Close to 20 years ago, I lived and worked in downtown Jerusalem. This was the time of the second intifada, the violent Palestinian uprising of years 2000-2001. It was a time of frequent terrorist attacks by suicide bombers, attacks carried out in busy streets, in cafes and on buses. Over time, together with everyone else, I learned the routine we all followed after an explosion: Check in with your loved ones, let them know you are ok, ask if they are ok, check on anyone you know that could have been in that area or on that bus and then move on, do the next thing you were planning to do, as if nothing had happened.

At the time, some people called that being accustomed to reality, some people called it resilience, and some called it numbness. I, too, tried to respond this way. I really wanted to be able to move on with my life as if nothing had happened. I didn't want my experiences of trauma to get in the way of the very full and wonderful life I was living in Jerusalem. But I was not always capable of responding so stoically.

One day, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a crowd very close to my downtown office. Close enough for me to hear the explosion, the sirens and everything that followed. I was supposed to go to a meeting of my fellowship of rabbinical students but I had to wait until the streets were cleared again for people and traffic. This particular meeting was of a very close group of friends and teachers who met monthly to study Torah and to discuss our spiritual and rabbinic journeys.

My first reaction was to assume that the meeting would be cancelled. I called my mentor, Rabbi David Lazar, but he asked me - why we would cancel the class? In tears I responded, because there was a bombing.
He said to me, because of the bombing it is even more important that we gather to study!
I got very angry at him and explained, through my tears, that in my experience after a bombing the world stops -- you cannot simply go on as usual.
But my teacher would not relent.
He insisted I come to the class, and that he would not allow me to be immobilized by mourning and fear.
So, reluctantly, I went.

However, at the meeting we did not study what was originally planned. When we sat down to learn, I was so upset that my colleagues did not respond with the same intense sadness and fear that I was feeling, that I challenged them on this, angrily. They listened to me and they embraced me, they held me while I cried. They asked me to reflect on my life, to look at the strength I had found within me in the past, and to notice that I had not let fear define me. They embraced me with love, and together we moved on to study Torah.

Last October, when we heard the news of the shooting in the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, we of the North-American Jewish community knew that something had changed for us. Eleven people were killed while in shul at shabbat services. This was the deadliest anti semitic incident in the US. Unfortunately this was not to be a unique incident and it happens in the context of many more acts of antisemitism, including the shooting in the synagogue in Poway, California last April and many incidents of vandalism on jewishly identified property, the most recent being the shattering of a Brooklyn synagogue’s windows just last week during Rosh Hashanah.

We also know that this is not happening in a vacuum. These are hardly the first examples of this kind of violence, and Jews are hardly the only targets. This is part of a terrible spate of violent hate crimes over recent years by white supremacists, in houses of worship, in clubs and in many other places.
There are too many to name by now, but I will recall two: the murder of nine African Americans by a white supremacist at a Charleston church in 2015 and the mass shooting at Pulse, a gay nightclub, in 2016, in which 49 people were killed. Sadly, this kind of violence is not new, but now it has directly impacted Jewish sacred space, and Jewish communities engaged in prayer. Now that the pain of this violence has been brought close to home we must ask - How are we responding?

How do we work to root out hate and terror so that it does not fester in the hearts of the people of our country? How do we maintain the feeling of safety within our communities?

The Shabbat after the Tree of Life shooting, the organized Jewish community responded by showing up. The American Jewish Committee called for a Show Up Shabbat, and millions of people of all faiths rallied around AJC’s #ShowUpForShabbat initiative, packing synagogues in what became the largest-ever expression of solidarity with the American Jewish community.

Our Sanctuary was filled, like it is tonight at for Kol Nidre and we prayed and sang and cried together. Most importantly we committed ourselves to moving forward without letting fear define us, but instead putting love and Torah at the center as our guide.

That is easier said than done. We can sing Olam Hesed Yibane, we will build this world from love, again and again but the fear is real and it expresses itself differently for different people. In conversations at TBZ and with many of you, I hear people’s fears: fear of coming to shul, fear of this new reality, fear of what it means to be Jewish in this time and place. Fear not just as Jews, but as citizens of this world, and specifically of this country. The world feels very scary.

