



Episode 4.1

“I Can't Explain How I'm Here”: A Nova Survivor's Story

Oren Segal: Welcome to extremely, a podcast from the ADL Center on Extremism. I'm Oren Segal.

Jessica Reaves: And I'm Jessica Reaves.

Oren: In this episode, we're going to focus on the Nova Music Festival, which was attacked by Hamas on October 7, 2023. 1,200 people were killed on that day, and there remain over 120 hostages still in Gaza, unclear how many of those are alive. The effects of that day, the deadliest attack against the Jewish community since the Holocaust, has sparked a lot of activity around the world, including massive protests against Israel, record levels of antisemitism. The impact of that day is still reverberating everywhere around the world. Our featured guest, Chen Almog, was there. We will ask her to tell us about what she experienced, how she escaped, and a range of other questions that are as important today as they were on the day that this happened.

Oren: We will also explore the Nova Music Festival exhibition in New York City, which is designed to commemorate the festival and the lives lost. Lastly, we'll discuss the recent surge in demonstrations around the country, including ones that took place at the exhibit in New York and the increasingly radical nature of the messages and language at those protests. But first, Jessica, we should probably catch up.

Jessica: We need to address the tiny door in the room.

Oren: See, yeah, so beyond that, and can we put a hold on that, like, people can see us now, right? So before, where they would just hear our, you know, dulcet tones, talking about really important issues, now they could see the actual horror on our faces when we're talking about it.

Jessica: They can, they can. Either, you know, you're welcome or we're very sorry

Oren: Yeah, how do you feel? How do you feel about that? How does this change?

Jessica: Me, personally?

Oren: Yeah, how do you feel about being, like – people seeing your face when you're talking about these issues and not just hearing your voice?

Jessica: I mean, look, we do what we must for the cause of fighting extremism, Oren, and these are the –

Oren: What just happened, did somebody flip a switch and you became like is this Chat GPT Jessica?

Jessica: Yes. We do what we must. You know, I think it's going to take a little bit of time for me to get used to it. I suspect it will be the same for our listeners slash viewers. But, you know, I am looking forward to, you know, people getting familiar with your album selections and your frog who has become a real, important part of the COE family.

Oren: Yes, thank you. And we love your brick wall. And not that any of us are vain or care so much, but just for what it's worth, in real life, my face is not this long.

Oren: Our first effort at relaunching in our first episode, and I think people will really be interested in hearing the perspectives from our guests. You should know there's going to be some descriptions of what this individual went through that are not going to be easy to hear, but her bravery and ability to tell those stories are really important. And we're glad that she did. And we will see, as this develops, whether or not we're comfortable with our faces being on video, but we are going to try to continue to bring stories about what we're seeing, to bring guests to help explain some basic questions. So, thanks so much for joining us. You know, Jessica, please take it away to start us off.

Jessica: Chen, thank you so much for being here. I'm really grateful that you were able to join us and I'm really looking forward to having you share your story with our listeners. Can you tell us a little bit about why you decided to go to the music festival, what it kind of represented to you, and just tell us a little bit about how you ended up there?

Chen Almog: You know when you ask this question you know you can see how I'm smiling because the Nova festival was a festival for trance music and the whole point in trance music is to be free, to dance barefoot, to feel the ground to – to be nice to other people, to accept everybody and to celebrate life and happiness. That's the reason I went to the Nova Festival and, you know, I remember that the ticket was very expensive and when I step in and I took like a walk inside the festival, I told my friend the price was really worth it, yeah.

Oren: So, like many stories that we've heard, people showed up to have a celebration, to get closer with each other and the music, etc. And then obviously things took a terrible turn. Talk a little bit about sort of when you knew that this was not the event that you thought you were coming to attend.

