



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
Congregation Beth Tikvah
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday October 13, 2023 ~ Parsha: Bereisheet

Now We Know

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

It has often been said -- were the Arab armies to lay down their arms for a day, nothing would happen. But if Israel were to do so, the response would be brutal and immediate. Sadly, now we know that these words were not just rhetoric or a talking point or an expression of moral superiority. Now we know that this is a statement of fact. The only thing that may have surprised observers was how immediate and how savage that truth would be.

We are experiencing one of the darkest periods in modern Jewish history. I cannot claim any greater insight or understanding than those reading my message today. But I would like to at least add some perspective and context that is often missing despite the sympathy demonstrated toward Israel at this moment. The events of this past week are the largest single loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust. They recall the violence of the pogroms in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that sent so many of our grandparents to these shores. They are reminiscent of the 17th century [Chmielnicki](#) Massacres in Ukraine. That's the level of violence and murder that Israel has experienced.

For 27 years I have taught the congregation that at times of crisis, it is our responsibility to think critically, rationally and not emotionally. I know that that is difficult to achieve in almost any situation where the safety of the Jewish people and the welfare of the State of Israel are in jeopardy. It is virtually impossible when each day we learn more about the atrocities visited upon Israel's men, women and children. Even the most alienated and assimilated Jew's hearts are broken at the sight of Jews murdered, abused, and kidnapped to Gaza by Hamas terrorists. How could we resist

fantasies of violence, revenge and utter annihilation at such moments, knowing our powerlessness to directly affect the events on the ground? Nonetheless, outrage, hatred and unhelpful suggestions are not an action plan, and despair is not an option.

The one emotion we must feel at this time is solidarity -- solidarity and unity with our brothers and sisters in Israel and with Jews around the world. Towards that end, I want to prepare you for what we can reasonably expect in the next several days and weeks as Israel weighs its various military and diplomatic options.

1. As I said earlier, while initial press coverage in most outlets has been sympathetic to Israel (with major exceptions to be sure), if the past can help us predict the future, much of this sympathy will fade soon, replaced by calls for “de-escalation”, “proportionality” and other euphemisms for allowing the current crisis to end without Israel achieving its goal of eradicating Hamas.
2. There will be efforts to evoke sympathy for the enemy as Hamas continues to hide behind civilians, schools, hospitals and United Nations institutions which often cover for Hamas military installations and rockets. We must sadly understand this for what it is and steel ourselves for a ferocious Israeli response. Israel simply cannot return to the *status quo ante* that existed last Friday. It is clear that its citizens will not permit it.
3. There will be attempts to explain that the reason for the attack is because of frustration over the so called "occupation" ignoring the fact that Israel relinquished Gaza to the Palestinian Authority (another group of vicious and unrepentant terrorists but that's fodder for another message) in 2005. So, let's review. Hamas took control of Gaza in a bloody coup against the Palestinian Authority in 2007. It was only then that Israel closed the Gaza border. (Yes, the border was open until then and thousands of Gazans crossed the border into Israel every day, a fact so conveniently ignored by even the most sympathetic press coverage). It is Hamas and Hamas alone that is responsible for the conditions in Gaza. The only Israelis in Gaza are those being held captive as hostages.

We will need to remain firm and resolute in the face of this unprecedented crisis. Israel will fight this war. Thank God for President Biden's firm and unequivocal support for Israel, his understanding of the pain that Jewish people are feeling, and his recognition of the geopolitical implications of this tragedy. Just as the world changed on 9/11, Israel will be different going forward. It will take decades to undo the damage to the Israeli psyche.

We also have a role to play.

Write to Senators, Members of Congress and the White House to thank them for their steadfast “rock solid” support for Israel. Write those letters today!

When a media outlet or social media posting misrepresents, misreports or distorts what is going on, speak up – respond, call or write and let them know it is unacceptable. Respond today!

Watch for information about community rallies in support of Israel. Make a special effort to join with us at religious services as we pray each day for Israel, and her captives. Show up today!

The cost of the war and the damage it has done will be significant and the burden must not be only absorbed by Israelis. Please consider significant contributions to the organizations I have suggested in my emails to the congregation Please contribute to organizations that you know and trust as well. And if you are unsure where to donate, please send me donations at the synagogue and I will send them for you.

Many in our synagogue family and greater Jewish community have friends and relatives in Israel. Some may be serving in the armed forces to defend the country. I have three nephews serving in the IDF right now. We pray for the safety of all those in Israel and for the safe return of those being held captive.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner