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# Adam Zivo: The Israelis who wish for peaceful co-existence

*While in Israel last week, I was moved by the empathy shown by locals toward their Palestinian neighbours*

By [Adam Zivo](#)

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“We hope to live in peace with the Palestinians. We want to live in peace. We don’t want terror,” says Rita Lifshitz, who lived in Nir Oz, a kibbutz where a quarter of the population was kidnapped or murdered in the October 7 attack by Hamas. PHOTO BY ADAM ZIVO / NATIONAL POST

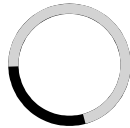
TEL AVIV — Many people in the world would like you to believe that Israelis are callous — but this is simply untrue. While visiting

Israel last week (through a trip sponsored by the non-profit Exigent Foundation), I was moved by the empathy that many locals showed towards their Palestinian neighbours, despite the horrors of the past year. It was an educational contrast to the extremism so often seen, from both sides, in other parts of the world.

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This humanity was poignantly illustrated by [Haifa's Rambam Hospital](#), where Palestinians arrive almost daily to receive urgent medical care — often for physical trauma or cancer. According to hospital director Dr. Avi Weisman, so long as there is space for Palestinian patients, they are given a bed at a discounted rate.

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Weisman explained that this inter-ethnic aid was made possible through an agreement between the hospital and the Palestinian Authority, which permitted residents of the West Bank to seek treatment in Israel. As no similar agreement was brokered with Hamas,

Gazan patients were left in a more precarious position that was exacerbated by their extreme poverty. Yet Gazans would still arrive for treatment with the help of Israeli volunteers who would drive them to and from the hospital — a trip that took hours — on a daily basis.


“All the children in Gaza that needed dialysis or kidney transplants, it was done here. Just because we treated the first one, and two and three; then they just kept on coming,” Weisman said.

Since October 7, sealed borders have precluded the arrival of new Gazan patients. Only two or three such patients remain, and they are afraid to return home lest they be killed by Hamas for fraternizing with the enemy. Meanwhile, the number of Palestinians arriving from the West Bank has diminished by roughly half.

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Weisman noted that, in a cruel twist of fate, the volunteers who drove these Gazan patients were among the first to be kidnapped and killed by Hamas on October 7, as they inhabited the peace-loving kibbutzim just outside the strip. Though he was obviously appalled by this butchery, his voice betrayed little animosity to the Palestinians themselves — he spoke of his patients empathetically, regardless of their background.

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I saw this same disposition in many others I interviewed, including Rita Lifshitz, who lived in Nir Oz, a kibbutz where a quarter of the population was kidnapped or murdered in Hamas’s attack. After she recalled her friends who had been shot and burned alive, and all of the carnage wrought upon her community, she proclaimed, “We hope to live

in peace with the Palestinians. We want to live in peace. We don't want terror.”

In Tel Aviv, I interviewed Yariv Mozer, a documentary filmmaker who was working on a project about the Nova Festival Massacre — which required him to watch unspeakable footage over and over again — and who had previously made [a film about gay Palestinian refugees](#) living in Israel. His disgust for Hamas was palpable, and yet he, too, spoke of Palestinian lives with concern. Though his faith in peaceful coexistence was deeply shaken, he strived to preserve his humanity.

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The same inner struggle could be seen in Iris Shellhav Nahal, who I met in [Tel Aviv's Hostage Square](#), where she sat surrounded by photos of missing loved ones. She confessed that, though she intellectually understood that the mothers and children of Gaza were

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suffering, she was too exhausted to feel anything for them. “My heart is somewhere else. I don’t have a place for them,” she said. There was little hatred in her voice and no satisfaction in Palestinian suffering. She wanted peace, not vengeance.

There were, of course, others who were less forgiving — people who wished to flatten Gaza indiscriminately and who saw the world through a colder lens of power without ethics or grace. Yet they were but one faction among many, as is inevitably the case in any society. To reduce all of Israel to them would be foolish.

In the West, so many activists and intellectuals speak of Israel as an evil place and casually throw around terms like “white supremacy” and “settler-colonialism.” Their image of Israeli society is a caricature that bears little resemblance to reality. If only they could see the efforts, amid brutalities, to advocate for both Palestinian and Israeli lives, even when such advocacy is difficult and painful. If only they could hear the stories of inter-ethnic solidarity and the wistful recollections of less violent times.

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I thought of the clueless university protesters in Canada and the United States and wondered what they would say if they were faced with these Israelis. Would they realize the superficiality of their own thinking? Would greater exposure to real life help them understand that complex conflicts cannot be understood through black-and-white thinking?

Conversely, the extremists on the other end, who call for unforgiving cruelty upon Palestinians, should understand that many Israelis do not want this — the bloodlust of foreigners is an unwelcome intrusion to them.

There are millions of Israelis and Palestinians living on this land, and neither will disappear anytime soon. Any solution to this conflict must contend with this fact. Many Israelis understand this and yearn for peaceful and dignified coexistence, yet their empathy is erased by hardliners on both sides — either for the sake of demonizing Israel or dehumanizing Palestinians. It is a shame.