

Opinion | Israel Has Had a 'Conscience-ectomy.' Can a Society Survive Without a Conscience?

Wednesday 12 June 2024, by [LEVY Gideon](#) (Date first published: 12 June 2024).

Can a society exist without a conscience? Can a state continue to function after its removal? Is the conscience a vital organ, like the heart or the brain, or is it like the spleen or the gall bladder, which you can live without? Perhaps it's like the thyroid: You can live without it, as long as you take a replacement for the hormone? These questions should be asked by every Israeli now, after the country underwent a total consciencectomy on October 7, 2023. Israel has been without a conscience ever since. For now, it appears to be alive.

Destruction in the Nuseirat refugee camp, where four Israeli hostages were rescued last week, on Monday. Credit: AFP

The process that Israel has undergone in the past several months can only be described as a separation from its conscience. It had been sick for years; now it is dead. There are a myriad explanations and justifications, but the question remains, in all its force: How can a society continue to endure over time without a conscience.

The kidnapping of Noa Argamani on October 7. Credit: AP

On the evening of October 7, with all of the atrocities that the day brought, Israel said to itself: We are done with conscience. From now on, it is only us, there is no one else. From now on, there is only force, nothing else. For us there are no dead children in their thousands, nor their dead mothers; no total destruction or starvation, no expulsion of destitute people or the inflicting of total terror.

Nothing interests Israel anymore other than its sacrifice, the punishment it was subjected to, its suffering and courage. Recent days have provided definitive proof of this. Subsequently, there is no more room for questions about its moral sense. It's gone.

The euphoria that erupted in Israel [after the rescue last Saturday of the four hostages](#) was justified, human, sweeping and very moving. The blindness that accompanied it attested to the demise of the national conscience.

Noa Argamani and her father Yakov at Sheba Medical Center, Tel Hashomer on Saturday. Credit: IDF Spokesperson's Unit

On the day of the rescue operation alone, according to the Hamas-run [Gaza health ministry, 274 people died in the Nuseirat refugee camp](#) and another 698 were injured. The images of convoys of ambulances, private cars and donkey carts carrying hundreds of wounded people and corpses to the

completely overwhelmed hospital in Deir al-Balah were among the most difficult of the war.

Israel chose to conceal them, to erase their memory, to deny their existence, as though if they are hidden and ignored they did not happen. Israel wrapped itself in joy; this whole week, songs of praise – for the bold operation, which was indeed bold, for the bravery of the rescuing soldiers, who were indeed courageous, for the officer who was killed and for whom the operation will be named – have been on constant repeat, and with not a word about what else happened in Nuseirat in the course of the operation.

The Nuseirat refugee camp on Thursday.Credit: Reuters TV/Reuters

When Daphna Liel of Channel 12 News describes the operation as “perfect,” what does she mean? That 300 deaths are perfection? And if 1,000 people had been killed, would Liel still think that the operation was perfect? Would tens of thousands of dead bodies have crossed Liel’s line of perfection? What number would have been crossing the line for Israelis? Would 1,000 bombs dropped on Nuseirat have raised questions? It is very doubtful.

When the commander of the Border Police, Maj. Gen. Itzhak Brik – the hero of the hour, whose forces rescued the hostages – says they carried out a “surgical” operation and were driven by “values,” what is he referring to? What would killing people in a manner not driven by values look like? Are 300 dead people a “surgical” operation? What would genocidal killing look like? When no one says differently or corrects such statements, when no one expresses reservations or even adds an asterisk so as not to mar the joy of the masses on the country’s beaches, something is very sick here.

Obviously, the moving rescue should have been celebrated. Israelis deserve a moment of joy in the hell they’ve been living in for months, which isn’t over yet. But one cannot, must not, ignore [the price paid by Palestinians](#), even if there are people who believe that the price was unavoidable or even entirely justified.

A society that ignores so blatantly the price paid by tens of thousands of people, with their lives, bodies, souls and property, for the rescue of four of its hostages and for a moment of joy for its members, is a society that is missing something vital. It is a society that has lost its conscience.

Gideon Levy

P.S.

• Haaretz. Jun 12, 2024 11:32 pm IDT:
<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2024-06-12/ty-article-opinion/.premium/israel-has-had-a-conscience-ectomy-can-a-society-survive-without-a-conscience/00000190-0d9e-d0f9-a1d5-ddbef0bf0000>