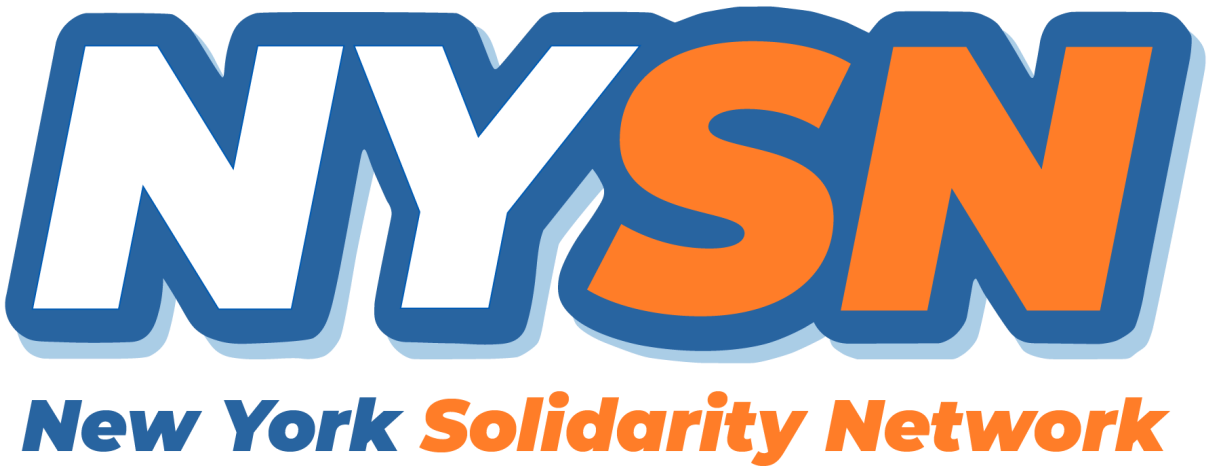



# October 7th Essays and Reflections

*One Year Later*

*October 7th, 2024*

## From the Executive Director

For Jews around the globe, the horrific massacre of October 7, 2023 was deeply personal. Beyond the magnitude and devastation of the attack, the captivity of the hostages, and the ongoing war against Hamas and its infrastructure, Jews have also been subjected to antisemitism, hostility, and an academic global disinformation campaign over the last year that would have made Goebbels proud.

Jews in New York feel unsafe, and unsure. Our lives are intertwined with others in very intimate and close-quartered ways. The hateful and targeted incidents of harassment, intimidation and bullying that have reverberated from borough to borough, school to school, subway to subway have taken their toll, and our community is exhausted.

Every one of us has a story to tell after October 7. New York's Jewish community, the largest in the world outside of Israel, has faced many challenges in this past year, and many of those struggles (and hopes for the future) are shared in this special edition of NYSN's newsletter. I hope we all can continue to find solace in each other, and in the thoughts and words of our community members who have graciously and thoughtfully shared with everyone in this continued time of difficulty.

365 days have passed, and I still cannot adequately put into words what has changed in this time. *Everything is different now*, *and nothing will be the same for us again* is where we are right now.

We dedicate our October newsletter to the victims of Hamas terrorism, the hostages for whom we will never stop fighting for a safe return, to the safety and security of all the people of the State of Israel, and to the Jews of New York who we stand beside every day.

- Executive Director Sara Forman

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**For Israel, State and Municipal Leaders' Words Matter**
*By Craig Balsam*

My wife Jodi and I have been members of NYSN since its inception. For many years, American support of Israel at all levels of the American government has been a key issue for us. But the reactions of many of our elected officials (local and national) to the brutal attacks of October 7 shocked us into action.




We realized, based on their public statements, that many local elected officials in NYC and New York State were either anti-Zionist or antisemitic, despite the fact that key components of their constituencies are Jews.

The vitriolic reactions of many of these members of Congress, state legislative representatives and city council members against Israel after this attack surprised us and jolted us.

Over the past year, we have assisted NYSN in its largely successful efforts to support candidates who "get it" when it comes to the Middle East.

We now know that it is crucial - even at a local level - to have elected officials understand the backdrop of global politics and the importance of Israel's existence both for Jews worldwide and as a geopolitical partner of the US.

***Craig Balsam is a NYSN member and longtime Manhattan resident.***

**Building Bridges**
*By Jeff and Linda Solomon*

“If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And being for my own self, what am 'I'? And if not now, when?” - Rabbi Hillel

Our philanthropic journey has always been focused on Jewish peoplehood and making a positive impact on the world by supporting causes that speak to our progressive Jewish values. After the tragic shooting in 2018 at the Tree of Life Synagogue in our hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, we identified three pillars where we hope to make a difference: ensuring Jewish continuity, fighting antisemitism, and supporting inclusion and diversity efforts through the Jewish lens.




The events of October 7th and many of the responses we have experienced as a Jewish community in the past year have inspired us to do even more in accordance with our framework in order to reinforce our Jewish peoplehood and reach a broader audience of supporters and allies. We have also extended our giving into the political realm with a lot more intention at both the national and local level by openly supporting candidates who

are committed to the Jewish community as well as the safety and security of the State of Israel.

Building bridges with other communities remains central to our philosophy even when it sometimes feels those efforts are not welcome. Ensuring our Jewish future depends on taking care of our a Jewish present.

“If not now, when?”

***Jeff and Linda Solomon are NYSN members, philanthropists and Jewish community lay leaders.***

**An Antisemitic Awakening**
*by Rebecca Novin-Cannon*

My Jewishness and the Jewish community have always been important to me. Yet, I was asleep to the pervasive antisemitism around me.




Sure, I thought people disliked Jews but the depth and breadth has been shocking. The unapologetic support for terror over the last 12 months, the constant denial and distortion of facts, the targeting of those that support Israel, the blaming of Jews for Israel's action in the war against Hamas, the calls for the delegitimization of Israel, the demonizing of Zionism, the failure of our Universities (and so much more), has violently awoken me and left me in a dull state of anguish.

It has been a veritable deluge of emotions: loneliness, grief, betrayal, anxiety and hopelessness. Most days I awaken to news that makes me feel betrayed. I never thought I would identify with what my ancestors felt in Poland in the 1930s.

This ache, however, is not all bad. It has ignited and energized my sense of Jewishness. My participation in my Jewish community, my love for my fellow Jews and my commitment ensure our collective Jewish future has never been more imperative.

In the wake of October 7th, being Jewish has become one of the most defining and consequential attributes of my existence. I now view everything through a Jewish lens. It drives my choices: who I spend my time with, what my political affiliations are, how I spend my money, what media I choose to consume, and the charities I contribute to.

In many ways, it has surprisingly reshaped my relationship to the world around me for the better. My priorities have been aligned - our future existence depends upon it and I am committed to do my part to ensure our collective future.

***Rebecca Novin-Cannon is a NYSN member and longtime Jewish community lay leader.***

**The Golden Age Generation**
*By Alissa Shams*



Living as a Jew in the United States the last 58 years was in my mind a Golden Age, never before experienced in the diaspora. Alongside a peaceful and successful American life was the State of Israel, the fulfillment of a two thousand year old dream, a return to our ancestral homeland.

It seemed that our Jewish American fear was assimilation, coming from the first class status we were experiencing in our daily lives. Our children were accepted to elite universities, once dismissive of Jews. Our issues became focused on global and societal concerns.

We were secure as Jews, and we imagined we were part of the accepted and celebrated world. Israel was our message to history: we now have the capacity to defend ourselves, never would we be victims without a means of combat.

October 7 will go down as a watershed moment in Jewish history. The horrific and brutal attack shocked and shook our belief that we were always prepared and never at the mercy of an enemy. The rippling effects of a new world movement defending what was once pure evil to be justified "freedom fighting".

The front line of this movement became the college campus. Moving from a position of strength to one of vulnerability has been life altering over this past year. As we approach the one year anniversary we are united in ways that might have been taken for granted before October 7.

Our hearts remain with the families of the hostages and we are in awe of the bravery and self sacrifice of our soldiers in the IDF. Israel and the Jewish people are a light unto the nations of the world. "Never again" is now a relatable and impactful slogan to the generation of the Golden Age.

***Alissa Shams is a NYSN member, Jewish community lay leader and longtime Manhattan resident.***

**My World is Larger (and Smaller)**
*By Jessica Haller*

Since October 7th, my world has contracted. There are more places in the world that I cannot go; more spaces in my City that I dare not go. Time has contracted, with more dates on the calendar that I do not trust: the date of a friend's death in a booby-trapped school in Gaza, then another's. And dates I await with dread: an attack from Iran, then another. Sunday mornings, marching for the Hostages, week after week. As an advocate, there are activities that I need to think twice about joining: assuring that the message is clear, that the partners respect who I am.



There are activists in spaces whom I question: the young woman from the Bronx who only now wears a Keffiyeh to talk about clean-air. There are pages in newspapers I cannot look at, and subscriptions I've canceled. There are virtual spaces, apps, influencers, and even friends that I cannot read or engage with.

And yet.

And yet since the crisis of October 7th, new worlds have opened. I've traveled more this year than in a long time. I've forged new partnerships. I've taken Israeli tech and used it to organize the Jewish community in Westchester to historic results, building political power and lasting networks. Then I went to Missouri, and did it again making new friends, allies and partners. I've traveled to Israel multiple times supporting family and accompanying American leaders. I've traveled across the US organizing and strengthening the Jewish community. My advocacy has shifted to become more focused and meaningful. I've been published more times in those newspapers because I will not retreat in silence.

While dimensions of my world feel smaller, have contracted, contraction, or '*tzimtzum*,' is the process God used to create space for the world, according to Jewish Kabbalistic tradition. Although we can't see the divine in this contraction, it enables the emergence of new worlds.

