



## I Stand With Israel

**By Pam Morris, Early Learning Center director**

I consider myself a fairly positive person. Of course, I am also prone to sarcasm, so that adds a bit of an edge to that positivity, but for the most part, I ALWAYS try to look for the silver lining. Whenever I have to speak to someone about a mistake or something that bothers me, I take the position that this is something that she just doesn't know, yet. To my core, I have always believed that people need to be given the chance to learn.

Which made Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah all the more difficult for me. My phone is turned off for the Jewish Sabbath (sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday) and for *chagim* (certain Jewish holidays that have many of the same requirements as Shabbat). I walked into the shul on that Saturday morning almost two weeks ago, ready for the celebration that was sure to ensue until the rabbi spoke about the "elephant in the room"; the news that Israel had been attacked. And not just the military bases, since the soldiers would have been prepared, but civilians. Music-lovers at an open air music fest in southern Israel. Mothers, Fathers, Children, Babies. And not just attacked, but gunned down, most & kidnapped, many.

This didn't compute. While the surrounding region of the Middle East is never, and I mean NEVER, overtly friendly, welcoming, kind to Israel, there hasn't been an attack in a very long time. The overwhelming sadness and anxiety took over that positivity and left me a shell, not knowing where to turn with my strong emotions and anger.

We talked at shul and later that night I went to dance with the Torah. The rabbi said that since we can't go and fight, (although many have; 300,000 reservists have been called up) we must come together as a community and fulfill our obligations of joy and continuation of the traditions.

And I went home after, and talked with my kids. I told them about what had happened and what was still going on. I stressed the need for them to stay away from social media, now more than ever, because of what might be posted. Once you see



something, you can't unsee it and I am too young to see the images so I know my children are too young.

Many of my friends, especially those in the non-Jewish community, reached out to me, and continue to, to offer their support, their love, their encouragement and their outrage. I have always been very vocal about who I am and my Judaism. It never occurred to me to not.

And then I did what I told my children not to, I read a few things on social media. Not that many, but enough to know that the world isn't in our corner. At least, not many places in the United States. I am not speaking about the government; I am talking about private institutions and businesses. Places that I once thought of as pillars of education or fairly responsible and not as political as others. The frustration and dismay and anger that followed - well, you don't want to know what I said. But these posts I shared with my children. They too should know what is being said at some colleges that will no longer be part of their list of places to apply and businesses where they have liked to shop but no more.

My children are a bit more informed about history than the average person, especially when it comes to Israel. That is the extent of my homeschooling. But they know when Israel was no longer occupying Gaza (August, 2005). They know that Israel is roughly the size of New Jersey (just over 200 square miles larger). They know that there are so many countries in the region that are Muslim countries that aren't helping the residents of Gaza. They know that nearly 20,000 residents of Gaza enter Israel everyday to make their livelihood and return home every night. They know that Hamas won a majority of seats in a Palestinian legislative election in January 2006. Because they need to be armed with facts.

And then there was an exchange last Sunday. I went to a grocery store near my home with all of my reusable bags. I have so many!! I have collected them from all over and when I was bagging my groceries, the cashier asked, "Are you Jewish?" Immediately, I said yes. It never entered my mind to answer any differently. He said, "I noticed your bag (from the Jewish Genealogical Society)" I smiled. We had a pleasant exchange.



He let me know that he is a Christian and he believes Israel is in the right. He said he was praying for me and all of the Jewish people. I thanked him, smiling.

While there may be those who still don't think that Israel has the right to exist, in the small suburb of Chandler, AZ, I am feeling pretty good.

I have seen our local community pull together. Families at the J and friends all around. There is outrage and sadness; some fear of course about what will happen next, but resolve to stand strong and be there for Israel.

As my shirt says:

I Love Israel.

I Want Peace.

I am a Zionist.

Am Yisrael Chai!

Shabbat Shalom!