



Israel: My Roots and my Wings



Name: **Deborah H**

Gender: **Female**

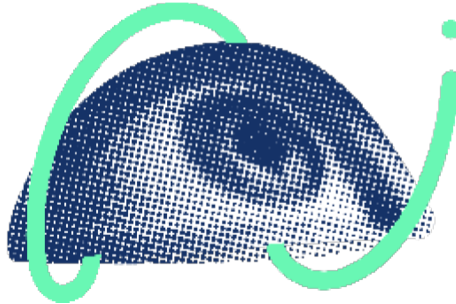
Country of residence: **France**

Writing language: **French**

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My name is Deborah, and I love telling stories. When the massacre of October 7th happened, I was deeply affected. For a moment, I thought I was going to lose the lightness that has always guided me in my adventures. But imagining that I could renounce what is dearest to me would be to misunderstand me. So, I got back up, armed with my pen, to regain my voice. I then went on an extraordinary journey that made me realize how proud I am to belong to the Jewish people, to carry its history, its colors, and to defend its ancestral land despite adversity. This story is mine, but in many ways, it could be yours. Welcome to my Kaleidoscope story.



Disbelief, horror, and shock. These were the first emotions that swept through me as I watched helplessly from France the terrorist violence that descended upon Israel on Saturday, October 7th, 2023.

Disbelief, first, because in Israel, one never resolves to let terror dictate one's conduct. We accept that tensions are part of daily life, even minimizing them, but paradoxically, we refuse to become accustomed to terrorism. No democracy would envision that for its people. So we pretend to be optimistic and prefer to convince ourselves that, whatever happens, life will resume its course.

Then comes the time of horror when we realize this won't be just a few difficult days when the country is on high alert. October 7th, 2023 reshuffles all the cards. The atmosphere has changed, and the images reaching us are of unimaginable violence. Women are raped and displayed like trophies in the Gaza Strip. The still-warm corpses of the elderly lie on the asphalt. In the kibbutzim of Kfar Aza, Nahal Oz, Be'eri, and Re'im, life that was flourishing has stopped. Their inhabitants, some of whom distinguished themselves as architects of peace, were coldly murdered in the most bloody barbarism. There are also those whose lives are in suspense, hostages at the mercy of their torturers, whose fate was quickly forgotten, briefly summarized in a few lines on a poster: "kidnapped".

Finally, the shock when the head of state solemnly declares, "We are at war." Doubt is no longer possible because words have been clearly placed on this chaos. Barely have we had time to digest the information when we must prepare to act. No one can say how long the crisis will last, but all help is welcome because a battle on all fronts is about to begin, and its outcome is placed in the hands of the entire Am Israël, both in its national home and in the diaspora.

The scope of the war is eminently military, but its stakes extend elsewhere. Consequently, we reinvent our Hasbara, because 76 years after the restoration of our sovereignty on the land of Israel, we must still prove to those who doubt and those who show their hostility our legitimacy to exist on our ancestral land.

I take part in this battle with all my heart, because for me, when someone suffers, the entire people, plunged into torpor, will find the courage to get through it, head held high, inspired by the mantra that teaches us that every Jew is responsible for others.

Invested in this new quest, I believe I am rising stronger than ever, but my approach is unsteady. When the 7th of each month brings me back relentlessly to that fateful day when a part of my innocence flew away, when words are no longer enough to qualify the horror or when their meaning dissipates in favor of all instrumentalizations, what can I do? What should I say?

These intrusive thoughts buzzing in my head remind me of the state I was in last year. This war has wounded the country I love so much by attacking its most precious asset: life. It has struck at the heart of individuals whose destinies will forever bear the weight of this Black Shabbat.

However, I will not resign myself to accepting that the only lessons of this dark year are reduced to the disbelief, horror, and shock of the first day. I want to believe that something exists that surpasses these initial emotions, and that it is incumbent upon me to discover. In any case, this is what I want to undertake: to seek within myself everything that has weakened my individuality.

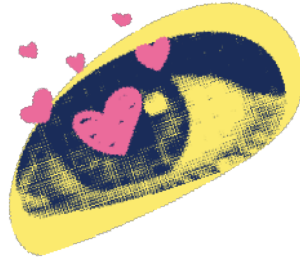
There is no doubt that the crisis we are going through has shaken many certainties. It has attacked what constitutes the cement of my identity: my Jewishness, my sense of national belonging, and my dreams.

It all begins with the observation that the past year has been revealing of a profound malaise. Antisemitism is gnawing at my country from within, but too few people condemn it publicly. This paradox perplexes me because at a time when access to information is instantaneous, silence reigns supreme. The importation of the conflict is very real. Fear can be read in the eyes of many Jews in France when a synagogue is set on fire, a kosher store is vandalized, or a child is raped for being Jewish.

As for me, I am not afraid to name things, because I believe it is imperative that those responsible assume the consequences of their actions. Nor am I ashamed to make my voice heard, when many will choose to remain silent, for the simple reason that if not me, then who? If not now, then when?

This antisemitism is an insidious evil because when it does not strike with blows, it deploys an arsenal of words as violent as bullets fired at point-blank range. I felt this sensation with my entire being on October 8th, when I saw spray-painted in bright red "Honor to Palestinian terrorists" on the facade of a Jewish school. At these words, my blood boils. Who can deserve honors if they strike down innocents with the most primal hatred or indoctrinate the weakest minds?

At that moment, I understand that I have a role to play. More than ever, I must express myself, because I can no longer hide behind the innocence of childhood. Today, I am the adult who, aware of the realities of the modern world, even the most infamous, must confront them. So I cry out, I scream my pain. I exhaust myself telling the world that this path of antisemitism is a dead end, but my words remain inaudible.