***Jessica Haller is a NYSN member, climate advocate, and New York City political operative.***

**Leaning Into our Jewish Lives**
*By Mark Levine*

A few weeks after October 7th I ran into a friend who is a strident progressive activist with a particular passion for criminal justice reform. She was wearing something I had never seen on her before: a Star of David pendant.



Though I was vaguely aware my friend is Jewish, I had never heard her utter a word about Israel or the Jewish community, so I had to ask her: what was the backstory on the pendant?

Out flowed an emotional account of someone whose world had been rocked by October 7th. Of course she had been deeply upset by the horrors of the attack itself. But there was a second unexpected shock that, for her, was even more painful: many of her activist friends did not share her outrage over Hamas's barbarity.

For her the explanation for the newly displayed Star of David was simple: "I'm done hiding".

Over the past twelve months I have had variations on this conversation probably hundreds of times. Throughout Manhattan and across New York City, liberal Jews have found themselves suddenly far more aware of their Jewish identity.

This happens when we face vitriol for expressing support for, or even just a connection to, Israel. It happens when we feel a lack of empathy for our concerns about rising

antisemitism in New York City. It happens when we see non-Jewish friends lose interest in the hostages still being held in dungeons in Gaza.

We have responded to these challenges not by retreating, but by leaning in. In my years speaking to Jewish groups and gatherings I have never seen bigger crowds than I have in the past 12 months. Participation in all manner of Jewish groups and activities is surging.

I have also seen extraordinary bonds forming among newly self-aware Jewish New Yorkers, including across the lines that often divide us—across the political spectrum, between secular and religious, and between American Jews and Israelis in New York. We are connecting with each other like never before. And I am convinced those bonds will last.

After a year of horrors it feels almost wrong to point out a silver lining. But the truth is I believe that the Jewish communities of our city have, against the odds, come out stronger.

One thing is for certain: We are done hiding.

***Mark Levine is the Manhattan Borough President and a 2025 candidate for New York City Comptroller.***

**Am Yisrael Chai**
*By Benjamin Forman*

Appalling. Horrifying. Unconscionable. Few words adequately describe the visceral reaction I felt as I watched the news come out from Israel that Saturday morning last October. I woke up on the 7th and came downstairs to my mother in a state of shock and panic, not believing what she was watching on X/Twitter and later on that day on television. The young and old, from Holocaust survivors to babies, were attacked and brutalized in ways that I only read about in history books. But instead of reading about a massacre of Jews, we were watching it unfold in real time on social media.



The barbarism Hamas members displayed that day still haunts Jews like me at night, and has forever shifted my perception of the world and my faith in society. What especially permeates my mind are the images of Naama Levi, being pulled by her hair out of the back of a jeep, her gray sweatpants bloodied from assault, her expression dazed. I think a lot about how Naama was born in 2004, one year before me. And can't imagine what she has had to endure.

I've been incredibly lucky to have had friends who supported me in my grief and shock last year, while I was still in high school, who understood the basic concept of right and wrong. (I think it's important to note that my high school friends are overwhelmingly not Jewish.)

And I'm very lucky now, as I'm attending college at Duke University, where the dialogue around Israel is largely positive. Yet, even in this positive environment, the Hamasniks staunch support for terror can be felt on the graffiti plastered under bridges and posters on the walls.

All the hate I see constantly on social media or perceived behind closed doors has led me to find more strength and spirit within my Jewish community. Our indomitable hope in our people and our homeland has only grown stronger through this dark year. Visiting Israel in February, walking through the Nova site, and witnessing the burned-out Kibbutzim with blood stains on the ground and bullet holes in the walls, gave me a newfound perspective on the commitment of the Jewish people to ensuring our safety and also for peace. I still believe that there is a future where both of those ideas can be true for Jews.

***Benjamin Forman is a freshman at Duke University.***

**Tired.**
*By Ryan Adams*

What happened on October 7th in Israel feels unfathomable. I know it happened but, even now, I struggle to comprehend it all—to process the unimaginable brutality, the chaotic hours, and the reality of how it unfolded. The attacks shattered lives in an instant: where the missiles fell, the violence that followed, the hostages taken, and the blood spilled. I try to understand how many were taken, how many were killed, who managed to make it back, and who is still waiting—waiting for safety, for news, for some measure of comfort that may never come. I think of these people, not just as numbers or headlines, but as human lives interrupted, each with a story, a family, a before and after that I cannot fully grasp. I wonder what their lives are like now, and what they might become in the days to come, God willing, when peace or something like it returns.

There is, I think, a collective blocking off—an emotional barrier—erected by those of us who cannot bear to look too closely. It's as if we instinctively know that to stare directly into the horror might undo us completely. We dissociate because imagining how it could get worse or how it could happen closer to home is almost too much to bear. It's a survival mechanism, and one that I understand deeply. I understand because I am tired. I am so very tired.



I'm writing this as Iran launches hundreds of missiles into Israel, and the relentless nature of it all weighs on my soul. I'm tired of having to justify my voice on Israeli-Palestinian issues, as though my lived experience and my people's history are not enough unless backed by academic degrees or politically sanctioned rhetoric. I'm exhausted by waiting for others to value Jewish lives before they are cut short, to acknowledge that our pain is real and does not require further justification. And I'm tired, so tired, of bracing for the next piece of bad news, the next unfolding tragedy that feels inevitable.

But after October 7th, I found something within myself—a resolve to face it all, to keep going. I began wrapping tefillin each morning, a ritual that feels like armor, like a declaration to the world and to myself. With the leather straps binding my arm, I remind myself to love being a Jew, to do so with all my heart, all my soul, and all my might as the prayers instruct me. I wrap tefillin for myself, for those who can no longer do so, and for those who will one day wrap themselves. And in that act, something shifts in me. The exhaustion lifts, if only for a moment, and I am filled with a purpose beyond weariness—a desire to make the world better wherever I can, to meet its ugliness with unyielding strength. And so, I refuse to be tired anymore.

***Ryan Adams is a partner at HZQ Consulting and a Democratic political operative in New York City.***

**Young, Jewish, Zionist, Democrat**
*By Zak Malamed*




I come from a family that fled the Pogroms and the Holocaust. Chronicles of survival and triumph raised me. The greatest narrator of my Jewish ancestry is my Tel Aviv-born and raised grandmother. She would often remind me of her family huddling around a night table-sized radio in their Maze Street apartment to listen to an address broadcast live from the United Nations in Lake Success, New York as the body voted to recognize Israel as a member state.

Little did my grandmother know that day, though, 10 years later she would immigrate to Great Neck, New York, within which Lake Success is, raise her three children there, and 75 years later have her grandson run for Congress in that same community against a man who lied about being a Jew and having relatives survive the Holocaust.

On Friday, October 6th I was a candidate for Congress, running to unseat George Santos. Friday night was sacred for me as a candidate. No one would accept my call for donations and there were hardly ever community events. So that evening, I was at a Shabbat with friends in Lower Manhattan.

Toward the end of the gathering I recall fortuitously meeting an Israeli man, whose name I still do not recall, and we realized we were both heading to the Upper East Side where I was meant to stay with my grandmother for the evening.

I called a car, dropped him off, and around 2 AM on Saturday, October 7th I walked into my grandmother's apartment, where I was staying for the night, to find her wide awake: "Zak, it's worse than anything I have seen since the Yom Kippur War."

In the weeks that followed, I felt a profound obligation to show that a young, Jewish, Zionist Democrat, would stand strongly with the American Jewish community and with Israel.

While I would soon suspend my campaign, I made sure to co-author a letter with other young Democratic congressional candidates to stand with the President's support of Israel in the immediate aftermath of October 7th.

In December, I would visit a ravaged Kfar Aza on the Gaza border, volunteer on an Israeli farm, and join my now-Congressman Tom Suozzi in Tel Aviv's Hostage Square where I was handed a yellow ribbon to remember Omer Neutra, a native of Plainview, only 20 minutes from Great Neck, and all of the remaining hostages. 288 days later and 366 since they were taken from us, that yellow ribbon endures and will until every single hostage comes home.

The hostages also remind us that no one will fight for us except us. And so at home we must stand up to antisemitic extremism, especially among our political leaders, wherever encountered. As a dedicated Democrat, I have and continue to stand up to this hate in my own party, especially in our home of New York State, as much as continue to call out the violent antisemitic extremism of the far right that has captivated leading factions of the Republican Party. There must be no place for this — without exceptions.

Now, my generation has the obligation to fight this extremism. My generation has the obligation to tell our story. My generation has the obligation to build anew. My generation has the obligation to both survive and triumph.

***Zak Malamed is the founder of The Next 50, a political organization dedicated to investing in the next generation of political leadership, and was a candidate for Long Island's third congressional district.***

**Time to Take a Stand**
*By Jeff Leb*

Since October 7th, a fundamental shift has occurred in how I view the elected officials I know — and I know more than 100 of them personally. Some of these individuals have been long standing allies, people I've worked closely with over the years, while others have been more distant, yet still present in my political orbit. That day marked not just a tragedy for the Jewish people, but a litmus test for all of us — particularly for those in public office. Where one stands on Israel and their commitment to fighting antisemitism has become a dividing line in my life.




The attacks on Israel were a wake-up call, not only for the Jewish community but for anyone who claims to stand against hatred. In the days that followed, I observed many of the officials I've known and trusted make strong statements. I watched who stepped up and who remained silent. It became clear that some had a deep understanding of the moment and the broader implications of antisemitism on a global scale. These individuals became more than just acquaintances or colleagues — they became allies in the truest sense of the word. Our bonds strengthened because they stood firm in their support of Israel, condemning the violence, the hate, and the antisemitism that underpins it.