Chen: Yes. It catch me during dancing, you know, 6 – 6:29 in the morning, the music shut - shut down, the music stop. And I just, I just started saw people doing like this, you know, looking to up to the sky. So, I took my head up, you know, I raised my head up and I just saw rain of rockets. I never saw something like that. And since we were young in Israel, the teachers in the school that if you under rocket attack and you're outside from a shelter, you need to lay on the ground and put your hands on the head. So, I didn't know what to do. But, you know, everyone was hysterical and just started yelling and crying. And it was a big chaos. No one knew what to do.

Jessica: And so, from that point, when you realized that something was wrong, kind of can you tell us a little bit about what you experienced in the next like minutes and even hours?

Chen: Of course. So, just like I said, it was a big, big rocket attack, and no one didn't realize that there are terrorists inside of Israel, because we didn't have a signal there, or Wi-Fi, or nothing. The phones – we didn't care about phones and the internet, but we started to realize that something bad happened in the south of Israel now. In my head, it was, oh, Gaza attack us again. This is the usual thing, I grew up like

this, it's not something special for me. And I decided to go to my car, even though I know it's wrong, I knew that I needed to drive to a shelter.

Chen: So, me and my friend decided to get out from the party, from the festival, to go to the parking lot, was a big mess there. You know, 3,000 people that tried to go from the parking lot, it's not something easy, it's not something that I think can happen. So, we stand in the traffic line, big, big one. Then I saw all the cars that stopped in front of me, I saw them leave their cars, like with the door open and everything, and just start running back, and I'm with my car window closed. I didn't realize what they're doing, so I just opened the window a little bit and I remember this one girl, she screamed, "They here, he was here, he was shouting, he was screaming!" and everything. And in a moment, it was like a second, I didn't realize what I'm going to do, but my friend just told me, she yelled at me, "Chen, go out right now!" and we just started running, and I really, I was so shocked, I was – I didn't know what's going on around me, you know, I just listened to order. It was terrifying because in the moment we start running, it was the first gunshot that I hear, it was the first bullet that I hear. I start running in the big field, and I saw people just fall, you know, like they got – they got shot, they got shot, and people screaming and crying and asking for help because they got shot in the leg or they got shot in the head, and no one can help them, and everyone just run, you know, for their life, and I freeze, I freeze in the middle of the – in the field. And you know, it's like ducks in shooting range, this is how I felt, really. Me and my friend, we ran together, we separate in that moment, we didn't make it together, and I don't know how much time I freeze, but after a few minutes, I decided I need to go hide.

Chen: The chaos is still around me, I still can hear the gunshot and everything, and I'm all by myself, and I still don't know what's going on, you know, around me. In the moment I get inside a bush, I was panicked for my life, I couldn't breathe, I couldn't watch what's going on because I heard the gunshot come really close to me, and I can tell you, in the minute I raise my head, it looks like when you see death in front of you. Like, but it was pure, pure evil of death, you know? I saw them, I saw them – I saw what they doing to this one man – I can't – I still can't say those specific words of what he did to him, but – I can't, you know, I can't take this picture from my mind. It's forever with me. After I decided to get out from the bush, I decided to get out because I heard the gunshot getting far. And I decided to go out because I heard someone, he screams, "Whoever you can, you need to go back to the cars, whoever you can!" So, I just, you know, look around, start running. I didn't know, you know, north, west. I didn't know nothing. And I saw one of my friends from my unit in the Army. I saw him and I called him, I yelled, I screamed, and he ran into me. And I don't know, you need to understand, I don't know what's happened to him until this point. I saw him last time in the dancing floor, in the dance area. He saw one thing and nothing else. He was like, "I need to go home no matter what."

Oren: It's like tunnel vision, yeah.

Chen: And I was so happy that I found him because he controlled the situation. He told me what to do. He managed me. This is what they teach me in Army when I need to do with someone in shock. Exactly. I was in combat. I know what to do. But I was the one in shock now. So, basically, we get to the cars area where I left my car and it was like a nightmare there. Really bodies – dead bodies everywhere, blood everywhere. The smell, you know, the smell of people that, you know, burn because they also blow cars and it was terrible, really. But even though all of this, I found my car and my car was with one scratch, one. Nothing happened. And I succeed to start a car and tell my friend, he get inside a driver's seat

because I couldn't, I couldn't drive at all. And he took us to the place where one officer stopped, blocked the road and he was shaking, you know, with this little gun, he was shaking.

