

Parashat Bereishit
14 October 2023

Al Kol Eileh – Over All These Things
We Stand With Israel

Every seven days, fifty-two weeks a year, we come together as a community to celebrate Shabbat. We have come together during moments of American unrest, moments of global catastrophe, and a pandemic that shook our souls to the core. I have never had a moment like this. I imagine that most of us have never had a moment like this. I don't quite know what to say. *Ein Milim*...there are no words...What I do know is that we *need* each other today. Our Jewish homeland *needs* you today. Our sisters and brothers, parents and grandparents, children, neighbors, and friends in Israel need our hearts, our support, and our strength...today.

If you are here this morning, you know what has been going on. I don't need to amplify the headlines, except to say that with each headline, my heart shatters. It is true that over 1000 people gathered at Adas Israel for the DC area vigil, over 1000 gathered at the Pozez JCC for our Northern Virginia vigil and over 1000 stood with Israel yesterday at Freedom Plaza in Washington. But it is also true that we are well over a thousand poorer. The death toll is up to 1200, which we know will only grow. The wounded are over 2800. The number of people stolen from their homes, including babies and grandparents, is over 150.

I have shared that this week, we are supposed to begin again. We read the beginning of the Torah, *bereishit*. God saw chaos and didn't like it. So, with every measure of light and life, God brought a world that could be ordered into being. Right now, it feels like that order isn't holding. Out of chaos, one day at a time, God built a facet of the world through speech. That world took shape. And at every step, God said, “וירא אלהים כי טוב” – and God saw that this was good.” When God created humanity, God looked at us, with hope in God's eyes, and said, “טוב מאד – really

good.” We are supposed to be really good. The stories we are reading, the images we are seeing, the horrific video footage...all of it is NOT GOOD. It is disgusting. It is barbaric. It is, as the President said, unadulterated evil. What kind of human being (if you can even call these terrorists human beings) has such a disregard for human life? What kind of creature massacres and mutilates God’s creation? Such creatures don’t even deserve to be called human beings.

We must be crystal clear that there is NEVER context for anything a terrorist does. There is NO context for evil. There are no shades of gray for the unfathomable horrendous things Hamas has done to images of God. I say this not only because they are our family; I say this because they are human beings created in the image of God who should NEVER NEVER EVER be treated with such despicable cruelty. If someone offers you context, stop them. There is no context for rape. There is no context for stealing and murdering a baby. There is no context for massacring a family. There is no context for kidnapping the elderly in wheelchairs. There is no context for any of this. Even if this wasn’t our family, and it is, it would be inexcusable, not contextualizable. And the difference between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism? *There is no difference*. When we say *am Yisrael chai* – the people Israel lives, it is not a declaration of citizenship; it is a declaration of the Jewish soul within every Jewish heart.

Hanging next to the front door of my home are several works of art, all with important significance. The first is a picture of Jerusalem. אִם-אֶשְׁכַּח יְרוּשָׁלַם תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי - If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither. Or, in the words of Yehudah HaLevi: לִבִּי בְּמִזְרָח וְאַנְכִי בְּסוּף מַעֲרָב – my heart is in the east...and the rest of me at the edge of the west. The second is a print designed by Liron Lavi Turkenich in aravrit, a hybrid writing system, fusing Hebrew and Arabic letters, with the word חיים – life. עֵץ-חַיִּים הִיא לְמַחְזִיקִים בָּהּ – it is a tree of life...please God will there be more people seeking to grab hold of her. The final piece is a wood carving. It is hard to see from a

distance, but this was a gift from Miri and Amir Tibon. It is a carving of their Kibbutz, Nahal Oz. In the middle is the watchtower with an Israeli flag next to the border fence. For those who went on either of the last two congregational trips to Israel, you were at their kibbutz; you walked next to this border fence; you saw Gaza. By now, most of us have heard or read the heroic story of Amir's father rescuing his children and grandchildren. Some of you may have also heard the story of Amir's uncle milking cows on abandoned kibbutzim and rescuing Miri and Amir's dog. On Tuesday afternoon, I had the chance to speak with Miri on the phone for over half an hour. First, she wanted me to share how touched she and Amir are by the outpour of love and support from this community. The messages, even if unanswered, do not go unnoticed. Each note of love, every heart emoji, gives them the strength to meet a new day. They are safe now and staying with Amir's parents outside Tel Aviv. When I shared that I would send our community the information to raise needed funds for their kibbutz, she was quite emotional. With your help, they have raised over \$25K to help rebuild so much of what was destroyed. And then I became emotional. Miri shared with me how her daughters, Galia and Carmel, woke up Monday morning and said: אמא, האם זה בטוח לעזוב את החדר שלנו – Mommy, is it safe to leave our room today? These are words no child should EVER have to say – words no parent should EVER have to hear.