Conversely, there were those I had considered friends or respected leaders who didn't say a word. They remained silent when the Jewish community needed their voices most. Others made weak or ambiguous statements, attempting to placate both sides or, worse, condemned Israel's response to the violence — as if any nation would simply stand by while its citizens were murdered. For these individuals, my respect has faded. Some of these officials had been people I worked closely with for years, but their failure to support the Jewish community in its darkest hour cannot be overlooked.

This is not just a personal reckoning; it's a call to action for our entire community. We must take note of who our true allies are — those who stand with Israel unequivocally, who denounce antisemitism in all its forms, and who are not afraid to take a stand, even when it's politically inconvenient. We must also remember those who abandoned us, who chose neutrality or silence in the face of terror. The Jewish community cannot afford to be passive in the political arena.

Following October 7th, I've reached out to some of our stronger supporters, and our conversations have been more meaningful. These elected officials are now not just political contacts but true friends — people who understand the stakes and the moral clarity required at this time. With others, my phone has remained silent. Relationships that were once close have now drifted apart because I can no longer respect someone who fails to grasp the gravity of the moment.

Going forward, I will continue to build relationships with those who stand with Israel and against antisemitism, and I will work just as hard to ensure that those who don't feel the consequences politically. Our community must do the same. We must reward our friends, and we must not be afraid to challenge our enemies — even if they were once our friends. We owe it to ourselves, to Israel, and to future generations to ensure that our political alliances are built on shared values, not complacency.

***Jeff Leb is a partner at Capitol Consulting and a veteran New York City political operative.***

**What has Changed for Jews Since Oct 7**
*By Amy Paulin*

We have spent a year mourning October 7. There are still 101 captives, and we don't know if they are dead or alive. With ongoing rapes, we are concerned that there are pregnancies and babies. For the Jewish people, these are our brothers and sisters being held and tortured. This Rosh Hashanah has been bittersweet for all of us.

Antisemitism, formerly dormant or possibly just at bay, is now fully awake. It is no longer an existential threat. It is on college campuses and in different neighborhoods in our area, and it is being embraced by too many around us, who sadly seem to be informed and uneducated about the issues facing Israel and it's neighbors, as well as the historic struggles the Jewish community has faced.

Moreover, we are saddened that those who we have stood by and fought for, are not standing by us now in our time of need.

Antisemitism is being cloaked under the false terminology of "anti-Zionism." Make no mistake, when someone says they are anti-Zionist but not anti-Jewish, their words are false. I wish more people could see through those words. We cannot let semantics mask antisemitism. And we cannot help but hear the chants at the protests that cheer on Hamas and Iran - we know that is based on antisemitism too.




Jews feel afraid, and worried. I am afraid and worried.

Is there a silver lining? I believe there is. As antisemitism is now touching all of us, we are also coming together as one Jewish family. Two Jews, three opinions has become one opinion. We are pulling together, and trying to figure out the best next steps. This is heartening for me.

One thing is certain - we cannot stand by and think or hope that this is just a phase that will pass. Jews are just a sliver of the world's population. Almost half of us live here in the US, and mostly in NY. The other half lives in Israel. If we don't come together as one people, and support each other, then we are going to be doomed.

Many Jews in Germany identified more as German than as Jewish. This, however, did not spare them from the same fate of murder that more religious Jews faced. Likewise, we Jews in the U.S. should not assume that just because we are American, and belong to our communities and our country, that we will be protected from antisemitism.

In the recent Latimer Campaign for Congress, the opposition said they were fighting his "dark money." They might as well have said what they meant to say, which is that they were fighting "Jewish money" – but they couldn't say that, because it would have made them sound like antisemites. They masked it instead - a common tactic by the latest antisemites we face.

Elections are so critically important. We all need to vote. Both the extreme left and extreme right are espousing views that are dangerous to our democracy that protects us. We have to keep reminding ourselves of our collective strength and not be afraid to use it.

I pledge to be a Jewish leader who will keep fighting to improve our community, while at the same time, I will continue to publicly oppose the evil voices out there who seek to lie and slander our Jewish community.

Lastly, let's all keep working on building bridges to other faiths in our region - let's work to rally all good and caring people in our county, state and nation to stand with and support Jews and Israel.

***Amy Paulin is a member of the New York State Assembly and has represented Westchester County since November, 2000.***

**(Re)Claiming Zionism**
*By Micah Lasher*

I never quite understood what my late father meant when he would insist that there were people who did not believe in Israel's right to exist. The construct itself made no sense to me. Israel had enemies, of course, but it couldn't *not* exist. My father's words felt like an earlier generation's abstract anxiety.

Likewise, I understood why he defined himself, in part, as a Zionist: he was born in 1928, cheered Israel's birth, and had vivid memories of the existential fears and triumphs of 1968 and 1973. But from my vantage point — born in 1981, just old enough to be politically conscious during the Oslo Accords and to mourn for Yitzhak Rabin — the nation-forming of Israel had been completed. The arguments — and the violence — that remained were about borders and safety and terms of co-existence between Jews and Palestinians. Peace, not Israel itself, was the unachieved dream, and we would eventually get there, too. I loved Israel, but Zionism as an identity felt, well, quaint.

The pogrom of October 7 and its immediate aftermath revealed my own perspective as quaint, and naïve.

At the time, I was working for Governor Hochul as her Director of Policy. Completely distraught, eager to do something — anything — to support Israel in that terrible moment, I was proud that the Governor decided to travel there just nine days after the attacks and honored to be asked to join her.



That trip will stay with me forever. It was bookended, at the beginning, by a visit to the hotel that was housing the displaced families of Kfar Aza, and at the end, by a tour of the remains of the kibbutz itself. I will never forget seeing a mattress covered in blood where two people had been shot while clutching each other in fear and embrace. And I will never forget meeting Nitay, a raspy-voiced nine-year-old riding a bicycle in the hotel courtyard, whose impish smile reminded me of my son Ben, and who was somehow carrying on. The most horrific things had happened but the *ner tamid* of Israel's future still burned.

When we returned, it quickly became apparent that somehow — in a perversion of common sense and human decency — the raping, slaughtering, and kidnapping of Israelis had suddenly made it socially and politically acceptable to contest Israel, foundationally, as a going concern. This was happening at precisely the same time as Israel's demise had become imaginable. And there were staggeringly many people, all around the globe and right here in New York, who seemed like they had been waiting — careful, quiet, poised — for this very moment. Waiting, perhaps, for my entire lifetime. My father had understood something I did not.



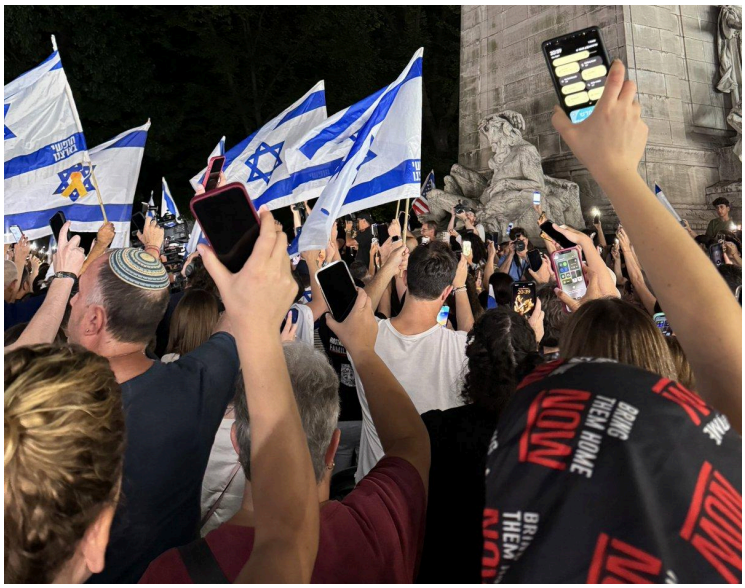
And so, in the year since, I have proudly claimed the label of Zionist that I once saw as an anachronism — and that some throw at us as a slur — and tried to do whatever I can to stand up and speak up for Israel. I do so not uncritically, but with clear eyes and unflinching conviction that there is no moral equivalency between a flawed democracy and a circle of death cults intent on destroying it — and with equally strong conviction that to support the preservation and security of that democracy and a pluralistic Middle East, and to vigorously oppose subtle and not-so-subtle antisemitism in our midst, is not only compatible with liberal values that I hold dear but is, in fact, the very definition of liberalism.

This has become a fundamental part of my identity, occupying a significant piece of my mind and my heart. So many American Jews that I know have undergone some version of this transformation. It is, right now, a necessary defense in aid of a vulnerable people, here and in Israel. I pray for a day when, with our sense of security restored, we may look at it as a healthy, lasting awakening that emerged from the ashes of horror.

***Micah Lasher is the 69th District Democratic nominee for the New York State Assembly.***

**Let My People Go…!**
*By Rabbi Jonathan Morgenstern*

These ancient words echo throughout our history. They were first uttered by Moses as he spoke truth to the great ancient seat of power in Egypt. These 3 words are ever so simple, yet ever so powerful. They are words that beckon humanity to see the plight of others - not turn a blind eye, but to act on their behalf - for the good of those subjugated and for the good of the world, at large. Moses's plea flies in the face of moral ambiguity and false moral equivalency. It places blame on the oppressor and rightfully identifies with the plight of the oppressed.




At a rally in NYC marking an unthinkable 6 months that our holy hostages had been held captive in Gaza, the poignant message of "Let My People Go" reverberated across millenia to our time - and now, we are incomprehensibly approaching a whole year of this inhumanity. For thousands of years, Jews have been taken captive or killed, the people and places may have changed from century to century, but the state of being has remained the same. We are, indeed, a "nation that stands alone." Like it or not, we are singled out for who we are and that reality will never change until the coming of the Messiah - which should come speedily in our times. And, why is it that our plea of "Let My People Go" is still resonant and relevant even now - after all these years? Because we, our Torah, our faith, our ideas and ideals, our ethics and values are still so resonant and relevant, even now.

