

How it Starts

To the east, God planted a garden in Eden and placed there the Human who had been fashioned.

And from the ground God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

God took Adam, and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and keep it. God then commanded the man, saying, “You may eat all you like of every tree in the garden – but of the Tree of All Knowledge you may not eat, for the moment you eat of it you shall be doomed to die.”

It is in this setting – paradise, that the first known deception takes place. The serpent tempts Eve into violating God’s command to Adam that they do not partake of the fruit of the Tree of All Knowledge. The Torah gives three reasons for Eve consuming the fruit: the tree was good for eating, it was a delight to the eyes, and she wanted to gain the wisdom of all things that the fruit would bring her. Nor can Adam resist the temptation. After they eat, they are aware of their nakedness, and they make clothing from fig leaves. Then, they hear God in the garden, and they hide in the trees.

And the God whom they are trying to emulate by gaining access to all knowledge asks a question that an all-knowing God should know the answer to: “Where are you?”

Adam replied, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” Again, God asks questions to which God knows the answer.

“Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?”

And of course, God knows that the answer is Yes.

If these questions are not about discovering facts, since God knows the facts, then what are they about? They are expressions of disbelief. God gave them an entire garden of delicious fruit-bearing plants, and just asked that they leave this one alone. God is shocked by this choice.

And yet, on some level, God is not surprised. As the Creator of humans, surely God knew that Adam and Eve had the potential to rebel against the rules. God might feel disappointed by their choice, but God is not shocked that it happened.

I am Shocked, and I am Not Shocked

When I think of the horror of what has happened in Israel this week, I find myself vacillating between shock, and not shocked.

The breach of the Gaza border, which we all assumed was among the most secured, monitored border in the world, was a tremendous shock. How could it be?

And yet, Israel lives surrounded by enemy forces that publicly call for its destruction. This has been the case since before the founding of the country. So in that context, I'm not shocked.

The scope of what has taken place – the sheer numbers, the attack on peace-loving young people at a music festival, taking innocent men, women, and children as hostages, killing babies. I'm shocked. We are shocked by the violence. The absence of humanity.

And yet, Hamas stands for evil. They do not care about the safety of the residents of Gaza, and they do not care about the lives of Israelis. So, I'm not shocked that those who espouse evil ideology commit evil, as devastating as it is to witness.

I am shocked by the victim-blaming that was the first reaction by public voices on the news and social media. As if terrorism can be justified under any circumstance whatsoever.

And, I am not shocked, because we see this reaction time and time again when Israel has been under attack, from Gaza or from the North, or from terrorists within the country. Why do we keep having to explain that the Jewish people have a right to live in Israel and have not only the right, but the obligation to defend its citizens? And why is our support for Israel interpreted by some to mean that we don't care about the lives of Palestinians? As if we don't have the capacity to care for both.

What do we do with the Shock, Not Shocked

So, we are shocked, and we are not shocked. Where do we go with these feelings?

First, we sit with them. We recognize that we are angry, and we are sad. We are scared, we feel guilty, or helpless, or inadequate.

I often feel like when something happens that is not a shock, it can in some ways be worse. To use an incredibly mundane example – if your neighbor backs into your garbage can and knocks it over once, you might be surprised by their carelessness. If they do it every other week, it is no longer a surprise, but that they keep doing, despite their apologies, despite your requests that they be more careful, we are even more mad when it happens.

And we are feeling this here, too. We have seen Israel attacked. We have seen atrocities committed against our people, against the most vulnerable of our people. We have been accused and maligned. So why does it hurt so badly?

Because we can't live in a world where we can't expect more from people. We need to believe that people have basic humanity and respect for life. That Israelis and Arabs have a chance for peaceful coexistence. That if we build relationships across differences, we can increase understanding, and live in a better world.

And we are right to expect, and to hope, and to dream of peace.

Do not let what happened make you feel like you were foolish or naïve to want more for Israel. We only have Israel today because of a dream. And as Herzl said, "Im tirtzu, ein zo agada." If you will it, it is no dream.

Solace

What comfort can I offer during this terrible time? My words are inadequate to take away the pain.

But I can give you some examples of what hope looks like to me:

An Israeli soldier, called up for Reserve Duty attends his son's bris via Zoom. You can see the video of him reciting the blessing, and hear the soldiers around him reciting the traditional verses, *b'damayich chayi*, by your blood, shall you live.

Tamar and Aaron Greene were engaged and were supposed to get married with more than 300 guests in Israel last Wednesday. Then, Saturday night, Aaron was called up for Reserve Duty. They decided against postponing their wedding, not wanting to give Hamas this victory. So, they got married on the groom's parent's balcony in Jerusalem. In the middle, they were interrupted by sirens and had to run to the shelter. When they emerged, they finished the ceremony and then went to

the courtyard of the complex to dance. Strangers heard them, and joined them to engage in the mitzvah of rejoicing with bride and groom.

There are many, many uplifting stories like these two, and more of them will emerge.

Let us be shocked by their resilience and courage.

And, let us not be shocked, because this is who our people are, and this is what we do. Every single time.

May God give us the strength to keep going, to hold onto our hope. May we sit with both our grief, and our faith that we can get through this challenge together.

While it is true that we feel like we cannot do enough to help, we can make a difference. Donate money to the many worthy causes that need our assistance.

Advocate on behalf of Israel and make sure our elected leaders know how important it is to support Israel. Keep learning about the situation and explaining it to those who are seeking to understand. Pray for Israel, for the healing of the wounded, and for the return of the captives to their homes. And reach out to people who need love and encouragement. Israelis need to hear from us that they are not alone or forgotten.

Here at TBT, we are populating a list of congregants who live in Israel, who have family and friends in Israel, and Israelis who are living here. We are looking for volunteers to help us make phone calls to check in and see how we can offer support. If you are interested in helping to make calls, please let me or Linda know.

Our website has resources, places to donate, and other action items, and thank you to Larry for keeping it up to date.

Join us for minyan during the week if you want to pray alongside a community. We are reciting the prayer for Israel every day, along with other Psalms and prayers. Prayer is an ancient tool for our people for coping with hard times, and it is just as relevant today.

This is a moment for us to come together in ways that we have not been asked to do in a while. We might be afraid, but we are not alone. I don't know what will happen between this Shabbat and the next. But I know Israel is resilient, and we have tremendous political support from Israel's allies, and what we can add to that is our prayers, our encouragement, and our unrelenting hope. Hatikvah.

As long as within our hearts
The Jewish soul sings,
As long as forward to the East
To Zion, looks the eye –
Our hope is not yet lost,
It is two thousand years old,
To be a free people in our land
The land of Zion and Jerusalem.