

KAYOUMI VINEYARD in the Upper Galilee, under fire in 2006, produced an award-winning wine. (Carmel Winery)



PUT AN ISRAELI WINE ON YOUR TABLE



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Since the Simchat Torah massacre, the mood in the country is as black as I can remember. The slaughter of Jews, with atrocities and brutality worse than ISIS, has brought about the war that Hamas apparently wanted.

We are swamped with stories of tragedies and heroism, each one more moving than the last. Israelis remain glued to their television sets, in between frantic rushing to safe rooms, stairwells, or shelters at the sound of rocket-warning sirens.

Many are homeless with just the clothes they are wearing. The residents of the western Negev – those who were not slaughtered, kidnapped, or burned alive – were evacuated from their homes. The Upper Galilee towns, villages, and communities near the northern border have been evacuated as Hezbollah steps up its attacks on a daily basis. The last thing anyone is thinking about is wine.

In 34 years in Israel, I have encountered problems of wars, military operations, and suicide bombings, like everyone else. There was the suicide bombing on a bus alongside a Meron vineyard in the Upper Galilee, when body parts had to be scraped off the vines.

We are too used to rocket-warning sirens causing us to run for safety. This has become commonplace every couple of years or so. On many occasions, my place of refuge was the deep underground cel-

lars built by Baron Rothschild at Carmel's wineries, mainly in Rishon Lezion. Little did Rothschild know he was building possibly the most secure bomb shelters in the State of Israel.

In 2006, the Second Lebanon War included sustained bombardment of the North. Growers were forbidden to go into the vineyards during the critical period before harvest. The Carmel Kayoumi Vineyard Shiraz 2006, which won the Decanter International Trophy, was a result of this situation. It was a war wine; but despite this, it remains the most prestigious award ever won by an Israeli winery.

However, the current situation makes everything else pale by comparison. The slaughter of 1,400 people in their own beds and homes, including whole families and babies, is the worst day experienced by the Jewish people since the Holocaust.

I was sure that the world would support Israel and would not stand with Jews being murdered yet again. I believed the maxim "All Hamas are Palestinians, but not all Palestinians are Hamas." I was certain that the intellectual Palestinians, educated Israeli Arabs, and worldly Palestinian lovers in capitals around Europe would be shocked by the Hamas violence. I expected they would say "We support Palestinians, but Hamas did not act in our name." I thought those regimes for which Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood were a distinct threat, like King Abdullah II of Jordan, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt, even Saudi Arabia, would be keen to distance themselves

from the fundamentalists who endanger their own regimes.

What we have witnessed is chilling. The world has delighted in the atrocities and inhuman behavior in an obscene orgy of celebration. Apparently for them all, Hamas is Palestine and Palestine is Hamas. Even the iconic BBC has taken sides. While insisting on taking days to confirm that Jewish babies had indeed been beheaded, they took seconds to broadcast the Hamas propaganda blood libel that Israel had bombed a hospital, along with an immediate exaggerated body count. Hamas is not a terrorist organization in their eyes.

Herein lies the whole problem. No one has taken the trouble to differentiate their cause from Hamas. Not a word about the Palestinian civilians suffering or being killed by Hamas. Ironically, the blind support of Hamas by supporters of Palestinians has put their cause back generations.

THERE IS no one in Israel who does not know someone murdered, kidnapped, or missing. The Israel wine family is also hurting.

Or Yosef Ran was an example of Israel's finest, cut down in the prime of his life. He was commander of a special unit and was a real modern-day hero. Goodness knows how many lives he and his team saved on October 7.

He was the brother of Mika Ran Mandel, owner and winemaker of Mika Winery in the southern



TAKE A SIP FOR SOLIDARITY

Israeli winemakers and their employees are currently facing challenging times. By purchasing Israeli wines, we can demonstrate our support during their time of need.

KEDEM EUROPE joins the campaign to sell Israeli wine. (Kedem Europe)

NOW IS the time to buy blue and white. There are Israeli wines of every style at every price point. (Adam Montefiore)

Golan Heights. His family members are farmers in the Samarian mountains, with quality vineyards at 800 meters altitude. At the end of this past Yom Kippur, he went straight from the synagogue to the vineyard to harvest grapes for Shiloh Winery along with winemaker Amichai Lourie.