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We have spent many hours in meetings at TBZ, talking about balancing our security measures with our core values of being welcoming, inclusive and open to all. These conversations are manifestations of the large question that must be addressed - how do we move forward in this new reality? How do we not let fear define us and how do we summon love, how do we summon hesed, how do we summon hope to be our guide?

This sort of capacity is often addressed in the field of psychology. Some of you might know about the psychotherapy Internal Family Systems Model or as it is sometimes called Parts Work.

Here is an oversimplified introduction to the principles of this theory:
1) It is the nature of the mind to be subdivided into subpersonalities or parts.
2) Each part intends to contribute something positive to the individual.
3) No part is inherently or intentionally bad.
4) The goal of therapy is not to eliminate the negative parts, but to help those parts act in less extreme ways and to not take over the entire person.¹

Personally, this approach has been very helpful to me. As my therapist says, the goal is to learn to speak for the part rather than from the part and not let my emotions, my anger, my sadness, my fear, my anxiety, those parts that can easily bring me down, define me or take over my identity. Rather I am called to respond with compassion to those parts of myself, to love and listen to them so I can be my better self.

In their book “Leadership on the Line, Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading”, Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky introduce the notion of “Sacred Heart”.

¹ With thanks to Rabbi David Lerner for summarizing this so eloquently. https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/how-our-parts-make-us-whole/
In their analysis of leadership they speak about how cynicism, arrogance and callousness can mistakenly and dangerously define leaders. They write the following, which I think could speak to all of us at different times of our lives, both individually and as a group: “The most difficult work of leadership involves learning to experience distress without numbing yourself. The virtue of a sacred heart lies in the courage to maintain your innocence and wonder, your doubt and curiosity, and your compassion and love, even through your darkest, most difficult moments… In one moment you may experience total despair, but in the next, compassion and forgiveness. You may even experience such vicissitudes in the same moment and hold those inconsistent feelings in tension with one another”.2

Rabbi Sharon Cohen-Anisfeld, my dear teacher and friend, told me she learned from our friend Rabbi Sue Fendrick to use the image of driving a car and to ask who the driver is, which are the emotions and values that drive us through life. When fear, anxiety and despair appear in our lives, we can acknowledge their presence, and even our inability to make them “go away”, but we can also ask them to sit in the back seat, rather than drive the car. Can we do that as a community? Can we recognize the feelings of anguish, hopelessness and despair, that the current realities of our world and our country might evoke, and together, can we all move them to the back seat and invite Hesed, love, compassion, and loving-kindness to be the driver?

We find in the Talmud this rather challenging teaching:

אמר רבא ואייתמה רב חסדא
אמר ראה אדם שסריו עליイ
יפשפש במעשו

Rava, and some say Rav Ḥisda, said:
If a person sees that suffering has befallen them,

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2 Leadership on the Line, Staying alive through the dangers, Ronald Heifetz & Marty Linsky, pages 227, 228.
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they should examine their actions\textsuperscript{3}.

This text is generally understood as claiming that suffering comes about as punishment for one’s transgressions. \textit{Lefashfesh Be- Ma’asim} then means to examine your actions so that you understand why whatever happened, happened.

For many years, I have read this text differently. I suggest that instead of reading it in the past tense- asking us to check what we had done wrong to bring about this suffering, we should read it in the future tense- \textit{Lefashfesh Be- Ma’asim} - meaning to check my actions now- what do I need to change from now on.

How does this experience shape my future decisions about how I live my life?
How do my own experiences of life, of suffering, of fear or loss, my experience of hurt actually help me shape my priorities from this point onwards, how do they shape my values and my journey?

These are the questions I invite you to ask.
These are the underlying questions when I say that we are in search for a response to living in times where anti semitic acts are growing, in times when hatred, injustice and hopelessness seem to be surrounding us.
How do we not let fear or anger or anxiety or skepticism, define us and how do we summon love and hesed,
how do we summon hope to be our guidance.