Chen: And in that moment, I saw the tank, the one tank in the Nova, if you know the story. I saw him, I saw this tank just passing really fast. This is the only unit, the only, you know, people that can save me that I saw. It's the only, you know, IDF thing that I saw. And I'm soldiering the IDF in that moment. I was feeling like I was bound. Okay, really. Tal and I was – we – we passed through this, the tank passed through us and we took the like farm road that the officer told us to go. Like he was doing like this and shaking and we took this road and we didn't know what's going to wait for us in the end of the end. It was one car in front of us, like before of us, like ahead, and three guys run there outside and try to open the cars to get, you know, get themselves out. So, one guy came inside to our car and he also was panicked. Like he just started to, um, he catch like the – the – the backseat and in, in, you know, so was like a hard, and all his legs was scratch and blood. And I don't know what happened to this guy. He didn't speak. I asked him if he needs something. He didn't speak.

Chen: So, we're just passing bottle of water and, you know, wait. So, we get to the end of the road and it was like a T, you know, T, T road. And we didn't know where, which way to go now, but we open the maps because no Wi-Fi, no signal, we don't know, no GPS. And we just open, um, the maps in the phone and we know how to navigate with maps, we learn it in Army. So, I saw Kibbutz Be'eri to my right and to my left Kibbutz Re'im. And we know that Kibbutz Be'eri it's the way home. So, we decided to – to – to the way to right to kibbutz Be'eri. And I don't know how to call it, maybe it's touch of heaven, maybe it's a miracle, but in the moment my friend took the right, he pressed the radio in my car and it works. The first thing we heard, it was attacking Be'eri.

Jessica: Mm.

Chen: And he just, like, you know, drift. So, he took the other road and we, this is how I got home, basically, in that road.

Oren: I was gonna I was gonna ask you, you know, if there are any individuals who played a significant role in your ability to get out of there. And it sounds like, you know, there are several

Chen: I know, it's - it's something I can't explain. You know I still I don't know how to explain it because in my head I don't know how I'm - I'm here today, really. There are some religious people in Israel and someone told me, "Chen, you got so – uh – god – god um he – he – he protect you. God protects you." And I couldn't, you know, I couldn't accept it because what's the difference between the guy that killed next to me and I didn't. I don't know what's the difference between us, you know? So, I can't explain how I'm here exactly, I don't know

Jessica: That's such a hard thing to process, I imagine. And, you know, you want to celebrate survival and being alive, but you can't, you know, you're also very aware of the people who didn't you know. Yeah, yeah, totally. Have you been able to kind of process this? Does talking about it help or does it set you back? Or is it kind of like one step forward, two steps back?

Chen: My story is a little bit complicated because I told you before I was still a soldier during the Nova, during this October 7. I was one month before I need to finish my service and get out. It's supposed to be really special time and happy and everyone's so excited for their, you know, finishing graduate Army. And three days after October 7, I got back to my unit. I needed to go back. I got, like, after I had like this

feeling now, this is my duty now. Now everything that I learned, it's come to real, you know? So I came back really fast from the Nova because my unit needed me and I didn't have any time to process, you know? I was going back to my unit and just start fighting. And with every – I was in the artillery by the way – and every bomb that we shot, I was like, I didn't – I didn't want it to revenge, but you know, I saw what they did. And I was so angry and so mad. I don't believe in revenge and I don't believe that people need to be in war. And I – I hope one day we can have peace. But every bomb, every gun, every shot, I was – thank you. Thank you. Because what I saw, it's bad really. I – I'm not – I'm not wishing this for my – you know – biggest enemy ever for anyone.

