

Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch

Oct 7 Commemoration 2024

Shana Tova and Gmar Chatima Tova. Today we are reminded of the profound weight of memory and identity that October 7 now holds for all Jews. My Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yaakov Weinberg, taught that the Holocaust should have its own day of religious significance, a fast day. Despite the many persecutions Jews have faced throughout history, he believed the Holocaust was unique because it awakened every Jew's consciousness about their Jewish identity. It wasn't only the scale of the tragedy but the universal impact on Jewish souls across the globe. In my humble opinion, I believe he would have similar thoughts about October 7th.

Though not as vast in scope as the Holocaust, the atrocity of October 7th stirred something deep in every Jew, no matter where they were in the world. For good or for bad, it reminded us that we are Jews, bound together by a shared fate. While we cannot create a new fast day to commemorate this tragedy, it is vital that every Jew find a way to remember it.

As a community, Mekor is doing so twice: once tonight and again during the Simchat Torah holiday itself. This date will forever be a stark reminder that, despite our differences, we share a common destiny. Our heartbreak has been intensified by the widespread shocking reactions to the cruelty of October 7, from apathy to outright celebration.

In such a world, it is more crucial than ever to combat our feelings of isolation by gathering for mutual comfort, support, and a determination to look toward the future with hope and resilience.

As part of our effort to memorialize October 7, Mekor has been privileged to participate in the Simchat Torah Project. This project brings together congregations around the world, each dedicating a new white Torah cover for the High Holidays in memory of the 1,200 souls lost and the many soldiers and hostages who died Al Kiddush Hashem. Our cover is embroidered with the name of אורן אלפסי הי"ד, one of the kedoshim of October 7. I'd like to read his obituary from The Times of Israel now.

Oran Alfasi, 22, from Rehovot, was murdered by Hamas terrorists while he was visiting Kibbutz Nirim on October 7. Alfasi was visiting his girlfriend on the kibbutz and went into the reinforced room when the air raid sirens began. Hamas tried to break into the room as he was holding the handle closed and shot through the door, killing him, while his girlfriend survived.

He was buried on October 10 in Rehovot. He is survived by his parents, Keren and Kobi, and his siblings Noam and Yonatan.

Alfasi worked at the hi-tech company Check Point, and was remembered for his love of the ocean and surfing.

His uncle, Ytsik, wrote on Facebook that his nephew had a “captivating smile and big love, he grew up on values of peace and loving others... Oran was a hero, he leaned on the door of the safe room to protect his girlfriend.” Oran’s aunt, Mazel Ben Zaken, said she was not surprised by his bravery: “He was a child full of love and looked only for good. He loved his family very much.”

His father, Lt. Col. (res.) Kobi Alfasi, was called that morning to the war room at the Kirya military headquarters in Tel Aviv to help oversee the fight against Hamas, without knowing his son was in a kibbutz overrun by terrorists. Recounting his day to Channel 12 news, he said the moment he got a call telling him Oran had been killed, “is the moment when a hand reaches into your chest and pulls out a piece of your heart, and that’s it.” “He was an angel, a guardian angel,” his sister, Noam, told Channel 12. “He would always protect me, even when I was protecting him. And in his final moment, he chose to protect who he was with.”

This 1st anniversary of October 7 also falls during the Ten Days of Repentance, the aseret yimei teshuva. In this period of reflection, we are encouraged to move from grief on the calendar that we experienced on tisha b'av to nechama/ consolation, and then to seek new beginnings. One of the key messages of this time is the recognition of our vulnerability.

We are reminded that in this crazy world, forces greater than us exist, and that it is precisely in moments of profound pain and fear that we must turn to God for help, strength and protection. Our relationship with God is the foundation upon which we build resilience to face whatever the world brings, even unspeakable evil.

As we honor אורן and all the victims of October 7, may their memory inspire us to strengthen our commitment to emuna and bitachon, devotion, and building meaningful lives. Let us enter the New Year with optimism and resolve, knowing that we are part of a larger story—a story that binds us together, no matter our differences.

May we continue to move forward, supported by our connection to God and to one another.

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