

Standing in Kibbutz Nir Oz today, I saw firsthand the remnants of the atrocities of October 7. On that day, 1 out of 4 residents of that kibbutz were murdered or abducted and taken into Gaza. 2 of those killed were Judith Weinstein and her husband, Gadi. 4 of those abducted were the Bibas family, whose 2 red haired children became symbols of hostages. Another of those taken was Sagui Dekel Chen, the stepson of my childhood friend Gillian Kaye. There is a verse from prophet Habbakuk that captures the sentiment of the day. He wrote: "The stones of the walls cry out..." Their voices seemed to shout out from the charred remains of a vibrant kibbutz that bordered on the Gaza strip. "Don't forget me!" I felt them pleading with me. Yellow ribbons and posters with smiling faces triggered the souls of so many of us to speak out for their release. Sure there is another side to the narrative—a Palestinian plea to be heard and to be counted; but today—the Israeli voices were so loud in my conscience.

Tali is the Eshkol community partner coordinator with the greater Albany area. She grew up on that kibbutz; her mother in law was one of the hostages released. Standing outside her childhood home, she said that 95% of life was heavenly and sadly, 5% of it is pure Hell. She challenged herself in the early days following the abduction and the carnage not to succumb to the negative. She and her family pledged that they would learn from Jewish history and would not go down in its ledger as victims. They would rise up to charter their own course based on strength and virtue, not defined by victimhood and martyrdom.

That message resonated deeply within me as well as Rabbi Greg Weitzman of Congregation Beth Emeth. When driving to that place, we wondered what ritual we should do to conclude our visit. Perhaps Kaddish for those who perished in their perceived safety of their own homes. But after Tali spoke, we realized that only response was not a prayer of mourning but one of hope. We sang Hatikvah. May the memories of those who died and those abducted be with us, forcing us to fight for an ever illusive notion of peace between 2 peoples.

That is my charge to you. Fight for peace. I have hope that it can be achieved. As I prepare for Shabbat in Jerusalem, may this be a message that becomes a beacon for us

all. In this week's Torah portion, God commands Moses and the children of Israel to "build me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them."

Through working toward peace, we make God's presence known to us. May those enslaved be freed. May those who suffer find solace. May those who grieve find comfort. And recall the prayer for peace in our *siddur*: Grant us peace, Your most precious gift...

Shabbat Shalom