Sometimes we forget the one sacred word that follows the clarion call of שלח את עמי and that is, of course, ויעבדוני - (send forth my people) "so they can serve me"! The Jewish People have not stopped being oppressed and persecuted, because we have not stopped practicing our faith and proudly living out our Jewish heritage. The tragic beauty of these past (too) many months of physical war in Israel and ideological/rhetorical war here, in the US, and around the world, is the broad tapestry of Jews who've responded in

inspiring ways, both big and small. What we've all come to understand is that you don't have to be "religious" (in the traditional sense of the word) in order to identify with the suffering and plight of our people, or to be impacted (and appalled) by the disturbing anti-semitic prejudice against Jews, everywhere. And, while there are those Jews who have sadly turned away in the face of all of these challenges, I am inspired by the thousands who have sought out their authentic identity as Jews and leaned into the noble mandate of ויעבדוני - seeking to serve God and serve our people with even more dedication, faith and gusto - be it through religious/spiritual observances, through passionate advocacy, or through selfless Chesed and philanthropy. It is for this reason that I am ever more hopeful in the prospect of our shared Jewish destiny; even now, and especially now!



We see this commitment in our greater community, as it manifests itself in countless acts of kindness, Tzedaka, Tefillah, Torah and activism on behalf of Am Yisrael, our holy hostages and our IDF soldiers. We see this in a new generation in our Kehillah that is increasingly naming their newborn children names that connect them and their families to the Jewish story - to our past, present and glorious future. As the prophecy tells us - נצח ישראל לא ישקר(Nili) - "the eternity of the Jewish People will not falter". Let us think

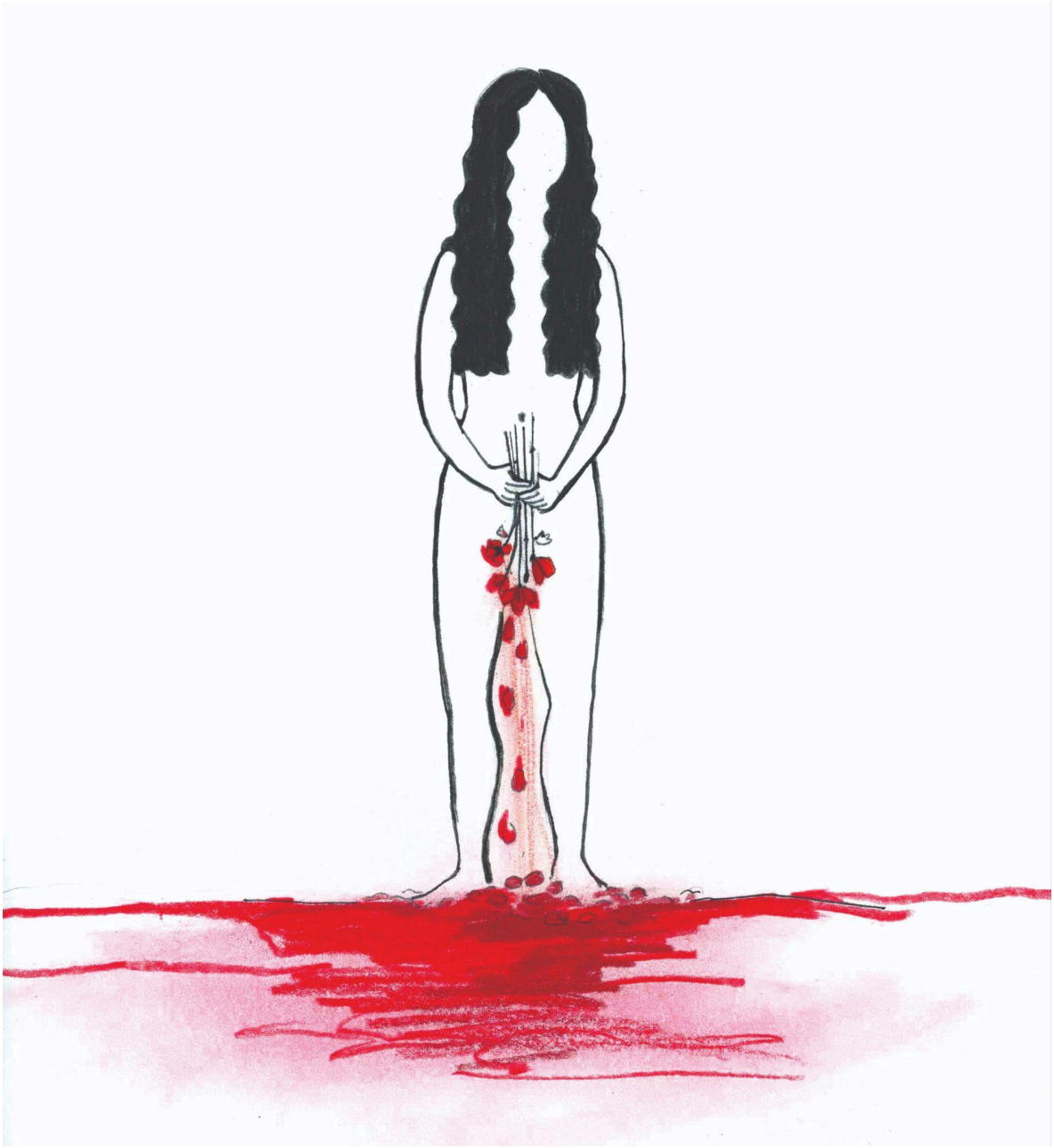
about this as we sit at our Holiday tables in this New Year with our families - praying that EVERY Jew merits to be back with their families, speedily. May we also continue to serve God and His people devotedly - so that we can merit to exult and rejoice in the promise of our shared Jewish destiny, safely in our Land, as we've been promised.

Shana Tova and Am Yisrael Chai!

***Rabbi Jonathan Morgenstern is the senior rabbi at Young Israel of Scarsdale***

**Continued Silence is Deafening**

*By Melinda Katz*



We have all seen the horrors that have resulted from Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel's civilians and defense forces, and Hamas' horrifying use of civilians and hostages as human shields in the ensuing conflict. But when it comes to these terrorists' use of sexual violence against women as a tool of war, the silence has been deafening.

Why is it so hard to acknowledge this reality and simply say “Rape is wrong. In any context, at any time.” Even for those who disagree with Israel’s response to Hamas’ attacks, this should not be difficult. But it seems like it is.

As a public official, I have always prioritized the pursuit of justice for victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. In our state and city legislatures, I’ve fought to reduce and prevent violence against women; as the Queens district attorney, I investigate and successfully prosecute rapists and implemented initiatives to combat sexual violence. The stories of every victim and survivor of sexual assault deserve to be heard, supported, and given justice.

And as a Jewish woman, I have long stood up for all victims of bigotry and hatred, whether it is antisemitism or Islamophobia, racial bias, hatred directed against members of the LGBTQ community, or any other group who faces discrimination.

Our entire city and state are deeply enriched by our diversity. Here in Queens, the World’s Borough, we are a microcosm of the global society. Our efforts to uphold justice locally can serve as a model for addressing injustices globally.

So I cannot understand the lack of collective outrage, and I cannot remain silent about the sexual violence against Israeli women by Hamas terrorists on Oct. 7.

It is stunning to see so little media coverage and discussion of this, and hear the tepid responses from institutions like the UN surrounding the sexual assaults and rape committed by Hamas. Silence is complicity, not neutrality. Choosing not to address these horrific crimes denies victims their voice and their justice.

Only by raising awareness can we ensure that these serious human rights violations are not ignored or neglected any further.

The details of these crimes to emerge from eyewitness accounts and testimonies of first responders, and morgue workers are beyond horrific. They include reports of survivors recounting witnessing gang rapes, naked female corpses found tied to beds, and victims mutilated with scissors or a knife.

The sexual violence against women by Hamas is not just alarming; it is a call to action for every individual and organization who says they are committed to human rights and

dignity. As Hillary Clinton said, “Women’s rights are human rights.” Why is it so hard to uphold this principle when those women are Israeli?

And you do not need to be deeply committed to the safety and security of Israel — as I am — to do so. This issue transcends religious or political affiliations, ideologies, or where you stand on the war. It is about standing up against sexual violence and rape.

Yet many in the international community and here at home either ignore or equivocate on the reports of Hamas’ sexual violence. I am especially disappointed by the lack of outrage from those who claim to fight for women’s rights. Such stances are not only a failure in supporting victims but also undermine the global fight against sexual violence. Have we forgotten our collective humanity?

Rape and sexual violence are abhorrent in any circumstance and must be universally condemned without conditions, no matter what side of any conflict one is on. The failure to do so not only harms the survivors but also emboldens the perpetrators — not only in this case, but potentially far into the future.

But where is the outrage? Why won’t activists stand with a collective voice and say “Rape is wrong, period.” If we allow anyone to contextualize this brutality because of political affiliation, we are making this violence acceptable in future conflicts and future wars. And we can never allow that to happen.

Those of us committed to fighting sexual violence have a moral obligation to stand up against such atrocities wherever they occur. Our collective voice is powerful tool to advocate for the rights and dignity of all victims of sexual assault and gender-based violence.