Oren: And, and I'm sure this is, there's actually never going to be a good time to sort of answer this question as I imagine this continues to evolve. But how has your perspective on sort of humanity and life changed, right? I mean the even the stories that you were saying about feeling like – why – why was I able to get out and others – like these, these are stories you know that we hear from Holocaust survivors, right? And, you know, the sort of the guilt of getting through it, but you did, right? And that's important. And – but your perspective now on – how has it changed other than, you know, how has it changed and just in general in terms of your understanding of your, your place in the world? Which I know is a unfair and huge question.

Chen: It's a huge question, but a lot of my perspective change. It's funny. It's funny that you – you said guilt, you know, the guilt feeling is, it was really big part of my – of my every day, you know, I felt guilty all the time. I still feel guilty sometimes, but I'm, I'm starting getting better right now. But the first guilt that I – I got was why didn't I save more, more people? I told you, I save one, why couldn't I save more? And how I say it, you know, I told you that, um, I feel like that I'm not so special, I'm not different from the people that murder there, you know. Don't murder, they – they slaughtered, they slaughtered. This is the word and this is how people need to call it. I'm sorry, it's difficult to think about it. And yeah, my – I think my – how we call it, me trusting people, it's – it's different now.

Oren: Mm -hmm.

Chen: And I always felt like I'm so safe in Israel and we have the strongest Army and the strongest, you know, security and everything, and it's not, you know, it's not because who thought that something like this could happen after Holocaust, right? No, there are people really mean, mean in this world. And I'm not believing anymore that there are still people in Gaza that don't want to – they don't want to – they don't want me to be dead. This is how I feel today. And I didn't feel like this before October 7, but I saw things that I just can't, you know, I can't refuse them. And I'm seeing – I'm avoiding news and stuff and protest and just things that people sent me, but I see how people, like, deny what's going on and - and say things that I'm telling myself, like how these people can say those lies? I've been there. I've been there. I saw, I saw and this is what exactly my grand grandma told me she was in Auschwitz and it's the same. It's the same. I don't want to compare, really, I never wanted to compare, but it's really, really similar. Really.

Chen: And the idea of, you know, some, some group they want to end another race, like to delete them. How it's, you know, we are in 2024. What's going on? I'm talking with you now with my, you know, my MacBook. 100 years ago, they didn't have cell phones. How this is going to happen?

Oren: Yeah.

Chen: Unbelievable, I don't know. You know what's not similar to the Holocaust? In the Holocaust, we don't have a lot of recordings of the torture that they needed to – to been through. And now they record everything, everyone recording everything, including Israel. Yeah, everyone. And I think this is the main thing that bothered me in the war.

Jessica: I think, you know, when you've come up close, like you have, to evil, and you've seen what people are capable of, being able to recalibrate and kind of be in the world again, I imagine it just changes everything. It just changes the way you see the world, it changes the way you see your surroundings. What would it take for you to feel safe again, do you think?

Chen: I think I always, you know, look – look around, look –look behind my – my shoulder. I think I'll never, you know, get off the PTSD things that happened to me after. I think it will take a lot of time. I hope I live full life until 120. I – I hope one day I can sit back, you know, when I'm old and be happy and tell myself, thank – thank – thank you world for everything you gave to me because life is worth it and I know it now. And after October seven in the first few months, I – I thought of myself that life isn't worth and it is, it's a big gift really, and I'm crying and I'm saying it because everyone needs to know it and no one needs to take another person life for any – for any reason, you know, for any reason.

Oren: You know, I think it's – for our audience, it's important to hear your perspective. Not to necessarily combat all those who deny that it happened, but it helps. You know, we need to have on record the stories of the people who – who made it through and what they saw. But I also think a lot of people who are attracted to, unfortunately, the work that we do of combating violence and extremism and antisemitism are curious about ways that they can cope with, you know, the trauma. And, you know, I'm not suggesting that all of a sudden, you're a psychologist and a trauma expert. But you know, maybe – maybe you are to some degree. Is there something that you could talk about? Like, what – what you've used? What you've relied on? Or is it people to help you get through? Because I think that also provides people with some hope that they can also seek those things out.

