

Empowering the Perplexed Majority

Dr. Zohar Raviv
International VP of Educational Strategy,
Taglit Birthright Israel

The Senior Educators Solidarity Gathering in Israel was a profound moment of comradeship and shared commitment to our people and mission as educators. While admittedly engulfed by overwhelmingly strong emotions personally, I was nonetheless compelled to try and chart a clear distinction between a *horrendous sight* and an *attainable vision*.

Accordingly, I believe that our educational philosophy and approach in a reality recognized as henceforth transformative should uphold the seminal need to be wholly reactive to 10/07, while remaining strategically proactive in realizing the fuller potential of solid Jewish/Israel education in the broadest sense.

A few thoughts to that end:

- *Moral Clarity:* The 10/07 atrocities are acts of pure, unadulterated evil. As such, they are wholly set apart from *any* form of acceptable human conduct, and have no place within legitimate discourse concerning political debates, territorial disputes, historical narratives, social ideals, and/or religious ideologies. They should never be allowed to be presented in “necessary context,” within



“multiple narratives,” or from “diverse perspectives.” These acts are Crimes against Humanity, and must be called out as such by any and all decent members of humanity.

- *Establishing the Jewish Event:* While acknowledging the sacred oath to remember, remind ourselves about and actively commemorate 10/07, we also need to be attentive to the awesome gravitational pull of tragedy, and its hazardous ramifications on Jewish identity formation. Accordingly, we should clarify that the 10/07 Hamas atrocities and ensuing global antisemitic and anti-Israel displays are *not* a Jewish event, but a heinous offense inflicted on Israel, its citizens, and the global Jewish community. The Jewish event itself needs to be identified as the values, ideals, and beliefs that have always sustained us as a Jewish civilization and continue to drive both our *routine* and *response* to such inhuman barbarism and antisemitism— as individuals, as a community, as a nation, and as a people. We need to establish the foundations of Jewish identity upon the internal values and ideals of Jewish living, rather than external threats to Jewish life.
- *Personal Relationships:* The tremendous thrust of solidarity both in Israel and around the Jewish world is also recognized as a profound asset to be leveraged. Here— as the term “Jewish Peoplehood” has shown its

tremendous potential value – active engagement needs to reflect commitment and responsibility to Jewish and Israel causes, both in Israel and within participants' home communities.

- *Jewish History, Israel, and Zionism in Appropriate Context:* The Jewish institutional world by and large has neglected to present generations of Jews with a contextualized understanding of Jewish history, Israel, and Zionism. The stories of Israel, Zionism, and overall Jewish history need to be effectively reframed and integrated, all while acknowledging Israel as a Jewish and democratic state whose population includes non-Jewish minorities. Additionally, on the one hand we need to be fully cognizant of the notable challenges our participants face when addressing these issues, whereas on the other hand we need to assume the responsibility and mandate to offer guidelines, language, frameworks, and sound contexts for these important discussions.
- *Culturally Bilingual Educators:* Any attempt to thoroughly and responsibly address the complex realities experienced by Jews both in Israel and worldwide cannot reach fruition without our combined efforts to introduce “culturally bilingual” educators: role models capable of facilitating and unpacking difficult issues respectfully, sensitively, and with

equal knowledge and empathy for Jews from “both sides of the ocean.” Educators capable of handling what it means to be an Israeli who lives in this land; and what it means to be a member of world Jewry who faces multiple challenges vis a vis both his/her sheer identity as a Jew and her/his associations with Israel.

- *Empowering the Perplexed Majority:* The overwhelming majority of young Jewish adults worldwide neither abides by nor takes *any* part in radicalized spheres whose shameful rhetoric is fueled by sheer Jew and/or Israel hatred. That said, I believe that in most countries there is a large mainstream that is not only a perplexed majority, but a *silent majority that increasingly feels as a silenced minority*. We need to refocus our consolidated Jewish communal and educational attention on this great source of human capital, wherever relevant, and on two levels: a) take all measures needed to raise our young adults’ awareness to the fact that they constitute the majority; b) take all measures needed to assist, support, encourage, and empower this majority to actively regain its voice and reassert its crucial place in social discourse – all while safeguarding everyone’s personal welfare and safety. This silent majority should and can become the spoken majority.