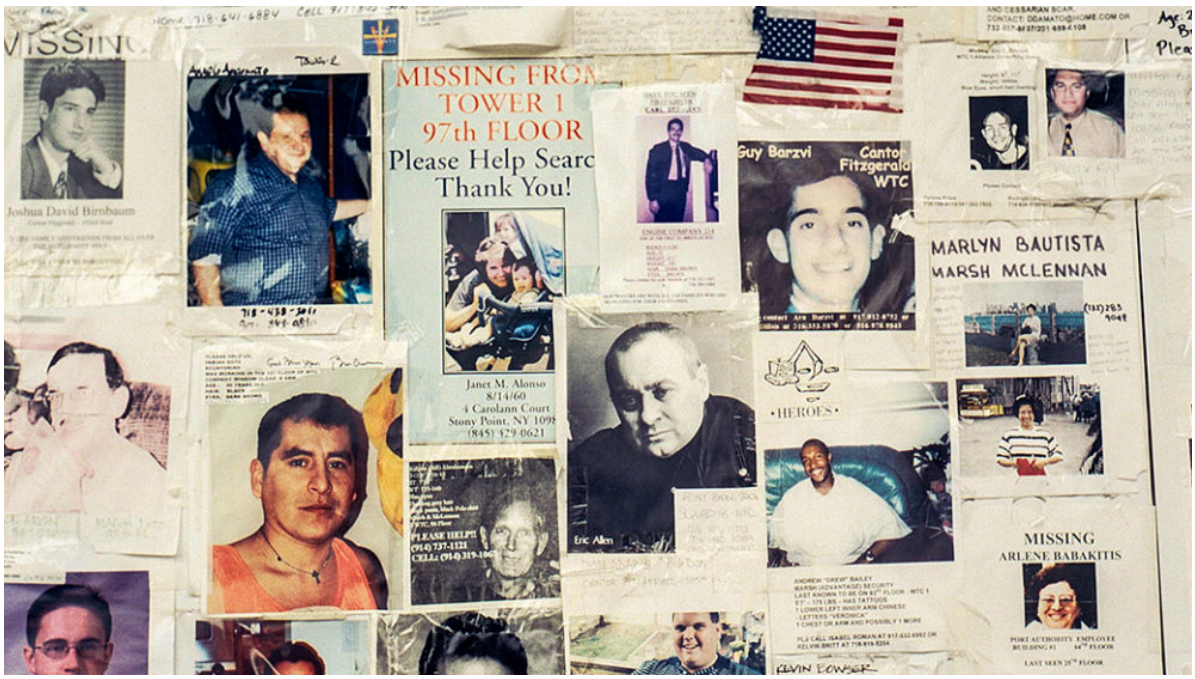
Together, we must ensure that the horrors faced by these women are not forgotten. Outrage is the proper response here, so let’s stand in solidarity on that point for all women. The time for silence is over; the time for action is now.

***Melinda Katz is the District Attorney of Queens. This essay was originally printed in the New York Daily News and is featured with Ms. Katz’ permission.***

**Sliding Doors: 9/11 to 10/7**
*By Sara Forman*

Twenty-three years ago, terrorists crashed two planes into the World Trade Center, one into the Pentagon and another into a field in Pennsylvania, killing thousands of Americans in the deadliest attack on U.S. soil since Pearl Harbor. It is a moment frozen in time for any New Yorker who lived through that day. Seared in our brains are images of horror and heroism. The bodegas blasting 1010 WINS in unison, the sirens, the smoke, the people plunged into a state of panic, not knowing what to do about what was physically missing from our City – let alone who was missing. Anyone in the City that day can recall with precision the hours of September 11, 2001 as fresh and real as though it happened yesterday.

It's not an alternate reality to recall how it didn't matter who you were or where you came from – every New Yorker, and even every American, suffered horribly that day. That is the cruelty of the random nature of terrorism – by death or witness, we all recognized our vulnerability.




The time immediately post-9/11 was one that united Americans in a period of national reconciliation and mourning not felt in decades. From Congress to the States, the White House and the international community – even from the United Nations, helping New

York was everyone's focus. New Yorkers were united in anguish and the knowledge that the terrorism that destroyed part of our community was borne out of evil intent. We mourned together in Union Square and all across the city with the faces of the missing mothers, daughters, fathers, brothers, sisters, brothers, and friends posted on every available surface.

We had yet to realize how fortunate we were that it was unquestionable that Osama Bin Laden was a terrorist. He planned and executed a terrorist operation that killed thousands of Americans because of his hatred for America's liberal values. There was no one in mainstream positions of relevance or academia suggesting we examine the context of the attack or provide a cause and consider how it was actually legitimate. We were attacked and innocent people were murdered.

The attack of October 7, 2023 was Israel's 9/11. It was a coordinated, calculated and cold-blooded mass murder.

What we did not see was an outpouring of shared grief or a united world community afterward. Instead, we saw the birth of a new, 21st century "Big Lie," a new kind of mass exulting over Jewish death delivered not by a Cossack's sword but by the stroke of a keyboard. Jews were not offered the option to bury, let alone mourn, our dead before the anti-Israel machine began to churn, manipulating the discourse online and in real life.

The facts and charges of terrorism quickly evolved once Israel began to root out Hamas. Hostage posters were callously ripped down, often by laughing and jeering people. Massive protests supporting the terrorists and mocking the victims crowded the streets and tore apart our campuses. Politicians aligned with far-left movements used their sizable platforms to laud the protests and uplift their cause, eager to demonize those against it with charges of "supporting genocide." Hiding behind the First Amendment, or by a cowardly decree that an institution would specifically now be neutral on significant events going forward, the mobs were empowered by the lack of significant condemnation or consequences and their words, actions. International antisemitic vandalism, overt intimidation, harassment and physical attacks on Jews around the world have become commonplace, even mundane.




The terrorist leaders of Hamas are looked to as some kind of warped statesmen, to be negotiated with and capitulated to instead of eliminated in the eyes of the international community. The United Nations has failed at every aspect of its purpose, its staff complicit in the attacks. The hostages are an afterthought to most of the world, as we near a year of their horrific captivity.

Looking back to 9/11, we live in an upside-down world as far as 10/7 is concerned. The victims of 9/11 were offered humanity, empathy for their ordinary lives so similar to our own, and their families' anguish and suffering was borne by all. Americans felt a connection to anyone in those dark days after the attack because almost everyone was distraught and gutted by what had occurred. This sentiment does not exist as far as 10/7 is concerned for the Israeli people, victims, and families. After all that we have seen and experienced in the last year, it remains unclear what it will take for the world to recognize Jewish suffering in real time.

We will continue to fight for the hostages and pray for an end to their captivity and a return to their families. We must. Because no one else will.

***Sara Forman is the Executive Director of the New York Solidarity Network (NYSN).***

**He Was Everyone's Hersh**
*By Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz*




Hersh's charismatic smile let you know he was, as his mother Rachel described, a "happy-go-lucky, laid back, good-humored, respectful and curious person." He was, as the death announcement put it, "a child of light, love, and peace." People were drawn to the story of a young man who loved soccer and music, had a passion for geography and travel, who had just gone to six music festivals in Europe over the span of nine weeks.

And then came October 7th. Hersh's last text messages to his family at 8:11 AM were "I love you" and "I'm sorry."

Hamas kidnapped 251 hostages that day. But a statistic doesn't ignite the same passion as an actual person, and through Hersh, the world connected to all of the hostages. Heads of State spoke about Hersh. At the Democratic National Convention, many in the crowd openly wept for Hersh, chanting "bring them home." His image was posted everywhere; "Bring Hersh Home" was graffitied on walls and printed on posters. Tehillim groups prayed for Hersh and a Sefer Torah was written in his merit.

After Hamas murdered Hersh, millions of people cried; they cried for all of the hostages, including the 101 who remain in captivity.

Hersh's story is one of love. His parents Rachel and Jon Goldberg-Polin advocated for him 24/7. Despite their overwhelming pain, what Rachel called "our planet of beyond pain, our planet of no sleep, our planet of despair, our planet of tears," they found the strength to speak out every single day and remind the world how many days it had been since Hersh was first taken captive. Rachel and Jon traveled everywhere to do everything and anything possible to bring him home.

Most of all they told the world how much they loved Hersh and got the world to love Hersh as well. Even at the funeral, in an otherworldly expression of spiritual strength, Rachel declared that "I am so grateful to God, and I want to do hakarat hatov (offer gratitude) and thank God right now, for giving me this magnificent present of my Hersh… For 23 years I was privileged to have this most stunning treasure, to be Hersh's Mama. I'll take it and say thank you. I just wish it had been for longer."

The Rambam says that when you truly love someone, "you will recount their praises and call on other people to love them." And that is what Rachel and Jon did.

Love has its limits. At Hersh's funeral, the speakers apologized to him for being unable to bring him home; sadly, this immense outpouring of love could not accomplish what everyone desperately wanted. But that is not the end of this story. The Song of Songs says "love is as strong as death." Jon declared at the end of his eulogy that Hersh's memory "can begin a revolution." And without question that is what love can do.

Love is belittled because it is bewildering. It is immaterial, a force that needs to be reckoned with but that cannot be measured. Charles Darwin wondered whether altruism would disprove his theory of natural selection; to sacrifice oneself for others contradicts a theory centered on a single-minded pursuit of survival. (A person of faith grappling with the same question would see the traces of a divine love tucked away in the DNA of the universe.) From a political standpoint, love is the frail runner-up to raw power. Machiavelli wrote that, "it would be best to be both loved and feared. But since the two rarely come together, anyone compelled to choose will find greater security in being feared than in being loved." In a world about survival and strength, love is seen as a veneer that covers up far uglier forces.

Judaism takes a very different view and sees love as the very foundation of the universe. There are commandments to love God and to love all of humanity, both the neighbor and the stranger. Hillel explained that the entire Torah can be reduced to the commandment of loving others; one first experiences the divine in interpersonal connections, and only from there does the rest of the Torah become comprehensible.

The world begins with love; the Book of Psalms says "the world was created in kindness." Rav Saadia Gaon and Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto see love as God's motivation to create the universe. Love becomes the spiritual blueprint for all of existence.