Chen: I have really good friends. Actually, I have really good friends from America, from the U .S. I met them in a birthright, and a few of them was really good friends for me this, you know, whole time. And I think what people, you know, with trauma you know, not to push the person that stand in front of you. Because if you push them, you know, “tell me what happened,” the first thing that people want to know is how it meant you, like how it happened to you and I know it's from curious and people just want to know it from not from bad reason, from innocent reason. And I think the first thing is not to push, and if this person will want to say and tell you story – his story, he will. It happened to me a lot of times that I meet a new person and we just start talking and just like a second I feel comfortable share with him just from the energy he gives me, from the energy that is here with me. W now together, we're sitting here and everything is okay. This is what helps me the most, and be with my family, you know, in warm area, not in combat, also.

Oren: No, I think that's helpful.

Jessica: I think one of the things we've seen repeatedly and, you know, over the course of all of this is this crazy misrepresentation, as you said, of somebody's lived experience. We've seen these people denying what you saw and heard and felt on that day. What do you want people to know? What do you want to say, maybe, to the people who are out there denying things or out there just asking questions? And what do you want them to know? What do you want them to go away with?

Chen: I want them to go away with that I think there are always two sides of the coin, okay? I think there are always bad people and good people. Okay, this is the nature, I get it. But you just need to imagine – I don't know how to explain you know. It's – it's a hard question because it's hard for me to tell – to explain to people that deny slaughtering people. I want them to go home with my lips – say that I was there. Read my lips. I was there. I felt it. I saw it. I cried there. I saw my worst ever nightmare that anyone can – can see in his life. And I'm still here. And I'm still here. And this is how the Israel is, and this is how the Jewish people was always. So, we are here and we still here. And for me I don't care if people want to deny. I know what's true I know what's the truth of me, you know, this is what matter.

Oren: Yeah. Yeah, you know, one of the one of the things that was difficult for us, I'll say for me to see here in – in America afterwards, where there are all these missing posters of not missing, but hostage posters, right, “bring them back”, and including, you know, kids. And you had people who were ripping them down, because they felt that somehow these were fake, right? And to me, I thought this was an American phenomenon, right? When in America, you have school shootings that happen all the time, terrible mass shootings. And immediately, you have conspiracy theorists who deny it, right, whether it's in Sandy Hook, or – and – and to me, the – the denial of Jewish suffering, to me felt like, all right, is this just an extension of people believe – they would rather believe in a conspiracy. But then it's like you look online, and the narratives and images and the creations there. And it was immediate, they didn't wait, it was immediate to deny. Which for me is why it's important to have, like the exhibition, right, the music festival exhibition. Which is reminding people, not only did it happen, but here's what it was intended to be, the positivity, the bringing people together, right? And you can't deny all of that. And yet we saw in New York, and you may be aware of this as people protesting that. People saying that, you know, “Long live October 7”, in New York City, by the way, I'm sure, you know there's a couple Jews in New York, right?

Oren: I mean, I think they knew, they knew who they were, you know, what their audience was. And again, like, this is the work that we do is trying to figure out how do we, you know, fight, you know, lies with truth? How do you hold people accountable? But Jessica and I have a luxury in a sense of, you know, we weren't also there. I will tell you, obviously, you know, the memories are emotional, like, if I went through something, and somebody denied it to that level, I wouldn't have nearly the amount of patience and the mindfulness that I'm seeing in you and other people who are telling their story.

Chen: Yes, I think, you know, there's a lot of Nova survivors that going in the world and telling the story from their eyes. And I think all of us doing it because we know how important it is to speak, you know, that people can hear from first, you know, first ear, you know, it's from someone that been there. And I know how important it is. So, this is why I decided to do it. And I'm going to keep doing it, you know, every – every time every opportunity I'll have, I'll do it. And I keep sharing my story and maybe, maybe it will change one – one man, one woman, maybe. And this is how I'm doing my duty now, I think.

