Hundreds, even thousands of people, each with families and futures, are caught in the middle of something far greater than themselves. If we, for one second, strip away the sides, the politics, and the noise of opinion, what remains are the innocent names, faces, and stories that ended too soon. Whether someone is taken hostage, displaced, or already gone, the reality is the same: in no place, and for no reason, should such suffering be acceptable. The value of life should never depend on geography or identity, it should be universal.



Further into my trip, I went to one of the checkpoints of the West Bank revealing another layer of the conflict. One defined by movement, restriction, and uncertainty. Viewing the checkpoint, I could feel the tension that comes with control and waiting. In front of the checkpoint was a sign stating

“This road leads to Palestinian village, the entrance for Israeli citizens is dangerous”. It was here that my understanding of the daily life in this region is shaped by barriers both seen and unseen. To witness the division of space is to recognize how deeply conflict extends into the most ordinary parts of living, and where simply crossing from one place to another can carry the weight of fear for many.



Towards the end of my experience in Israel, I travelled to the Syrian border, where I explored the IDF bunkers and the further implications of safety guarding from Syria. The atmosphere felt different, quieter, but heavy with history. Standing at that point, looking across into another country scarred by its own

conflict, I realized how borders are more than lines on a map, they are living reminders of fragility. It was a moment of distance and closeness all at once, seeing a place that had endured so much, yet remained so near.



The silence there was its own kind of echo, a reminder that peace and fear can exist side by side.

As a Journalism student from the United States, I can say with certainty that none of us can truly comprehend the depth and weight of this conflict and region until we have stood where it unfolds. We can protest, debate, and share our opinions from afar, but distance softens the reality. During my visit, I heard from Lucy Aharish, an Arab Israeli journalist, who said, "Democracy is being used



by extremists to take it down." Her words captured the painful complexity of what I witnessed, a struggle not just between sides, but within humanity itself. What I learned is that we, as observers, should not add to the separation, but work toward understanding and peace. The people living through this do not ask us to choose sides; they ask us to fight for a

peace where no one is torn down for the other to rise.

