

Opinion

Falling through history

We can only despair if the sight of Ariel, Kfir and who we thought was Shiri returning in coffins does not recalibrate Australia's moral compass

Lynda Ben-Menashe



On October 14, 2023, I was in Greece with a girlfriend, on a trip planned long before the hideous events of October 7 transpired in the south of Israel.

We were visiting the Royal Tombs of Aigai at Vergina and there, in the cool underground, I observed on the wall a fresco called The Rape of Persephone. In front of that fresco, I froze.

It depicted a red-haired woman being carried off by the barbarian Hades, ruler of Hell.

Exactly seven days earlier and 25 centuries later than the fresco was painted, we'd watched hundreds of Israeli women carried off by barbarians from Hamas hell.

Reel after reel of Hamas's own bodycam footage showed women carried off kicking and screaming on the backs of the terrorists (Amit Soussana); women abducted on motorbikes (Noa Argamani); women forced into jeeps (Na'ama Levy). And one red-haired woman cowering as she was led away shielding her two red-haired babies: Shiri Bibas.

Amit, Noa and Na'ama are now free. Amit was released after 55 days in the first hostage deal.

Noa was rescued after eight months in a daring IDF raid. Na'ama was paraded across a Hamas stage after 15 months in the second deal.

But how "free" any of them can or will ever be, we'll never know.

And now Shiri.

It's hard to describe the iconic status Shiri Bibas and her babies attained in Israel and the Jewish world.

It's even harder to understand how they did not in the rest of the world.

Their images, 20 storeys high on Tel Aviv buildings, reminded Israelis what they were fighting for.

On hostage posters from New York to Sydney, they made Jewish people cry twice or 2000 times – when they were put up and when they were ripped down by rabid, hate-filled terror apologists.

Jewish women like me woke in



Shiri Bibas and her children, Ariel, 4, and Kfir, nine months are abducted and (right) The Rape of Persephone at Vergina.

panic through 500 nights, wondering where Shiri and her babies were, and how they were, and if they still were at all, in those pits of hell.

The Bibas family – father Yarden, aged 34 when abducted; mother Shiri, 32; toddler Ariel, 4, and baby Kfir, nine months – symbolised to us every Jewish family through history torn apart by the forces of barbarism and hatred of our people.

Standing in front of the frieze at Vergina that day I felt as though I and my people were falling through history, and that is how I've felt ever since.

Red-haired Shiri was every Jewish woman abducted or raped or murdered by a baying mob.

She was Sol Hachuel, the 17-year-old-Moroccan Jewish girl, who was publicly beheaded in 1834 for refusing to convert to Islam.

She was one of the 997 unmarried

young women and teenage girls on the first transport of Jews to Auschwitz in 1942.

One of the four Syrian Jewish girls who were raped, killed, and mutilated while trying to flee to Israel in 1974.

She will join them in our collective Jewish memory for centuries to come.

Her babies too, were every child sacrificed on the altar of Jew hatred through the ages.

They were the firstborn Jewish sons slaughtered by the Egyptian pharaohs. They were the 12-year-old Russian Jewish boys abducted to the czar's army in the 19th century, converted to Christianity or killed and never seen again. They were the 1.5 million Jewish children murdered in the Holocaust.

And their husband and father Yarden returned from hell three

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It is our job to say to the world around us, “We have seen this thing before and we know where it leads and how it ends.” The fate of the Bibas family is such a pattern.

Over years we have said to the world, “Look at the Jew hatred taught to Palestinian children in UN school textbooks and in mosques and on TV in Hamas-run Gaza. Those children will grow to be the barbarians that massacre not only Jews, but also Thai, Filipino and African Christians and Israeli Muslims.”

We have said, “Watch as the words of anti-Jewish racism that governments do not punish will lead to your own cars and homes and childcare centres going up in flames alongside our synagogues ... and maybe even to yourselves being murdered by nurses in Australian hospitals who mistake you for Israelis.”

To no avail.

Tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians died because the genocidal intent stated in the Hamas Charter was actioned on epic scale on October 7.

The rulers of Hamas hell knew that the Jewish people would fight back to save the abducted Bibas family and every future abductee, raped woman and murdered child, and they let their own innocents pay the price.

Maybe I was the only one who saw Shiri Bibas in the fresco at Vergina, but surely at least one other person saw our classic Aussie comic battler Ginger Meggs in the face of little Ariel Bibas.

If seeing Ariel and Kfir and who we thought was Shiri coming out of the bowels of hell in coffins doesn't recalibrate Australia's moral compass, I give up shining my light on the threadbare carpets of Jewish memory.

I will resume my duty as a Jew and as an Australian, but right now there is no hopeful ending to their story and so none to this piece.

May their memories be for a blessing – and a warning.

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weeks ago 1.5 million times more bereft than any Jewish person living today.

The fact that we still have no idea whose body was in the coffin Hamas marked as Shiri's only compounds the horror.

I have always interpreted the complicated instruction to Jewish people that we are to be “a light unto the nations” to mean that it is our job to shine a light on the patterns of history that we see repeating.