Jessica: We're so grateful that you are here with us and that you were kind enough to share your experience with us and our listeners. And I know that it will have a huge impact. So please – please know that and be confident that, you know, these conversations really, they make a huge difference. So, thank you.

Chen: Thank you very much.

Oren: Yeah, Chen, thank you so much for – for making the time to join us. You know, we know it's not easy and.

Chen: Yeah, it's late in Israel now you can see how the light changed.

Oren: It's not easy. It's late and you still did it, right? You still did it. So – so thank you so much. We really appreciate your time

Jessica: Yeah, and please take good care of yourself.

Chen: I will. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Oren: Well, I appreciate her stopping by. That was, you know, intense at times, obviously, you know, people are still going through a lot of feelings who have had to survive that. But you know, like I – like I said to her, I really think it's important for people to hear these stories.

Chen: Yeah, I mean incredibly powerful and incredibly important for everyone to hear.

Oren: So, Jessica, why the hell is what is happening, happening? And what can we do to not only educate people about it, but maybe even to offer solutions. So, appreciate being on this ride with you, Jessica.

Jessica: Thanks, Oren. Same, same.

Oren: Why don't we get to some of the stuff that has been keeping us busy since we wrapped up season three and now that we're relaunching season four?

Jessica: Yeah, I thought you were going to say keeping us up at night, which is also true in many cases. Yeah, so welcome to season four, episode one. We probably should have said that at the very top of the episode, but here we are. A new season, a new look, and yeah, a new set of horrors to discuss. On that note, we just published a piece relatively recently, our dis- and misinformation analyst published a piece about Suno, which is a GAI, so a generative AI music creation, like song and album creation program slash platform. And there are a couple of these platforms, and unsurprisingly, probably for our listeners, Suno is now being, let's say, harnessed by extremists and bigots to create some really hateful music. You know, you can feed these prompts into Suno. I thought that perhaps we should create a Suno song for this podcast. You rightly pointed out that maybe we didn't want to be giving them just free publicity.

Oren: I mean, we're talking about them. But – but I think, you know, for the audience, it's not just one platform, you know, anybody who's been using some of these tools is like, all you have to do is say, I want a song about Jessica Reaves, and her dog. And I want it to be country music. And I want it to be about how they fell in love or something like that.

Jessica: Oh, that's –

Oren: No, no, this is an example. And what it'll do is spit out, like, an almost like a polished pop song, right? Because it's using history of music to – some history of music in order to relay it. And what is actually pop music other than a very formulaic thing anyway. So, it sounds like – like believable in some cases, what you would hear on the radio. So of course, to your point, what people are doing is giving it very racist and antisemitic and hateful and extremist prompts. So, it's creating this music, right?

Jessica: Well, and to be fair, you know, these programs and platforms do have something in the way of – they have some guardrails set up, so these people are actually being – who are going into abuse the

platform, are actually being pretty smart about their approach, well, smart in quotation marks, in that they are using coded language. One of the examples that our panelists pointed out was that someone went in and gave it a prompt around white power, but phrased white power as – or framed white power as a new green form of energy. So, the program spat out this song about, like, this great new thing called white power, which was going to save the planet. So, it was actually, I mean, I don't, we don't like to give extremists, you know, props, but I mean, they're using some clever ways to get around what are actually not terrible restrictions set up by the platforms. Unfortunately, you know, we see this happen again and again with dog whistles and carefully phrased sort of alternative language. But in any event, Suno is now being sued along with another GAI music platform for copyright violation. So, we saw that, saw that coming. And they're being asked to pay something like \$150,000 per song generated, because the argument is they're just taking, as you said, from the library of past music.

Oren: I mean, not to sound like an old person, but you know, I kind of am. But like, if you told me 20 years ago that, you know, you could get a tool that will enable, like Frank Sinatra's voice to sing like, you know, Notorious B.I.G. song, I'd be like, wow. But then how that was gonna be somehow also an application of some sort that, you know, trolls and bad actors and extremists would use too, because of course, it's available to anybody, I'd be like, oh, all right. Like that's a world that'll be interesting to live in. And guess what? We're here.

