

## Ron Leshem on Hamas attack: The little innocence that was left might be dead

**Israel** Horror at the inhumanity of Hamas. The certainty that too many have legitimized it for too long. And the question of how to hold on to sanity and compassion being possible. Writer Ron Leshem describes how he experienced the past days

[Ron Leshem](#)



Funeral of Amichai Vanino in Jerusalem, a soldier murdered by Hamas terrorists

[Eine deutsche Version dieses Artikels lesen Sie hier.](#)

I'm sharing these thoughts as a member of a family whose entire lives have been committed to campaigning for Palestinian independence and against the ideas of the right-wing in Israel. Among the 1.300 killed in a few short hours on a Saturday morning, were my aunt and uncle, who were burned alive. I have loved ones among the captives. Family members who survived describe infants executed in their mothers' arms and mothers tortured to death in front of their children.

### The one piece that will haunt me forever

My grief for our own family's loss pales. Even for the girls who were raped and then shot to death I find myself too weak to scream, or for 85-year-old abducted grandmothers. In my emotional storm, the one piece that will haunt me forever is the hundreds of babies and small children who are victims of ruthless cruelty. The terrorists shot bound children at zero range, I'd never allow myself to recover from this. It was the organized destruction of entire villages – In this case, communities of peace activists. The land looks like a mixture of Ukraine and

ISIS.

I am shaken by the acknowledgment that the faces and the stories of these children, whose lives we were not able to save, will haunt our society in every decision in the next decades. We will promise ourselves that we will emerge from this trauma better people, but history teaches us that we will emerge from it deeply scarred, hateful than ever, vengeful, and fearing for our own security, knowing that no one will come to save us if our children are slaughtered. Such traumas grow overwhelming feelings that we will all need to struggle with.

## **A naïve support for extreme Islamic regimes and movements**

As a gay person, for years, I found myself asking my European left-wing friends to be aware of the nuance, that their support for extreme Islamic regimes and movements which, in the name of religion, execute LGBTQ victims, murder freedom activists, women who are suspected in sex outside the marriage, liberals, journalists, and opposition, is a naïve support that results in more victims. When you confuse such groups with freedom fighters, you are not only betraying liberals and queers to their deaths, for years, but also encouraging more terror and undermining peace.

When Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005 and dismantled the settlements, Hamas seized control by weapon, ruthlessly pursuing the secular Palestinian camp that opposed Hamas from within. It turned into a religious dictatorship. Since then, and as we are in constant rounds of violence and missiles shot on both sides of the border, my heart bleeds and tears for every child victim, on both sides, for every woman, family, and all my beloved Muslim close friends. While I passionately demonstrate for Palestinian rights and independence, I also warn that the Hamas government is a monstrous force that would cruelly seek to exterminate not only Jews, Israelis, and gays, but anyone who does not adhere to fundamentalist beliefs. Embracing them as partners means helping their ideology grow, yet Israel and Europe kept treating them as the legit partner, under the circumstances. You can't support a government led by such a terror group and think it helps Palestinian freedom. Same for Iran, the tolerance for a country that systematically executes liberals and homosexuals would never save any lives, but will bring more horror. Also, those who talk about Global Jihad, cannot be considered freedom fighters.

## **The plague of „the death of truth“**

Social media and the deep fake video era bring the entire Western world the plague of „the death of truth“. Democracies will struggle to survive in the era of „the death of truth“, where every person can choose not to believe what their eyes see, and every citizen decides what to believe, even if it's a lie. Journalism is replaced by complete chaos. Ignorance and conspiracies are exploited by dictators, whether nearby or distant, in an attempt to completely undermine the Western societies' ability to make complex decisions and to sow discord among us and confuse us. We are in the struggle of liberals against demagogues, worldwide. In the midst of this, and more than ever before, a generation has grown that tends to see reality only in binary terms. It is necessary to be against the occupation, and to shout that oppression creates violence, yet not to blame the victims when a government of terrorists slaughter elderly women, and ruthlessly rape young girls. Yes, it is important to sit in universities, shrines of knowledge, and analyze how the rise of ISIS was historically