At times, when there are no words, I look to our liturgy and I pray. One particular prayer is one we recite every day. It is called שומר ישראל, Protector of Israel. שומר ישראל, שמור שארית ישראל. The translation (and there is no adequate translation for the way it feels to say these words): Protector of Israel, protect the remainder of Israel. Don't let Israel be destroyed or erased. We are the ones who say: Shema Yisrael.

Introduce Yarden to share reflections...

Friends, this week has been an emotional rollercoaster. There are moments when tears just well up, there are moments of anger, and there are moments of feeling utterly overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of this horror. But there is one emotion we must not feel, and that is hopelessness. Hopelessness is not an option. We all have the power to do something. If you can donate, make a difference with your resources. If you are confronted with misinformation and lies, make a difference with your words. If you know someone in Israel, reach out to them, tell them you love them, tell them we stand with Israel, make a difference with your heart.

I want to close with a song by Naomi Shemer – על כל אלה. I have sung this song for decades, but not until now have its words resonated so deeply within my soul.

Over the honey and the [bee] sting
Over the bitter and the sweet
Over our baby girl
Please guard my good Lord.

Over the burning fire
Over the crystal-clear water
And over the man returning home
from afar

Over all these things, over all these things
Please guard for me my good God
Over the honey and the [bee] sting
Over the bitter and the sweet.

Please don't uproot what's been planted
Don't forget the hope
Lead me home and I will return
To the good land

Guard my God over this house
Over the garden and the wall
From sorrow, sudden fear
and from war.

Protect the little I have
The light and the infants
The fruit not yet ripened and the ones that were picked.

A tree rustles in the wind,
In the distance a star falls,
The wishes of my heart, in the darkness
Are being written now.

Please guard all these things for me
And over my beloved ones
Over the quiet, the tears
And this song.

ED Sings...Al Kol Eleh

After seven days, after all the chaos, there was finally order and the world was created. This moment will likely take more than seven days, but we WILL succeed, not only in this war but also in creating a new world out of this chaos...a world of shabbat shalom – a world of restful peace.

I am so grateful that we are all here today. We are going to keep coming together, every 7 days, 52 weeks a year. We will continue to show up for each other, for Israel, and for the Jewish people. Am...Yisrael...Chai!

Introduction to Hatikvah

Before we conclude, I would like to share a short story about a Jewish chaplain in the US Army. At the conclusion of WWII, this rabbi was in Paris and had the opportunity to meet David Ben Gurion. Ben Gurion requested permission to visit a Displaced Persons camp, and the Rabbi was to be the escort. Upon arrival in Germany, he took Ben Gurion to meet General Eisenhower. The rabbi remarked: “General, if there was a Jewish state now, this gentleman would be the head of it.” General Eisenhower invited Ben Gurion to tour the DP camps and return with his recommendations.

At the first DP camp they went to, people immediately recognized Ben Gurion and began shouting his name. The Rabbi arranged for everyone to come to the auditorium so Ben Gurion could address them. The rabbi said: “In about half an hour, several thousand Jews had crowded into the auditorium. All the seats were full...any standing space was full. I led Ben Gurion out on the stage, and then all the people rose to their feet. They sang Hatikvah. Ben Gurion wept, and I wept. And when the people stopped singing Hatikvah, they wept.” In the figure of David Ben Gurion, there stood a radiance of hope, a ray of light poking through the darkness of despair.

“As long as in the heart; the Jewish spirit yearns; with eyes turned eastward; looking towards Zion, then our hope, the hope of two thousand years, is not lost: to be a free nation in our land, the land of Zion and Jerusalem”.

For two thousand years, our people maintained their hope. Today, the global Jewish community, along with all those who love Israel, stand firm and stand united, singing together our anthem of hope.

Please rise for Hatikvah...