Jessica: We sure are. We sure are.

Oren: So, yeah, you should check out our website, we'll put it in any show notes that we have as well, link to this because it's not just about this one platform or this one strategy, but it's really a reminder of the need as new technologies developed at a very early stage for people to sort of anticipate how it might be exploited and, you know, and put in some, as you said, guardrails against that.

Jessica: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And, you know, we want to educate platforms too, like those who are operating in good faith, we want to remind them, hey, there are ways to circumvent the good faith, you know, restrictions that you've put in place. And, you know, we just think about this all the time. And I do think that there are platforms that just come up and they don't necessarily give the same attention that we do to – well, hopefully, no one is giving the same amount of attention to extremism as we are. But we're here to help.

Oren: I think so.

Jessica: You know, some people who are not here to help, Oren? Yeah, that's my segue

Oren: Do tell.

Jessica: Segue of the day.

Oren: So not on the nose. But who is here to help?

Jessica: No, they're not here to help, is the anti-Israel and 100% antisemitic protesters of – many in New York City – who targeted the exhibition around the Nova Music Festival last month, who targeted the Brooklyn Museum. This group in particular, within Our Lifetime, are escalating these tactics in a way that is reflective of the trends that we're seeing around the country. At this point, I think we can all agree that nothing that is happening on that front is either pro -Palestinian or pro -peace. It's just antisemitism. And it's alarming to see, but I want to know sort of what you're thinking about.

Oren: Yeah, so, you know, I still think that, you know, post sort of campus encampments, although some of that stuff is still going on, there's an entire summer here where we're seeing other activities related to the conflict overseas. And I feel like more hardcore people are sort of involved in this, not – not all of them believe every last thing that we're hearing. I don't think anybody who engages in a protest, by the way, is antisemitic in any way. But there are certain things that we are seeing at protests that are really raising red flags to me. The way that they did at other protests we have seen from other groups and movements in previous years. So increasingly, like Hamas, Hezbollah, PFLP flags showing up at these events, right, one sign in front of the Nova exhibit in New York on June 10th said, basically, Zionists are not humans, right? So, dehumanizing their targets. Another said, long live October 7th, right? So, it's now like the celebration of a massacre. It's the glorification and legitimization or efforts to have terrorist organizations. In California, we've seen three arsons in and around the University of Berkeley, one targeting a cop car, one, I think a hall, I don't know if it was a student hall, another construction site, but it was claimed by a group as retribution for what campuses were doing in terms of the anti-Israel protests, and because of, you know, the opposition to Israel. And then just to keep it going, right, you have somebody on the train in New York City saying, you know, "Raise your hand if you're a Zionist," you know, kind of trying to single people out. You had people who, you mentioned the Brooklyn Museum, the head of the Board of Directors is targeted with a red triangle, you know, spray painted, calling them a white supremacist Zionist. Again, this is at people's homes. Yeah, we know where this ends up, when the rhetoric of dehumanization and support for terror groups becomes the norm. When people are willing to protest an exhibit in honor of, like, in commemoration of the lives of people who are massacred, right? Like this is not normal. No, and we have a whole summer filled with what I anticipate is going to be more of this. And like, I'm not here to just, like express random outrage, like I'm really concerned about where this goes, because this is not a controlled environment.

Jessica: Right, right. Yeah, and I just, I just truly believe that a lot of people have lost the thread. Like they have just 100% lost sight of what they may have originally been protesting for or against and are now just being sucked into this sort of vortex that is just pure vitriol and like hate and lies. And I – it's hard for me to square kind of, like, this idea that people claim to be protesting on behalf of the Palestinian civilian population, but they're out there, as you said, waving flags of a terrorist organization. It doesn't compute for me. Just feel like we've, we've reached a point of like disconnect where I think, you know, and we saw this sometime – we saw this with the encampments. We saw, you know, reporters asking people, "Why are you here? What do you want to achieve here? What are you here to protest?" And occasionally there would just be these responses that were sort of stumbling and clearly people are not even aware of the primary issues at stake. And I wonder if this like, and again, I'm not excusing or like making excuses for people who are making very, very bad decisions and who are expressing vile and hateful rhetoric. I'm just saying like, I think there's a mob mentality here that you see in all extremist movements, honestly. I think we can connect this back to some of the other movements that we've covered, some of the other, you know, like extreme iterations of belief systems. People like to belong to something. They like to feel like they're part of something bigger than themselves. And I just think it's such a dangerous sort of like alchemy there where I think people can get sucked into this and it's just, it's incredibly dangerous.