The human love we have for others reflects this larger divine love. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook offers a fascinating perspective on Shir HaShirim, the Song of Songs, a biblical book written in the style of a love song. In the Talmud, Rabbi Akiva had already reinterpreted Shir HaShirim as a metaphor for the love between man and God; ordinary love songs don't belong in a holy text.

Rabbi Kook offers a fascinating reinterpretation of Rabbi Akiva, and explains that the ordinary love songs in Shir HaShirim are actually a small-scale reflection of the greater love between man and God; everyday love also offers a glimpse into the Holy of Holies. Rav Kook reminds us that our "ordinary" loves are not ordinary at all. Every true love leads a person to the Divine.

It's difficult to talk about love in a time of war. Yes, love sometimes requires a person to go into battle to protect their family, reluctantly but resolutely. But that is not the goal; Isaiah dreamt of a world where the swords are beaten into plowshares. War is our nightmare; the dream is peace, of each person sitting contentedly under their own vine and their own fig tree.

And that is the love we continue to search for, a transcendent force that will transform history. Rachel explained that Hersh had a unique ability to bring people together and that he had "befriended… German (soccer) fans over the years when they visited Jerusalem to watch their team play soccer. Together they painted a peace mural with both Arab and Jewish residents near our home in Jerusalem…"



We pray for the day when this will be more than a mural.

Jews have always chosen love, even when it is difficult to do so. Machiavelli's approach is tempting; pure strength seems to dominate on the world stage. But it is also mistaken; brute force works for a generation or two, until there is a crisis. Then the fear disappears, and the ruler is deposed. Power is as finite as those who wield it, grasped tightly by princes whose lives are short and temporary.

To survive for a generation or two, one needs power; to survive for millennia, one needs love. And that is the story of Jewish history. Jews are a people who never quit because they had a passion for God, Torah, and the Jewish people. The love Jews around the world had for Hersh (who was named for a great-uncle who had perished in the Holocaust) is part of this same neverending story. The Jewish people are living proof that love outlasts power.

The day of Hersh's funeral, several posts on social media reported about children being named Hersh in the memory of Hersh Goldberg-Polin *z"l*. These were not relatives or even acquaintances of the family. They were just ordinary Jews who cared, who wanted Hersh's legacy to continue onward. They were naming their children after a man they loved but never knew.

They were sharing Rachel and Jon's remarkable love for Hersh with their own families.

And in doing so, they were starting the revolution of love once again.

May Hersh's memory be a blessing, and a revolution.

***Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz is the Senior Rabbi at Congregation Kehilath Jeshrun in Manhattan and the author of "Despite Everything: A Chronicle of Jewish Resilience in the Aftermath of October 7."***

**The Tests of Our Time (Rosh Hashanah 2024/5785)**
*By Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch*

**"For Jews, our deepest anxieties for the safety of our people — the product of centuries of repressed traumas — have reawakened and our confidence in the West's ability to withstand the test of civilization has been shaken," says Rabbi Ammi Hirsch on Rosh Hashanah, warning that what was unleashed against Israel on October 7th "threatens the West as much as it does the Middle East..."**

Evian, France is one of the most beautiful spots on earth. It sits on the south shore of Lake Geneva. In France, they call it Lac Leman. The French, being French, resent Geneva's dominance of this part of the world, and point out that the lake was called a variation of Leman already in Roman times.

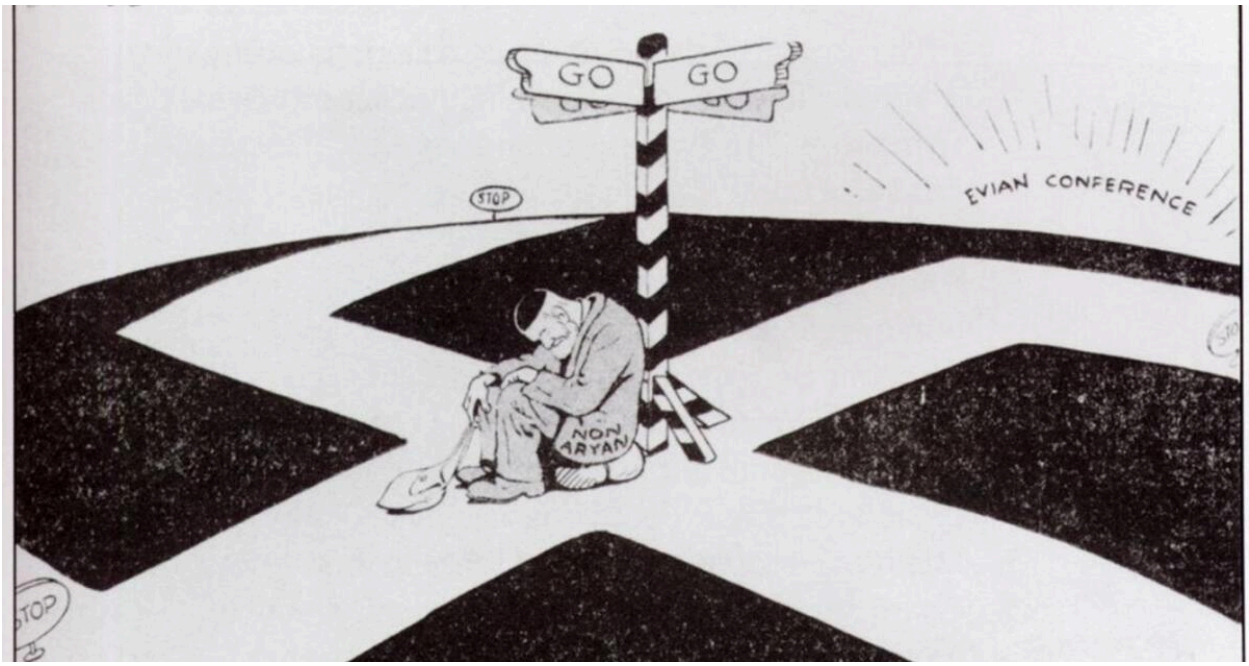
If you plunk yourself on the hills overlooking the town of Evian stunning vistas unfold before you. The azure water shimmers in the summer sun, that mesmerizing blue produced by the snow melt of mountain streams. Behind you are the legendary French ski resorts of Megeve, Meribel, Val d'Isere, Courcheval, and Chamonix. Mont Blanc rises from the mists, its snow-capped peak like icing on a cupcake. In front of you is Lausanne, and beyond, on the far shore, the incomparable rolling hills of Switzerland, carpeted in emerald green.

The Evian water bottling factory was built in the 19th century, when the town officially changed its name to Evian-les-Bains, the place of baths. Authorities wanted to encourage visitors to bathe in the spas, a practice dating back to the Romans, and after a day of wellness gamble at the casino. Their efforts paid off. For over a century, tourists have been flocking to Evian les-Bains.

And that's how Alison and I ended up there this summer. We were in the Geneva area, and wanted to see what all the fuss is about. A quick Google search revealed that the place to stay for a night was the Hotel Royal — about a mile from the lakeshore, up on the hill. As often happens to me in Europe, looking down on the serene town, and Switzerland beyond, my mind traveled back to the mid-20$^{th}$ century. Nazis roamed this part of the lake, but not the other side. Here, people choked under the German boot. There — a rowboat away — they breathed free.

The hotel's website describes the beauty, the attractions, the wellness, the spa, the food, and its aristocratic history. Emperors, sultans, maharajas and celebrities took up residence, including the likes of Rita Hayworth, Ringo Starr and Marcel Proust. British King Edward VII was the royal for whom the hotel was named.

I couldn't find on the website any description of the infamous Evian conference held in this very hotel in the summer of 1938. It is a black mark on the history of Europe, and reminding people of that disgrace is, apparently, not good for the business of carefree leisure. This is where delegates from 32 countries gathered to discuss how to save the Jews of Germany and occupied Austria while there was still time. They met for nine days from July 6 to 15, the season that I visited. They saw the same spectacular sights, the same captivating colors, the same old trees casting their evening shadows over Lake Geneva, the same bright lights of the casino shining across the serene waters. One after the other, they rose to express sympathy for the Jews of Europe, but no country except the Dominican Republic, and later Costa Rica, was willing to substantially raise their immigration quotas — including the United States that convened the conference. President Roosevelt was under immense pressure from the isolationist America First Committee to restrict immigration, especially for Jews.




The duplicity of the diplomats, the crocodile tears, their failure to produce any agreement to help the Jews under Nazi occupation, emboldened Hitler, and convinced him that the West didn't really care about Europe's Jews. Some historians believe that *Kristallnacht*

— the night of broken glass — four months after Evian - when synagogues and Jewish business throughout Germany and Austria were shattered — was a direct result of the failure of the conference. The international community might stomp and shout, Hitler concluded, but would not intervene to save the Jews of the Reich. He could do with them as he pleased.

The conference had the opposite of the intended effect on the West as well. Countries raised immigration barriers even more. Germany exploited the pathetic outcome for propaganda. "Should not the outside world be most grateful to us," Hitler derided, "for setting free these glorious bearers of culture — these most valuable members of the human race — and placing them at its disposal? How will the states so infatuated with these 'splendid people' explain why they are suddenly taking refuge in all sorts of pretenses just in order to deny asylum to these people?" If other nations agreed to take Jews, Hitler scoffed, he would help them leave - "for all I care, "even on luxury ships."

Upon the conclusion of Evian, historian Nora Levin, a Jewish American observer to the conference, wrote: "When the old trees of Evian cast their evening shadows over Lake Geneva, and the bright lights of the Casino shone across the serene waters, I was overcome with grief and despair… The course which the Evian Conference was taking… was a tragedy whose certain end was destruction. The gates had closed before us." *(p. 284 thesis — Jewish Trail of Tears)*

But at least the French food was great, and the views were amazing.

