

While in New York this past week for Rabbinical Assembly meetings, I had the privilege of hearing my colleague, Rabbi Phil Scheim, speak about a member of his congregation in Toronto, a 97-year old survivor of Nazi Germany. One of this gentleman's strongest memories of the Holocaust was of Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass that we commemorated just yesterday, where he witnessed German soldiers brazenly toss Torah scrolls out the window of a high apartment building only to be trampled and burned on the street below. Many years later, long settled in a new country across the ocean, this man had the honor of having a Torah at his beloved synagogue, Beth David, dedicated in his name. In his words that special day he said, "This Torah at least makes up for one of those that was destroyed so long ago."

The month of November is a poignant and important one on the Jewish calendar. This past week, November 9th commemorated that terrible Kristallnacht night in 1938, often seen as the unofficial start of Hitler's reign of terror. And both November 2nd and 29th are essential dates in the story of the State of Israel, the former acknowledging the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration issued by Britain announcing support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" and the latter marking the United Nations vote for partition of Palestine. While I could never suggest that the blessings of modern Israel can in any way compensate for the astounding loss of life and horrific atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis, it is probably true that the birth of the Jewish State in 1948 was hastened by the events of the Holocaust. Particularly in this momentous year, the 100th anniversary of Balfour and the 70th of the Partition Plan resolution, we celebrate the fact that Jewish life both here and in Israel is so strong and vibrant – our ultimate revenge against Hitler's terrible plan.

This Shabbat we also commemorate Veteran's Day, honoring the men and women who have so bravely served our country, the State of Israel, and armed forces around the world. As is our custom, veterans will participate in various parts of our worship which will include additions chosen specifically for this occasion and are invited to come to synagogue decorated in uniform. As we say in our special Veteran's Day Prayer before the Ark: "The many sacrifices [you] have made do not go unnoticed. We are grateful for [your] hard work and for [your] heroism."

There is nothing that can ever make up for the destruction of lives or sacred books or entire communities that are no more. And our greatest wish, as always, is for peace – a time when soldiers will at last be able to rest and civilians live without fear. Yet, still, perhaps the greatest antidote to violence and hatred is human courage and decency – our commitment to advancing and protecting the good and right values that we hold dear. On this weekend filled with so much memory we honor the veterans who risked their lives to uphold safety and democracy and the survivors who dedicated their souls to preserving Jewish life in a world where it could so easily have vanished.

Zichronam livracha – May the memories of our departed veterans and victims of Nazi Germany always be for a blessing.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Annie Tucker