To make matters worse, the past year has also given me cause to question my place in the nation. Until now, I navigated between my Jewish and non-Jewish friends. I enjoy a multicultural France where everyone learns from each other's differences, and where these differences are our greatest strengths. The France I love is the France with a capital F, proud and fraternal. However, on October 7th, 2023, instead of seeing unconditional solidarity with the massacre victims triumph, a freezing of empathy predominated. In this moment of gravity, I still hoped that the entire nation would come together, in the same way that after the Charlie Hebdo attacks, we had descended into the streets as one to vociferate our indignation against this ultimate attack on freedom of expression. Instead, the point of no return. I struggle to believe that just yesterday, during a Shabbat conversation, someone told me that my words made them want to sing the Marseillaise, while saying they no longer had hope in France for Jews. This was before October 7th, 2023. Today, can I still believe in the same discourse when the house of cards collapses? I do not want to give in to anger because I still believe in living together. But I rage against this rise of perils, when extremes make pacts with the devil. On the right and the left, the obscenity is unbearable: when some want to get rid of their antisemitic past, others manipulate and appropriate all symbols. And the moderates are not left behind, when their voices, if not timid, are nonexistent. In sum, I rage against all those who have abandoned us and who have no consideration for two of our compatriots: Ofer Kalderon and Ohad Yahalomi, still held prisoners in the Gaza Strip.

Finally, I would never have thought possible that the international community I had so idealized could fall so low. At twenty, naively, I dream of an extraordinary destiny. I dream of a life dedicated to diplomacy, of a future where the fruit of my hard work will carry me to the most illustrious chambers to deliver committed speeches. I would go, with my words, to find a remedy for all our ills, inspired by those women and men who made peace the fight of their lives. The difficult year that has tested us so much could have united us against terrorism. But instead, a sadly pathetic spectacle. The United Nations and its multilateral order, so imbued with justice and good sentiments, found itself on the ropes, knocked out in the ring of hatred. I am disgusted by a Geneva law with variable geometry, where war victims, when they are hostages, are treated differently, left behind in the darkness of tunnels. And in the midst of this chaos, thousands of kilometers from conflict zones and blood effluvia, a pernicious spirit has infiltrated the chambers I have always coveted. During plenary sessions, I remain stunned by an unbearable injustice: that of a narrative inversion where authors of massacres and war are rediscovered, erected by some as figures of resistance. Their names? Yahya Sinwar, Ismail Haniyeh, Hassan Nasrallah, or Mohamed Deif. Their crimes? Taking Palestinian and Lebanese societies hostage, coldly assassinating Israelis, legitimizing the hatred of Jews in the Near East and beyond, even on our Western university campuses, where they insidiously undermine any hope of peace in the region. So, no more cries or rage, but the silence of despair. I, who am usually the life of my group of friends, who always reminds those who give up at the first difficulty, no longer know where I stand, and at every moment I fear finding the feelings that overwhelmed me at the beginning of the crisis.

However, will I offer my detractors the pleasure of hiding my Jewishness, deliberately excluding me from the debates that animate my country, or abandoning my diplomatic dreams? Negative. Affected, I am, like all of you, because this war has overturned what I took for granted. That said, I have matured. Deep down, I am convinced that hope remains. Animated by the love of Zion, I have therefore decided that I will not remain silent.

For the love of Zion, I will fight for what is dear to me, because I understood that I could not remain prostrate indefinitely. I would be unworthy of not rising to the height of those who have been my constant support when my world collapsed. I owe much to those who surrounded me with their strength, they who never doubted the difficulty of what I was going through at the university. They knew how to put an end to my fears, reminding me that we are a people and that we share the same heart.

So, for the love of Zion, I will continue to carry my message of peace and tolerance with more force than ever. Faithful to my values, I swear that nothing and no one will stop me. I will paste notices at night so that the hostages see the day again. I will not stop writing, so that the fire of their memory never goes out. With tenacity and courage, I will continue to speak out against all odds to give voice and face back to those who have been deprived of them.

That is why, out of love for Zion, we will continue, all together, to move mountains on the sole condition of transcending our differences. For months, even years, we have forgotten the strength of our bonds. It took a crisis to provoke the surge of our community for us to realize the magnitude of what was at stake and the necessity of acting together. To hatred, we responded with love and became our own heroes.

As I complete my prose, I am in Tel Aviv. In the starlight, it is time for assessment. The masterminds of October 7th are falling one after another, but the war drags on, and the hostages still shine by their absence. As I retrace the thread of my doubts and hopes, an obviousness imposes itself: a piece is missing from the puzzle. It is the 7th of the month, and I am in Israel. A thousand times, I have dreamed of the moment when I would again tread the soil of the Holy Land. One would think I had never been there, even though I grew up in Tel Aviv almost every summer of my life. Yet this year is different because the entire country bears the burden of tragedy.



But in the darkness, light. Far from the epicenter of trauma, my perspective remained incomplete. I needed to be here, now, to feel the intensity of mourning. So here I am, answering the call of the stars, facing Kikar Dizengoff, where the fountain of my childhood has become a sanctuary. At its feet, dusty stuffed animals, photos frozen in time, and burnt-out candles pile up. All these memories speak for the disappeared who see and hear us. Sabra or not, they are proud of where they come from, and in their eternal silence, they transmitted to me the most beautiful of messages.

My Judaism, born of the land where milk and honey abound, is a child of the Levant, a wanderer of the Mediterranean, fiercely Aegean and terribly Galician. It is international, a mixture of Hebrew, Ladino, and Yiddish. It wants to resemble everything and nothing at once. It is formless, deformed, and multiform, but that's how I love it. If in its veins flows the fervor of life, then it no longer fears anything or anyone. Its roots are my wings. I will always be faithful to it. In a word: Israel.