Years later, Vice President Walter Mondale said about the Evian Conference: "If each nation had agreed to take in 17,000 Jews at once, every Jew in the Reich could have been saved." They could have been saved. The nations could have acted. They chose not to. Think of what was lost. How many descendants would be alive today; how many good and great people who could have contributed so much to the welfare of the world were murdered or never born?

"At Evian they began with high hopes," Mondale said, "but they failed the test of civilization."

Much has changed since the mid-20th century. The times are not as desperate. Still, we have this nagging feeling that the world is entering what Churchill described in the 1930's as a "deepening and darkening corridor." For Jews, the two central tests of Evian

have reemerged in 21st-century form. First, our deepest anxieties for the safety of our people, the product of centuries of repressed traumas, have reawakened. And second, our confidence in the West withstanding the test of civilization has been shaken.

The Resurgence of Antisemitism

October 7, 2023, exposed the persistence of Jew-hatred constantly bubbling under the surface of Western societies that we thought was mostly suppressed. It is not that we were oblivious to the still-existing hostility. We remember the Pittsburgh synagogue massacre well. We vividly recall the "Jews will not replace us" chants from Charlottesville. But in terms of our daily routines, most of us related to Jew-hatred as we relate to our own mortality: We know it is inevitable, but we convince ourselves that, somehow, it will not happen to me.

One of the saddest developments since October 7 is the shock experienced by American Jews, who, for the first time in their lives, are encountering pervasive antisemitism. The realization that age-old hatreds are still alive and kicking, even in America, thrust American Jews into a crisis of confidence. We are beginning to hear eerie echoes of Europe, the haunting howls of hatred that brought our ancestors to these shores in the first place.



The nexus between anti-Zionism and antisemitism is now much clearer. Leaving aside the philosophical discussion of whether anti-Zionism, by definition, constitutes antisemitism, the effect, if not the intent, of anti-Zionism, is to generate intense hostility to Judaism and Jews themselves. How trippingly on the lips do the words “Palestine Free From the River to the Sea,” transform into “gas the Jews,” “kill the Jews,” “cleanse the world of Jews.” How naturally does hatred of Israel mutate into hatred of Jews. How easily do anti-Israel passions lead to violence against Jews and Jewish institutions.



We should have no illusions: Antisemitism always centers on the collective Jew — always. That is why atheist, secular, religious, ultra-liberal and ultra-conservative Jews from every part of Europe all met at Auschwitz. That is why atheist, secular, religious, ultra-liberal, ultra-conservative, advocates of two states and opponents of two states — were all slaughtered and kidnapped on October 7. Israelis who devoted their lives to coexistence with Palestinians, who advocated and acted on their behalf, were also brutally murdered. It didn’t matter what they actually believed. No one asked. They were viewed in terms of their proximity to the Jewish collective.




The naiveté, the historical ignorance of some Jews who think that they can present themselves as the “good Jews,” the “decent Jews,” the “moral Jews” — the ones who reject Zionism — is as infuriating as it is troubling. Infuriating, because they are so cocksure, so preachy, with no doubts and no qualms - and troubling, because it is a fool’s choice. It never worked in the past, and it won’t work now. Sooner or later they will come for you — the “good Jew.” This is history’s iron-clad rule, because the root cause of antisemitism is not our personal beliefs. The root cause is the existence of the Jewish collective — and by definition, no Jew can separate themselves from the Jewish collective, because that would be a contradiction-in-terms that even antisemites understand. You cannot virtue-signal your way out of your proximity to the Jewish people. Eventually, they will come for you, too.

It never mattered what Jews actually believed. In every era, even centuries before the establishment of the modern Zionist movement, Jews were always clothed with the most egregious sins of the era. For Communists we were capitalists; for capitalists we were Communists. For the religious we were secular, and for the secular we were religious. For the poor, we were rich, and for the rich we were poor. For supremacists we were both racially inferior and superior at one in the same time. Whatever the specific indictment, the common accusation was that Jews are conniving, cunning, cruel, conspiratorial, and consumed with cravings of control.

If you understand the history of classic antisemitism, the connection to today's anti-Zionism stares you in the face. The Jewish state has become the Jew of the world, humanity's ultimate villains, and accused of our era's worst transgressions. They have made the obscenity of anti-Zionism into a virtue. Israel stands in the way of human progress. To struggle against it is to struggle for freedom, goodness, justice and righteousness. As one speaker emphasized at an Oakland city council debate: "It is a contradiction to be pro-Israel and pro-humanity." The only thing preventing a peaceful and decent world is the Jewish state — the collective Jew.

This is classic antisemitism. Its roots run very deep. Israel's enemies have tried to portray her as genocidal for decades, since genocide is the ultimate evil of our times. To accuse the Jews — the victims of genocide - is to justify genocide against them. It is Holocaust denial in its sickest form. It empties the word "genocide" of meaning. Antisemites always accused the Jews of the very acts they intended for us. The Nazis accused the Jews of wanting to destroy German civilization — hence the Jewish people needed to be destroyed first, as an act of self-preservation.

Criticizing Jews is fine. We, ourselves, are the most critical, and self-critical, of all. Have you ever met an uncritical Jew? Opposing Israeli policies is fine. Most of us at one time or another opposed Israeli governments. Advocating for Palestinians is fine. I have tried to do that my entire career, which is why I have always supported a two-state solution. Protesting to relieve the carnage of war is fine. I, too, am devastated by the destruction, and have spoken of my anguish many times. Even not liking Jews is fine. "Who can fathom the human heart," Jeremiah preached. "It is beyond cure." And therefore — Jeremiah concluded: "God rewards a person by his deeds." All of us have our prejudices and predispositions. What matters is how we act on them. We are judged by our deeds, no matter what disturbing, disconcerting and discouraging desires we harbor in our hearts.

No country, no government and no community is beyond criticism. Even if I disagree, I will listen to your critique and endeavor to learn from you. We will study your narrative of the history of this awful conflict. We will debate with you all the terms and conditions of an eventual two-state solution that will bring dignity and coexistence to both peoples. We will consider your accusations of excessive force in Gaza and Lebanon, and study your suggestions, learned or not, on how you would have handled the military campaign differently, in a manner that would have reduced civilian casualties while still achieving security for Israel. We will reflect on your views when and how a ceasefire should have been effected. These are all legitimate issues.

But we will not debate with you whether the Jewish state, of all the countries of the world, has a right to exist. We will not debate whether we have a right to live. If we cannot persuade you to leave us alone we will defend ourselves. What other choice is there? We have already tried everything else. The days of prostrating before the marauding murderers are over. Israeli literary great, Amos Oz, an outspoken liberal throughout his entire life, reminded us that "no one copied the model the Jews were forced to sustain for 2000 years — the model of a civilization without the tools of statehood. "For me," Oz said, "this drama ended with the murder of Europe's Jews by Hitler." Oz often described how his father regularly endured the refrain from his Lithuanian fellows: "Jews, go home to Palestine." Now, said Oz, people scream, "Jews, get out of Palestine."

Wherever individual Jews decide to live, Israel is the last stop for the Jewish people. There is nowhere else to go. We are open to all discussions related to coexistence. We will not debate with you national suicide.

The Test of Western Civilization

From that Shabbat of Simchat Torah when I first heard the news, I felt that October 7 would pose a test not only for Israel, not only for Palestinians, not only for Jews — but for the West, itself.

I knew that the coming war imposed on Israel would be brutal. No country, especially one as small and vulnerable as Israel, could tolerate a murderous regime on its doorstep, a mile from its towns. I knew that what Israel would need to do would result in the deaths of hundreds of Israeli security personnel, and thousands of Gazans, no matter how careful the military operations. There would be no other way to ensure that October 7 could

never happen again. The only way to get to Hamas would be to plow through their tunnels and booby-trapped hospitals, mosques, schools and residential neighborhoods, all serving as human shields. I knew that the easiest way to end the war would be to insist that Hamas release the hostages and lay down its arms — but that no one around the world would even think to pressure Hamas, least of all Palestinians and their supporters in the West.

I knew that when Hezbollah began firing on Israel on October 8 that the long-dreaded war with the terrorist group was coming, sooner or later. I knew that no one worldwide would really care that Northern Israel was subjected to an unprovoked daily barrage resulting in the displacement of 80,000 Israeli civilians — until Israel responded with ferocity — and then — it would all be about Israelis attacking Lebanese civilians: That demands for restraint, ceasefires, and accusations of disproportionality apply only to Israel.

And I knew by sunset of October 7, that once Israel responded militarily, the West would be put to the test: Would we be willing to defend our principles, or have we become so affluent, so comfortable, so detached from the real world, so used to sending other people's children to fight our wars — and so confused after years of political and cultural polarization — that we would fail to see that what was unleashed on that day threatens the West as much as it does the Middle East.

Since October 7 my fears have intensified. For years now, some of us have been warning of a deteriorating commitment to liberal values, camouflaged by a torrent of high-sounding words like "progress, civil and human rights, anti-racism, and anti-colonialism," but too many have been unwilling or unable to see it. Ideologies that divide people by the color of their skin rather than the content of their character; philosophies that reduce all human conflict to oppressor and oppressed, subjugation and freedom fighting, racists and anti-racists — are not liberal values — and as a liberal, they are offensive to me. These are illiberal and dangerous ideas that threaten the future of our country and Western civilization. And, as always, first and foremost these ideas threaten Jews. We are always going to find ourselves in the outcast group, on the wrong side of virtue.



