

Amiad Yisrael

The Eternal People

I.

First of all, I want to begin by acknowledging Steve and Barbara's incredibly touching gesture to mark their fortieth anniversary- thirty nine of them have been here- by sponsoring kiddush this morning. Literally, and figuratively, you have journeyed together with us, as Barbara and Steve told me this week about their very first Yom Kippur at the Center, where they were seated towards the very back of the Stein auditorium, to the second row. Not bad at all.

Steve and Barbara have made their lives here, celebrated their tenth anniversary with Steve's first maftir- first of many, as it would turn out- raised their children here, and celebrated Chaim's Bar Mitzvah, and then Josh's. They've served the shul in so many different ways: the board, the kiddush, shul finances, and it's both fitting and extremely touching that you've chosen to mark the occasion by spending it together with us.

As you have been such a blessing to this congregation, our bracha in turn to you is that you have so many years of health and happiness in the future, with incredible nachat from one another, from Chaim and Shelli and your wonderful grandchildren Yoni and Chani (whom Barbara, ever the teacher, always makes sure say thank you for the lollipop) and Josh.

II.

To state the obvious, it has been a terribly difficult week in Israel, and by extension, for the entire Jewish people. On the final night of Chanukah, as the menorah burned the brightest, terrible darkness was cast over the Holy Land, as a vicious terrorist sprayed machine gun fire at a bus stop, wounding seven, and taking the life, as we know, of a baby, who would live only three days, on Wednesday evening.

Just over a mile to the South of the first attack, on Thursday morning, a copycat attack, at the bus stop in Givat Assaf. Two more were taken from us- Yovel Mor Yosef, and Yosef Kohen. Another soldier, an American oleh from Silver Spring, who worked as a camp counselor at Camp Stone, Netanel Felder, currently fights for his life.

Yet again, the very will of the Jewish people to live in our ancestral homeland is being tested. The brunt of the battle, of course, is borne by those in the proud uniform of Tzahal, the Israel Defense Forces, and all those who live within the boundaries of the land of Israel. And yet, we too, must do our share.

This week, we read of one of the finest moments in the history of our people. Yehuda, who had failed so utterly and completely to protect his younger brother Yosef, and instead, had been the very one to suggest his sale, is once again at a crossroads. He has promised his father, Yaakov, a man laden by immense pain and suffering from the loss of his beloved Rachel and the disappearance of Yosef, that nothing will happen to Binyamin. And yet, Binyamin now stands to be taken captive, to be enslaved.

Yehuda does not miss his opportunity for redemption. He offers himself in place of Binyamin, noting, **כי עבדך ערב את הנער**, I am the guarantor, I am the **ערב**, I must be a slave, and Binyamin must go home, **כי איך אעלה אל אבי והנער איננו אתי פן אראה ברע**, for how can I ascend to my father, and the young man is not with me, lest I see the pain and suffering that shall befall my father. It was one thing for Yehuda to talk the talk, but now, he has, when it mattered most, walked the walk.

Herein we find the very origin of one of the foundational concepts of our faith- arvut, mutual responsibility, **ערבות**. We are all deeply responsible for one another. We rejoice in each other's triumphs and celebrations; we share in each other's disappointments and sorrow. **כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה**.

It was this very idea which Yehuda was introducing, and it is this simple, yet profound, notion which guides us to this very day. If Yehuda served as the guarantor for Binyamin, his brother, we must stand today and declare that we are the guarantors of

Ezra Binyamin, the region in Israel called Binyamin, which is where both terror attacks occurred this week. We shall embrace Binyamin, and all those who dwell there.

Geographic distance can be no boundary.

The fact that we, in all likelihood, did not know the victims personally, matters not.

That there have been many attacks before, and, it would not appear that peace is on the immediate horizon, makes no difference altogether.

We stand shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters in Israel, and with the Jewish people in all of the lands of our Diaspora, in this difficult hour.

Those who seek our destruction will find, as the ancient Egyptians, about whom we read this morning, discovered, that all of their afflictions will only lead to our thriving further, **וכאשר יענו אותנו כן ירבה וכן יפרוץ**.

The flame of a nation that sanctifies life will never be extinguished by a culture of death and darkness.

In Heaven, the purest of souls illuminates, welcomed into the ranks of the martyrs who span across the generations and the globe itself.

Their collective sacrifice is the ultimate testament to the unbroken will of an indomitable people, and, who whisper together, comforting the youngest amongst them, and all of us, as they whisper **Amiad Yisrael, Amiad Yisrael, Amiad Yisrael**, my nation, the People of Israel, are forever.