The Italian Jewish Holocaust Survivor Primo Levi, writes a heart-wrenching account of his experiences in Auschwitz in his book “Survival in Auschwitz”. Auschwitz was abandoned by the German SS guards on January 18, 1945 which was ten days before Soviet troops arrived to rescue the prisoners. Primo Levi, who was a prisoner at the Monowitz labor camp in the Auschwitz complex. gives a detailed description of what

\textsuperscript{3} Babylonian Talmud, Tractate of Brahot 5a
happened during those ten days that the prisoners were on their own, without the Germans to keep order and feed them.

In one scene, Levi describes a moment in which three men, including him, repair a window and a stove, which were vital for their survival as they were about to freeze to death. He writes: “When the broken window was repaired and the stove began again to spread its heat, something seemed to relax everyone, and at that moment Towarowsky proposed to the others that each of them offer a slice of bread to us three who had been working. And so it was agreed. Only a day before, a similar event would have been inconceivable. The Law of the Lager [the camp] said: ‘eat your own bread, and if you can, that of your neighbour’, and left no room for gratitude. It really meant that the Lager was dead. It was the first human gesture that occurred among us. I believe that, that moment can be dated as the beginning of the change by which we who had not died slowly changed from Haftlinge [prisoners] to men again”

Primo Levi identifies the moment of liberation, of the transition from prisoners to free people again, as the moment when they are able to share bread. Humanity is possible again, when people are guided by human generosity. What made them human, what made them free, was their rediscovered capacity to respond with Hesed, with love and generosity to the most terrible reality that humans can possibly experience.

They were able to summon love, to summon hesed and that brought about the transformation of their lives.

The Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld in his essay on the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, published in the New York Times in January 2005, speaks of his experience as a secular Israeli and Holocaust survivor. In speaking of his experience he quotes the words of a doctor from a religious background, who survived the Holocausts and who sailed to Israel with him in June 1946. Appelfeld

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4 Survival of Auschwitz, Primo Levi, page 160

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writes: “[He, the doctor] told us: We didn’t see God when we expected him, so we have no choice but to do what he was supposed to do: we will protect the weak, we will love, we will comfort. From now on, the responsibility is all ours.”

These powerful words must be heard in dialogue with the Talmudic teaching from the Tractate of Sotah that I shared on the first day of Rosh Hashanah: the talmudic text teaches us that the way we walk in God’s path is by clothing the naked, visiting the sick, comforting the mourner and burying the dead. This doctor, whom Appelfeld quotes, experiencing God’s absence, ends up responding in exactly the way our tradition teaches to be in relationship with God: by caring for others, by offering love to the world, by building a world with love.

For many of us, fear, anxiety, disappointment and desperation are familiar feelings these days. A member of the community recently wrote on facebook about the experience of coming to Shul, to a new reality for American Jews -- a shul with a guard -- and the struggle to stay positive. I myself have experienced these feelings as I read the news, as I try to understand how it is possible that so much injustice, hatred, and racism are at the forefront of our reality in this country.

Fear is constantly being weaponized by leaders who want us to respond and act in the world based on our fears.

It serves them well, but it definitely does not serve us well, it does not serve our humanity.

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6 Sotah 14a

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Fear can not be the driver of our life -- instead, we need to lead with hesed, love, generosity, compassion, resilience and hope. We must continue to ask ourselves, again and again, how not to let fear define us and how to summon love, how to summon hesed, how to summon hope to be our guiding beacon.

I will finish this on a personal note.
My mother was 48 years old when she was killed in an antisemitic terrorist attack in Argentina, the deadliest such attack outside of Israel since the holocaust. My older sister Marianella, who celebrated her 48th birthday last April made a commitment that from now on, she will live for two. Have fun for two, volunteer and give love to the world for two. She has decided to live for our mother the part of her life that was cut short. My sister decided that instead of letting her pain, our deep pain, be what drives her in life, she would let her love for our mother be the thing that drives her. May she be an inspiration for all of us to be driven by our joy, by the knowledge that we will not give up, that we do not freeze up, by the conviction that we can move forward with hesed and love.

Olam Hesed Yibane,
We will build the world with love
I will build this world from love
And you must build this world from love
And if we build this world from love
Then G!d will build this world from love

A world of love and not hatred
A world of compassion not anger

7 Lyrics in English by Rabbi Menachem Creditor

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A world that is not defined by fear and helplessness but defined by resilience and hope.

A world in which we embrace each other and the world itself with love.