Universities, elite schools, and human rights organizations couldn't even find the compassion to identify with the victims of Hamas, let alone condemn the perpetrators, even before Israel responded militarily. Longtime interfaith colleagues who showered us with support after the Pittsburgh massacre, our friends with whom we waged many communal struggles for peace, tolerance and understanding, were eerily silent. Jews slaughtered in their pews in Pittsburgh was self-evidently murderous, but a hundred times more Jews slaughtered in their bedrooms in Israel, was somehow morally opaque for them. How could that be?! Not only did many avoid condemning Hamas, they considered the massacres legitimate, even admirable, resistance. These were our decades-long partners, brothers and sisters in arms. Jews helped build and sustain America's great universities. We devoted ourselves to civil liberties and human rights, participating in, and helping to found, some of America's preeminent civil rights organizations. Jews were intensely active in labor unions and were its fiercest defenders. Our own Rabbi Stephen Wise, America's foremost Zionist, was among this country's leading advocates for workers' rights.



What business do liberals have supporting those who oppress women, gays, minorities and Christians? How could feminist organizations with whom we marched arm in arm not condemn horrific sexual violence against Israeli women? What to make of climate activist allies, who take time out of their days and money out of their coffers to oppose Israel, as if there is some insidious intersectional interplay between the evils of the Jewish state and the perils of climate change. Why do young adults, especially, who are so acutely sensitive to the assignment of moral accountability, fail to assign moral agency to Palestinians? Why treat them as passive victims bearing no political or moral responsibility for their actions?

How to explain the failure of university administrators to enforce their own policies? Is it just the uneven quality of leadership, or does their willingness to tolerate anti-Jewish and anti-Israel environments on their campuses, in violation of their own codes of behavior, a window into the mindset of administrators, DEI functionaries and faculty members? Was it that these intellectuals — by their own self-assessment some of the most brilliant people in the world - could no longer distinguish between terrorism and freedom fighting, democracy and dictatorship, decency and degeneracy? Was the refusal of so many universities to issue any moral guidance on Hamas' brutality simply a localized failure of leadership on the part of individual presidents and administrations, or does it point to deeper systemic failings of higher education?

October 7 was an easy moral case. Babies in cribs and grandparents who could barely walk were slaughtered in their homes. What does it take for those who consider themselves paragons of social justice to speak out for Jews — and if not Jews — at least in defense of the central values of Western enlightenment? What would these self-professed moral exemplars have done at Evian? Would they have passed the test of civilization? Are universities still devoted to the free exchange of ideas in pursuit of moral truth, or have they, too, become yet another establishment intent on advancing narrow philosophical dogma and imposing stifling social conformity through widespread dissemination of political and intellectual intolerance?

Alas, the sad history of the human species teaches that there is no correlation between high intelligence and high morality. When radicalism hijacks liberalism and prejudice imprisons reason, even the most dazzling intellects darken. The mind still sparkles, but in subjugation to a corrupted heart that gradually takes possession of the soul.




The illness has seeped into high schools and even middle schools. Parents here with us today — you know what I mean; you have seen it in your children's schools. The outrageously libelous racist and colonial narrative used against Israelis is so pervasive in educational institutions that it is taught as a fact even in elementary schools. The lack of context, nuance, history and pedagogical humility create a kind of identity fairytale of good versus evil so overwhelming that those in its rapture become mindless automatons, incapable of measured thought. Every Israeli action is illegitimate or disproportional, and every action taken against it is appropriate and justifiable. It is deeply disconcerting that this one small lonely democracy in the Middle East, flawed in some respects but that tries to — and often does — uphold Western values — is castigated so passionately that even elementary schools educate their youngsters to oppose this deviant nation.

What can we do?

First, recognize the urgency of the times. Don't put your head in the sand. We must win this battle of ideas and reassert basic norms of Western liberal morality. Do not be in denial. If we cannot identify threats, we cannot overcome them. Do not be complacent. If we are unwilling to act upon threats we cannot defeat them.

Second, remember that ultimately, our well-being is tied to the well-being of others. We are diminished and less effective when we act alone. While we have many opponents, we also have many friends. Reach out to the good people of all backgrounds and persuasions. They, too, are repelled by radicalism and repulsed by flag-burning, intimidation,

desecration of monuments, illegality, and unlawful occupation of buildings and town squares. The country is filled with smart, decent, talented caring people in educational institutions, local, state and national government, political parties, the media and social justice circles. Work with them, even if you disagree on many matters. Most social goods come from the center, the moderates — those who are willing to listen to one another and find common ground for the greater good. Moderation is a strength, not a weakness. Extremism leads to catastrophe.

Third, fight back. Fight back hard and fight back everywhere, each in our own corner, whatever we can do. Parents, look carefully at what is going on in middle schools, high schools, and even elementary schools. Get to know the faculty and the administrators. Inquire about their views and values. They should hear from you regularly, especially if they pursue or tolerate anti-Israel and anti-Jewish bias. And if they do not respond to your appeals, continue to press the case, reaching out to the many other parents of all religions, ethnicities and backgrounds, who are equally disquieted. Be active. Be vigorous. Our children, too, like every other child, have the right to wear distinctive Jewish garb without being harassed. They have the right to be protected from physical, verbal and virtual bullying. They have the right to hang a mezuzah on the door of their dorms, and not have it ripped off.

Jewish faculty in schools and universities, do your part. There is an unsettling lack of energy from some faculty quarters. Do not be intimidated. “To sin by silence when we should protest makes cowards of men. The few who dare must speak and speak again to right the wrongs of many” (Wilcox).

In your workplaces, take example from the bold actions of some of New York’s most prominent law firms that will now screen applicants for anti-Jewish provocations. Philanthropists, take example from the bold actions of some of America’s most generous donors, who have made a real difference by withholding contributions from universities that tolerate anti-Jewish activities on campus.

Young people — Gen Zs, university students, teenagers — in the past years I have met many hundreds of the most courageous, intelligent, articulate and impressive young adults. In so many ways, you are so much better than we were at your age. Rediscover your Jewish pride. You are not the first generation of Jews to endure anti-Jewish animosities. You will not be the last. Study Jewish history. For some reason, God has decreed a rocky and thorny road for our people. Looking back through the centuries, it

has been a long, hard, tragic march from Sinai. But the journey has also been filled with exhilarating accomplishment, transcendent meaning and noble purpose. I hope you feel this, sense this, and are empowered by it. I hope that you, too, will do what our ancestors did: Walk the long and winding Jewish road with faith in the ultimate redemption of our people and all people.

Do not begrudge these years — they can make you better. Nothing inspires us more than the fight for principle. Moral sentiment and grim resolve lift the heart and stiffen the spine. We get better through moral struggle. Fight back — and fight back hard. Fight as hard as our opponents. You will find many allies — both Jewish and non-Jewish. Do not ignore the outrages perpetrated against you and fellow Jews on American campuses. We have learned throughout Jewish history that if we allow these anti-Jewish mindsets to fester, eventually antisemitism worsens. To ignore antisemitism is to allow the culture of Jew-hatred to settle in institutions, rendering its eradication much more difficult. Antisemitism devastates not only Jews, but also the institutions and societies that allow or encourage it.

And finally: it is time for all of you to return to the Jewish community. Rediscover your Jewish inheritance. Raise your children to be proud and knowledgeable Jews. Engage the Jewish community. Be part of a great and good people that contributed so much to humanity. Give of your time and your resources. Everyone should be giving more money now to Jewish institutions, no matter your financial capacities. There is no need to bankrupt yourselves, or even change your standard of living. Give what you can. Jewish tradition requires even those who receive *tzedakah* to give *tzedakah*.

And those of you blessed with prodigious financial resources — consider giving a lot of money now to the Jewish community. We need your support. Synagogues need to improve. Rabbis need to improve. Jewish schools need to improve. Jewish camps need to improve. Our communal agencies need to improve. A myriad of new initiatives to contend with the new challenges have been established. They, too, need support. It should be clear to us how decades of neglect have corroded the spirit of successive Jewish generations. Now is the time.

Do not give up on efforts to improve the general welfare of our world. We can never give up on our responsibility to help make life better for all. That would be a Jewish contradiction in terms. But if you withheld money from entities you previously supported, give it to the Jews. Some of those institutions of education and higher

education, social justice movements, international organizations and political agencies we have so generously supported — have disappointed and even betrayed us, their hatred of Israel distorting their own principles and legacies.



Golda Meir, an observer to the Evian Conference from Palestine, later to become the fourth prime minister of Israel, who was not even allowed to be seated with the delegates, or speak during the proceedings, later told the press: “There is only one thing I hope to see before I die, and that is that my people should not need expressions of sympathy anymore.”

She lived to see that. Israel was created so that our people should not need expressions of sympathy anymore. Never forget what it was like to be powerless and at the mercy of the dark lords. Never forget that with all the sympathy expressed by the world powers in 1938, sympathy alone did not save the Jews of Europe. It is a basic law of human nature that we can tolerate much more pain in others than in ourselves. Renee Richier was the chief concierge at the Hotel Royal during the Evian Conference. Years later he recalled the mood of the delegates:

*“Very important people were here and all the delegates had a very nice time. They took pleasure cruises on the lake. They gambled at night at the Casino. They took mineral baths and massages at the Establissement Thermal. Some of them took to the excursion to*

*Chamonix to go summer skiing. Some went riding; we have, you know, some of the finest stables in France. But, of course, it is difficult to sit indoors hearing speeches when all the pleasures that Evian offers are outside." (Jewish Trail of Tears, page 350)*

The sympathy of others is welcome, but sooner or later compassion dissolves into compassion fatigue. It is difficult to listen all day to tales of woe and human misery when all the pleasures of the world beckon outside.

In the end, if you want to be saved, you must save yourself. If you want to live you must choose to live.

*U'vacharta ba'chayim le'ma'an tichyeh ata ve'zar'a'cha…lashevet al ha'a'da'mah asher nishba Adonai la'avotecha le'Avraham, le'Yitzhak u'le'Yaacov latet lahem.*

Choose life so that you and your offspring shall live...and dwell in the land that God pledged to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

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