Oren: Yeah, and you know, I definitely think there's people who are sort of testing the waters out, may not fully know what's going on or naive or impressionable and all that. And you know, I'm concerned about that, right? That that's part of like, a group that sort of normalizes some of this stuff that that is not helpful. At this point, though, I'm really concerned about those who like, it's no real way around the

fact that they kind of know what they're doing. So, for example, in New York, there was like, as part of one of the flags recently, there was the Houthis, right, which we've talked about in a previous episode, the flag says, it reads, "God is great, death to the USA, death to Israel, curse the Jews, victory to Islam." Okay, like – I – that's like, if it's telling you exactly, you know, you don't have to guess what's the context here?

Jessica: Yeah, right. Yeah. And again, I'm not suggesting that people are just like these innocent lambs who are being led to the slaughter. I just mean that I have sincere doubts about people's basic understanding of like geopolitics and like world history. When I look at these people who are protesting I think like yeah, I don't want to just describe, you know idiocy to everybody but I you know, I think we have a failure of education, I think, and a failure of empathy and a failure of just sort of basic humanity on display at all of these protests, as far as I can tell

Oren: Certainly, in many of them and it's really unnecessary because I think there's a lot of people that have a lot of, you know, legitimate concerns about what is happening. And we've said it before, you can care, and I certainly do know a lot of people both in ADL and - and just around my life that care deeply about Palestinian people's right to self-determination and that can exist at the same time that we condemn the dehumanization of Israelis and Jews right at these protests. And - and that's what our job is, and those two things can exist at the same time, and people who tell you that they don't are full of s***, and the reason I said that is I want to see if we're actually going to bleep it or not.

Jessica: Just a test, a small test. Yeah, I think there are ways we can all criticize many decisions made by governments, many governments as a whole, without it descending into attacking people as a group, as a whole, and that goes for all sides here.

Oren: Yeah. I'm glad you brought the good news. You raised these two topics.

Jessica: Always here to spread some sunshine. So, Oren, it's that time again where I ask you, what's keeping you afloat? What's your life raft during this incredibly challenging time?

Oren: Okay, so I promise that, you know, I'm not gonna just say key lime pie every time. So I will say, one of the ways that I find a little time away from, you know, hate, violence and extremism. I'm a huge New York Knicks fan. And for all the those that don't care, okay, for all those that do, you're all probably very excited with me that the Knicks are putting together a team bringing in a whole bunch of people, re-signing and their commitment to winning a championship that has never existed in my lifetime. For me, if the Knicks win a championship, I literally will start walking and never stop. And you'll never hear from me again. So if for no other reason, folks, to root for the Knicks, I will just –

Jessica: Which direction are you walking? Into the water or the other way?

Oren: Don't worry about it. Bottom line is the potential of what can be kind of like America. It's not always what it is, but it's the potential what it can be. I find that also in our work sometimes, but also in my beloved New York Knicks, that is keeping me afloat during these difficult times. How about you?

Jessica: We are also a big basketball household, but I will say that for me personally, it's been very, well, I think for most of the country, it's been incredibly hot. I have now identified about 10 different popsicles slash ice cream things that I really enjoy. And yesterday I returned home with all 10. So that is the

entirety of our freezer at this point. And it is all I'm eating pretty much. So yes, send key lime pies and ice cream.

Oren: It may sound like nothing, but this could be everything.