influenced by colonialism and Western sins. This does not contradict the need to fight the militants manipulated by Iran, who, within a few hours, kill 1,300 people, wound thousands of innocent unarmed civilians, cut off heads, abduct hundreds. Our tragedy, on both sides of the border, is not a story of South Africa; it is not a story of Vietnam. If one listens to Hamas and Jihad in their own language, they explicitly say they will slaughter Jews until Islam controls the entire land, and Israel is fully exterminated. Queers and Christians will be next. Hamas is not engaged in the true liberation of Gaza.

Our friends, filmmakers and devoted journalists, have been murdered and kidnapped as well. We, as artists, have been trying for many years to act as a bridge to peace and dialogue. Now, we are paralyzed by the shock, we are dead humans walking, assuming that everything we have believed in all these years has been rattled to its core, possibly shattered for good. We will try to occupy our minds with the work of storytelling, alongside our beloved Palestinian writing partners, in order to soften hearts and promote compassion and the desire to reach out and hug each other. We must keep believing that art can transform the world with the truth. It is becoming so hard to keep believing. We who could not save our children; We, who watched our loved ones brutally slaughtered on a livestream, by thousands of trained invader militants, and realized that no one would come to save us when we are tortured, must keep on believing.

## **Bring back babies, children, women, and the elderly to safety**

Firstly, and practically, I wish every government worldwide would use all its power and influence to bring back babies, children, women, and the elderly to safety. This will be the immediate way to lower the flames of the fire, and convince that these are the first steps of potential sanity and compassion.

When the world spins out of control and each one of us is preoccupied with anxiety over his own children's safety, the morality of all of us will face the most difficult crucial tests, to hold onto as much compassion and empathy as possible in the face of monstrosity. It's our mission as storytellers and artists, to promote nothing but empathy, and we try to do so, even in the cruelest times. I'm terrified of what's ahead in both sides. Our streets are filled with dead humans walking. Hamas shields itself by civilians, forbids its civilians from evacuating downtown Gaza and moving South when battle evolves, and there, Hamas hides deep underground, protected by the hospitals and schools above. They continue to fire thousands of rockets a day on civilians. Then, when a military goes into battle, devastating tragedies accrue.

## **The fear that has haunted Israel all these years**

Occupation is a crime, yet now you have a glimpse of the fear that is holding us up from accepting unlimitedly armed extremists living within us, or alongside us. In every single peace negotiation, they were insisting on freedom to unlimitedly hold arms and build such forces. This is the fear that has haunted Israelis all these years – Those who discard infants by the roadside, chase after young people on motorcycles at a nature and peace festival, hunt them like prey in the wilderness. We all become infected with the flame of hatred, if we allow them to grow. The depth of hatred for Israel puts us constantly on the brink of war, much before the West Bank was occupied, and that is our tragedy, raising generations of children

this way.

None of us can know whether the sequence of events that began with the war in Ukraine will continue with a possible escalation with Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia in the Middle East and lead to a broader, complicated conflict. Hopefully, we can extinguish the flames and the unbearable tragedies for all, save lives from all religions and races. In moments like these, we need not sink, not be swept away in a river. We hold to a branch, then convince ourselves we are a tree trunk, or otherwise, fly away. Regardless, for us, life will not be the same after Saturday's massacre. We are no longer the people we used to be. I'm assuming the little innocence that was left might be dead.

**Ron Leshem**, born near Tel Aviv in 1976, is a novelist and screenwriter. Among other things, he co-developed the series *Euphoria* and co-wrote the screenplay for the series *No Man's Land*. His novels *Beaufort* and *The Underground Bazaar* were bestsellers in Israel. *Beaufort* was made into a film which won the Silver Bear at the Berlinale in 2007 and was nominated for an Oscar. His latest novel *Als wir schön waren* was published in 2022 with Rowohlt