Or Shani also died on that black Shabbat. He was 22 years old and left behind a wife and a four-month-old child. His uncle is Eli Shiran, owner and winemaker of Shiran Winery, situated at Kiryat Arba, near Hebron. Or Shani also was a hero on that day who saved countless people. The two lights (Or means "light" in Hebrew) will shine brightly forever in our memory.

Daniel Lifshitz is the ex-goalkeeper of Maccabi Tel Aviv, wine importer with his company Bourgogne Crown, and one of the leading Burgundy experts in the country. His grandparents Oded and Yocheved Lifshitz, respectively 83 and 85 years old, were kidnapped and taken hostage. This is a couple who spent a lifetime offering kindness and caring to individual Palestinians. Fortunately, Yocheved was released, but her husband still remains captive.

Shai Wenkert is owner of a wine importing and marketing company called Winekart. His son Omer was one of those at the Supernova music festival. The fun turned to terror when hundreds were brutally mowed down and murdered in cold blood. Furthermore, many are missing. Omer Wenkert was one of the innocents taken hostage by the barbarous Hamas terrorists. Nothing has been heard about their health. The Red Cross has not been permitted to visit. We pray for the hostages' safe release.

There is also property damage. A missile landed in one of Domaine Castel's vineyards in the Judean Hills. This was the same vineyard burned in the fire of a couple of years ago. Ramat Negev Winery, pioneer of wine in the Negev, received a container of new bottles, which was hit directly by a rocket, destroying the contents. Fortunately, the damage was material.

The vineyards in the western Negev, southern Coastal Plain, and Upper Galilee have been under attack by barrages of rockets. Farmers, vineyard workers, and growers are often prevented from entering their own vineyards by the authorities, due to security alerts.

The workforce of wineries has been decimated. Many employees have been called up for reserve duty.



ROYAL WINE, the largest importer of Israeli wine in the world, shows solidarity. (Royal Wine)

Lourie of Shiloh Winery told me he has lost all his workers except two. Young mothers have had to stay at home looking after their children who are not going to school.

Every winery has had to introduce emergency procedures in case of rocket attacks. Most visitors' centers are closed, and there are no tourists. Unlike COVID, when wine lovers drank more wine at home, this time sales have stopped abruptly. Supermarket shelves are empty, as people panic-buy water and toilet paper. It is not hard to understand that wine is not high on the list of priorities.

However, nature does not wait for anyone. Wineries have had to bring in the remainder of their red grape

harvest and start the process of turning their grapes into wine. Israelis have rallied to the call. The spirit is amazing. They have really replaced the dysfunctional government, which simply seems unable to rise to the occasion.

I apologize for talking about wine, but that is what I write about, and I see everything through a prism of wine. The local wine industry is three weeks into a major crash. The writing is on the wall. The local economy is going to be hit in a way that will make COVID look like a picnic.

MY MESSAGE is to importers, distributors, and retailers of Israeli wine; to Israelis and Jewish communities abroad. What you can do is very simple. Put a bottle of Israeli wine on your table today! Contact the large main importers, like Royal Wine in Bayonne, New York, or Kedem Europe in London. They have a very large list of wines to offer. These include the finest, small boutique wineries and the largest wineries in the country. They include rare, expensive prestige wines and inexpensive wines for easy drinking. There are numerous smaller importers, too. Go to your nearest retail wine store and ask for an Israeli wine. Creating a demand is how to create a market.

Why do this now? Because the winegrowers and winemakers of Israel really need your help like never before. It is a very easy way that you can provide assistance, and you will have the feel-good factor of making a contribution. Also, by putting an Israeli wine on your table, you are putting Israel up front, which is important in this time of darkness. If you have to give a gift, this time make it an Israeli wine. Each individual wine represents a person and a place. You can't give hi-tech as a present, and our wine represents Israelis and the Land of Israel. It is Israel's most visible ambassador of all that is good here. So, today, without delay, lighten the darkness with a bottle of Israeli wine.

For Israelis, I realize that talking about wine now is a futile exercise. Wine is certainly not important, with the mountains of problems people face. It is not a priority or a necessity, certainly not at this time. I just want to put it out there, that things can seem better with a glass of wine. It is better than Prozac.

However, my main message is to our supporters abroad. Now is the time to buy blue and white. ■

The writer is a winery insider turned wine writer, who has advanced Israeli wines for 35 years. He is referred to as the English voice of Israeli wine. www.adammontefiore.com