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## A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Hillel D. Gold

Friday July 26, 2024 ~ Parsha: Pinchas

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Shalom once again from Jerusalem!

I write to you late in the afternoon of the fast day of *Shiva Asar B'Tammuz* (17th day of Tammuz) which was observed on Tuesday July 23. As a collective Jewish community the world over, we have entered into the saddest and most contemplative portion of the Jewish calendar, culminating, three weeks from today with *Tisha b'Av* (the fast of the 9th of Av, commemorating the destruction of the two Temples here in Jerusalem, and which stood only about 2 miles from where I live.)

These three weeks of the summer have always provided the Jewish people with the opportunity to take a step back and contemplate our personal actions and review our people's history. Perhaps this is no truer and more relevant during the current year, one that has been consumed in war - whether from afar or up close - for what is now approaching 300 days (today is Day 291).

I am frequently asked by friends and acquaintances about the mood here in Israel and what life here is like at this time. Much of the answer is dependent on two realities: a) where a person is located and b) whether one has family currently serving in the IDF (Israel Defense Force) or not. Living here in Jerusalem, life goes on at a vigorous pace and things, at least outwardly, appear "normal". Sure, there are many more people nowadays who walk around carrying firearms (three members of my own family fall into this category!) and the signs to "bring them home now" and the increasing number of days that Hersh Goldberg-Polin has been in captivity appear on the masking tape on people's chests, with that number changing and increasing

daily. But life "appears normal", especially here in Jerusalem, where we are insulated a bit since the enemy is generally hesitant about firing rockets in the city lest they were to damage their own sacred spaces. But, nearly every conversation, no matter how brief or lengthy, ends with the phrase *besorot tovot* - may we be privileged to hear good news. Those two Hebrew words convey a combination of hope, fear, and uncertainty about the future.

Elsewhere in the country, the reality is different. The northern part of Israel is essentially a ghost town. People who were displaced from their homes on October 7 have been assured that they will be able to return home in time for the beginning of the new school year in September. Yet, serious doubts abound whether this promise is reality or illusion. And of no less importance is the question that even if the residents of the north *could* return home, *would* they would even want to do so. Why is that even a question? Because not a day goes by without the North being attacked by rockets fired by Hezbollah in Lebanon. People are genuinely afraid to return to their homes and resume their former lives. Who can blame them? Hezbollah's strength is rumored to be such that they make Hamas look like the minor leagues. Israelis who live in the North genuinely fear being kidnapped or attacked by Hezbollah. Hezbollah is rumored to have upwards of 150,000 rockets, and a tunnel system that dwarfs the tunnel system constructed by Hamas in Gaza. The situation is serious, and the situation in the South also continues to be in flux with an uncertain outcome and future. And so, uncertainty remains in the hearts and minds of nearly every Israeli, even if that uncertainty is less frequently voiced aloud at this moment in time compared to a few months ago.

But in these times of uncertainty and danger, perhaps we should turn to the venerated words of the Hebrew Bible, such as those found in the Book of Proverbs, which states in chapter 29 verse 25, "A snare brings terror to a person, but he who trusts in the Lord will be safeguarded."

We are a people for whom *emunah*, hope, has been of immense value. *Emunah* has sustained us through the centuries during times of crisis and despair. As we begin these three challenging weeks that will culminate on Tisha B'av, I hope that we, Jews

in Israel and around the world, can utilize this period of time to deepen our trust in God and find ways to engage constructively with one another to bring about an improved reality and a period of good times and good news that we may all be privileged to share with one another.

Wishing everyone *b'sorot tovot* from Jerusalem.

Rabbi Hillel D. Gold