

Parashat Chayei Sarah
11 November 2023

Marching for Israel

This morning we are going to have a special guest share some words with us. This will not be the first time this individual has spoken from this bima. In fact, for a period of time, it was relatively common. However, never before has the message been as urgent as it is now. In a break from anything I have done in the past, this guest is actually not in the room this morning. His words are words he has shared with the world. When I shared with this individual how important his words are, he told me to share them with our community. Following his remarks, I will briefly connect this moment to Parashat Chayei Sarah and our charge for today. And now, with his permission, I would like to share the words of a personal friend, a dear friend of so many, the husband of our former shelicha, Amir Tibon. These are his words:

One month ago, on October 7, as the sun was rising over my home in Kibbutz Nahal Oz, I had to tell my two daughters – 3 years old and 20 months old – that they must remain completely silent. Not a word, no crying. It was 7 A.M. in our Gaza border community, and they had just woken up in a dark room devoid of electricity, with five men shouting outside. These men soon began firing bullets into our home through the living room window. They tried to break through our locked door... They sprayed our two cars with bullets. One of them held a rocket-propelled grenade launcher. Another threw a grenade toward our neighbors' home. These men were Hamas terrorists, armed from head to toe, on a mission to get in and kill us.

Imagine yourself having to tell a 1-year-old, stuck in a dark room with no food, electricity or toys, hearing gunshots and shouting all around her, that she must be silent. That this is not a time to make any noise because it's dangerous outside. Think about that for a second. Now imagine having to do that for 10 hours. Ten hours in the dark, with sounds of war immediately outside your

window. Not nearby, not down the street. Literally on your porch. Right in your backyard. Gunshots fired into your living room. Asking yourself: Is my dog still alive?

Exactly one month ago, when Hamas entered the civilian community where I live, they knew exactly what they were doing – and what the price would be. There are many military targets along Israel's border with Gaza. Some were attacked on October 7. But that wasn't enough for Hamas. They deliberately chose to enter civilian communities and the homes of families, to murder innocent people. In my community, they shot to death a teenage girl who worked in our kindergarten. They kidnapped two sisters, ages 14 and 8, but not before murdering their father. Had they managed to break into the room where we silently barricaded ourselves that day, we all would now be dead. My wife, a social worker who began her career helping Muslim families in southern Israel fight for their legal rights; my daughters, not old enough to hurt a soul in this world. We survived, but many didn't.

In the first days after the massacre, the eyes of the world were on our story. The horrific actions of Hamas – the killing of the elderly and the young, the kidnapping of toddlers, the torture and rape of women – dominated headlines worldwide. But soon, Israel began its military action to eradicate Hamas in Gaza and terrible images from the other side of the border began to emerge. Images of mass destruction and an endless stream of funerals. A tragedy in every sense of the word. I don't want revenge on Gaza. I don't feel any satisfaction upon hearing that civilians there have been killed. I'm as sad as it's possible to be over those deaths. But I know that when Hamas came into my community on the morning of October 7, it knew exactly what would happen in the Gaza Strip the day after.

In my own community, we were proud to employ workers from Gaza, paying them 10 times the average wage inside the Strip. The Gazans who came to work in our community were

able to build homes for their families and finance an education for their children. In a shocking act of betrayal, some of them, it turns out, provided intelligence to Hamas that helped the organization plan its deadly attack on our kibbutz.

I'm the last person to claim Israel has no fault or blame in our long conflict with the Palestinians. I have written hundreds of articles against the policies of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his far-right allies, and in favor of a real commitment to Palestinian rights and sovereignty. But what Hamas did on October 7 had nothing to do with any of this. It was a suicide mission to murder as many Israelis as possible, specifically in civilian communities, with no policy goal or endgame other than murder, torture and pain. When Hamas terrorists came to my home, they knew a family with young children was living there. Our baby stroller was parked outside the door as they shot through the windows. And they knew that after they completed their mission, Israel, like any other country, would have to retaliate. On that day, they knew they had signed the death certificate of thousands of Gazans. For them, it was a price worth paying for the joy of murdering my teenage neighbor and kidnapping children. They knew Gaza would suffer terrible, shocking destruction. They did it anyway.

I have my own criticisms of the Israeli government's response. I don't understand what the long-term strategy guiding our actions is, and I'm afraid Netanyahu – a corrupt, failed, useless man – will try to prolong the war for personal gain. None of that changes Hamas' culpability. No country in the world would have accepted what happened to my family on that awful morning – and you must multiply that by many hundreds of families. A country that doesn't destroy the people who tried to murder my daughters, and those who sent them, has lost its right to exist. That's as true for Israel as it is for any other country on the planet. This hasn't changed my belief, based on a cold, calculated reading of reality, that in the long run we must find ways to share this land,

provide measures of sovereignty to the Palestinians, protect their human rights. But first we must survive. We can't do anything constructive with the Palestinian people, who deserve equal measures of freedom and security, if we're all dead.

In order for this to even be a relevant topic of conversation, Israel must first defeat Hamas. This organization can't remain an active force in Gaza after the atrocities it deliberately committed against civilians. And defeating Hamas will come with a price. Hamas, of course, has been preparing for years, entrenching its military presence within civilian installations – schools, hospitals, clinics. Hamas has shown the same total disregard for civilian life in Gaza as it did in my neighborhood. Israel is now fighting a war against a shameless organization that is barricading itself behind innocent people in a dense urban environment. It's an awful war to fight, but we have only awful choices. If we don't fight this war, we are inviting Hamas to repeat October 7 in the future. This isn't genocide or ethnic cleansing. It's a terrible war. It's an inevitable war at this point. It's a war for our very ability to keep living in this land and raise our children here. That doesn't mean Israel should be shielded from any criticism during the war or after it. President Biden should definitely use his influence and leverage to promote steps that will create long-term stability and open the door to a better future here. But if Hamas isn't defeated and its leadership destroyed, nothing Biden does will have any positive impact. Hamas must go first.

You can read these words from Amir, and more, in his writing for Haaretz.

Reading these words, listening to these words, I ask: What do we do now? What can *we* do? I have been thinking a lot about these questions as I read this week's parashah. Why is it that Abraham only buys a plot of land in Israel upon Sarah's death? Why did it take Sarah's death and Abraham's increased sense of his own mortality for him to start looking for a wife for his son Isaac? He knew of the promise of land, he certainly knew that in order for God's promise of

progeny to be fulfilled, Isaac would need a bride. This was not “new news” for him. Why did Abraham wait until this moment to do what he should have done long before?

The great rabbi of Modern Orthodoxy, Rabi Joseph Soloveitchik, distinguished between living a life of fate and a life of destiny. To be a people of fate is to be a people who resign themselves to a condition, a set of circumstances, to be passive participants in the unfolding of chronological time. To be a people of destiny signifies a deliberate and conscious existence, a people who has chosen to chart out its own future to seize its moment. Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote that “Every age, every epoch constitutes a turning point.” We need to look at our lives as if every moment is a small and shrinking window of opportunity.

To be fully alive, as a Jew and as a member of humanity, means that you lead your life, each day, believing that you are living in a moment of destiny, that the demands of today are insistent and particular and pressing in a way they weren’t yesterday and won’t be tomorrow. It means you allow for the nervous, unsettling, and angst-ridden condition that also inspires, motivates, and stirs you to activity. It certainly means that we cannot wait to do what we should have been doing all along. Our lives, our community, our people, are just too sacred to have it any other way.

So, in *this* moment of destiny, this turning point, we must choose to March for Israel on Tuesday. In fact, there is nothing that you can be doing on Tuesday that is more important than standing together in our nation’s capital. Our participation is crucial. Now is not the time to be afraid. We must show mass support, unity and solidarity at a time such as this, so that our political leaders know that we stand with Israel. Our solidarity will speak to our brothers and sisters in Israel in a way nothing else can. They need to see and hear us — people from across political, religious, and other spectrums — as we show up for them. We need to demand the freedom of hostages. We

need to unite against the unrelenting antisemitism rising locally, nationally, and globally. We must come together so that we may draw strength from each other.

Planes have been chartered from LA, Denver, Detroit, and cities across the country. Over 100 buses will be coming from New York alone. Buses are leaving from Connecticut, Cleveland and elsewhere at 5 o'clock in the morning. Quite simply – change your plans. If you have a meeting, reschedule it. If you have a doctor's appointment change it. Miss work. Take your kids out of school.

Our synagogue delegation will meet at 10:30 AM in front of the Ritz Carlton in Pentagon City (in front of the Pentagon City Metro Station). We will take the metro together to the rally. Please plan to park by 10:15 a.m. so we can leave on time. There is plenty of parking available at the Pentagon City Mall. I will have wristbands available to gain access to priority viewing. If you are joining us with children and/or teens, we will arrive in time for the pre-rally performance. Please email the office if you are joining our delegation so we know you are coming.

Years from now, you will look back at this moment, and when you do, what will you say? You will say, "I showed up...I marched for Israel." We will keep showing up. We will keep marching with Israel. Today. Tomorrow. Tuesday. And...*every* day. Let us make history together.