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ILLUMINATE OCTOBER

Light at the end of the tunnel



ZEDDY LAWRENCE

On October 7, 2023, the unthinkable happened in Israel. Ten days later, on October 17, 2023, my father passed away in England. Eleven days later, on October 28, 2023, having flown back to the UK to bury my father, I cut short my trip to the old country and was on a plane back to Melbourne to be by my wife's side as she buried her grandmother.

One year on, as we approach the anniversary of all three events, there aren't really the words to encapsulate the emotional upheaval.

You'll forgive me then, I hope, if I resort to the traditional British response of profound stiff-upper-lip understatement, honed over a hundred years ago on the playing fields of Eton, and merely muse ruefully that October 2023 was quite a month.

As for October 2024 ... that's shaping up to be quite a month as well. In striving to give members of our community the opportunity to commemorate October 7 and honour those that fell that day, those that have lost their lives since and those still held hostage in the terror tunnels of Gaza, Zionism Victoria has undertaken one of the most ambitious initiatives Victorian Jewry has ever seen – Illuminate October.

We didn't want to simply emulate our annual Yom Hazikaron service where we're an audience of passive spectators as a memorial ceremony unfolds on stage. For most of us – as a community and as individuals – October 7 impacted us like nothing before. We witnessed the fragility of the Jewish State, we witnessed the true nature of the terrorists on her border, bereft of any shred of morality or humanity, and we witnessed teenagers, children, the elderly – our own family and friends – slaughtered en masse.

And then, while we mourned, rather than feel a comforting hand on our shoulder from the multicul-



Zionism Victoria's lantern making project at Beth Weizmann as part of marking one year since the October 7 atrocities. Photo: Peter Haskin

tural society we've striven so hard to be a part of, we felt victimised and isolated, as those who claim to champion tolerance and progressiveness instead championed terrorism and prejudice.

So we wanted to give members of the community the chance not to just watch the commemoration, but to express themselves, to actively participate in the commemoration.

“On October 7 we will ride the rollercoaster again.”

Much of that, in recent weeks, has focused on making lanterns. In schools, in shules, youth movements, social groups, charities ... thousands of us have come together to produce papier-mache lights, each one dedicated to a victim of the atrocities committed in that heinous attack.

But the lantern procession – the Walk of Light – is just one aspect of Illuminate October. Whether you have a lantern or not, you can come along to experience a range of artistic installations and projections, as well as attending the actual service which will include reflections, songs and prayers – again, all written and performed by members of our community for our community.

I've been asked more than once if it will be suitable for children and yes, it will be. There'll be no

graphic images or speeches. This is about remembering and honouring, rather than reliving.

Needless to say, it is tremendously gratifying that the Illuminate October concept has been adopted by a number of Jewish communities across the globe, as well as by the Hostages and Missing Families Forum in Israel.

After a year in which we have organised countless rallies, events and activities – from bike rides to mountain climbs and from raves to art exhibitions – the uptake both within Australia and overseas is testament to the out-of-the-box thinking and extraordinary efforts of our tiny team.

Ultimately, it's all been driven by a desire to give our community opportunities to show solidarity with Israel and stand shoulder to shoulder with each other.

And the diverse demographic that has taken part in all the activities since October 7 is indicative of the desire to do just that.

Young, old, religious, secular, straight, gay, armchair Zionist, right-wing firebrand and everything in between, if there's one glimmer of light in the darkness, it's been that spark of Jewish identity – so different in all of us and yet so powerful at times like this – that binds us all together.

A bond of family, of familiarity, of belonging. Am Echad. One People.

Over the past year, we have

ridden the emotional rollercoaster together – the all too brief high when four of the hostages were rescued in June, the depths of despair when six of the hostages were found last month, brutally murdered just hours before they would have been liberated from their captors, the admiration at alleged Israeli ingenuity when pagers and walkie-talkies sent a much-needed message to the terrorists of Hezbollah whose relentless rocket fire has forced tens of thousands of Israelis from their homes.

On October 7, we will ride the rollercoaster again. The despair at just how long this war is taking to achieve its goal, the sorrow at the innocents on both sides who have paid the price for the terror prosecuted by Hamas, the hope that we will see the remaining hostages return to their families alive, and the prayer that sense and humanity will finally prevail, with Israel's neighbours valuing life over loathing and peace over pride.

This is the light at the end of the tunnel. Before that though we remember the souls and the spirit of those that were lost, the light within that cannot be extinguished – the light that will shine when we illuminate October.

Zeddy Lawrence is executive director of Zionism Victoria. For more details of Illuminate October and to register for the Melbourne commemoration, visit illuminateoctober.com



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