



November 7, 2023

Dear *Hevre*/Friends,

Since October 7th for many of us, the world has changed dramatically and we are still trying to find the new ground beneath our feet. While we are trying to adjust to our new experience of being in this world, we also recognize that many of our friends and peers are carrying on as if everything were, “normal.” Many of us in the Jewish community are indeed still trying to find our footing and I want to name and acknowledge that for many of us, this is not “normal.”

At the same time, we have now been in this new reality for a month, a 30 day period referred to in mourning as *sheloshim*. At the *sheloshim* mark, mourners are forced to confront the reality that while everything has changed forever for them, and there is no going back, they also need to begin figuring out how they will move forward in their new existence. For many Israelis, this moment has now become a “wartime normal.”

I too have been struggling with the concept and question of how to move forward in a moment that continues to be fraught with so much pain, fear, anguish, and anger. There is a relatively new quotation floating around social media that resonates with me. It’s one of those things that should go without saying, but in these tense times, it bears saying anyway. “It is possible to care about more than one group of people at a time.” Indeed our hearts are all stretched and forced to hold so much more pain than one month ago, and we are also challenged to stretch the muscles of love and compassion to encompass innocence and humanity.

The president of my Rabbinical Association, Rabbi Wechterman recently wrote, “Elie Weisel, Holocaust survivor and author, taught that the opposite of love is indifference. If that is true, then the precursor to the depths of pain we are feeling, to the sadness, to the anger, to the restlessness and desire to do something, anything, to make it better, must, in fact, be love. We are hurting so much at this moment precisely because of our

capacity for love. And that is something that can continue to sustain us through this dark moment—our shared capacity for love that leads to the experience of this pain.” I do know this to be true, Kerem Shalom has a deep capacity for love, and I am personally leaning on that at this moment, love for friends and family, love of our community, love of the Jewish people, *ahavat yisrael*, and love of innocence and humanity.

We must find the strength to hold onto our center when extremists are pulling so hard in opposite directions and we are internally buffeted about by our own rapidly cycling emotions. There is a Hebrew letter *vav* in the dove’s beak in our synagogue logo for a reason. The *vav* is intentional, the *vav* is a conjunction often translated as “and.” We must hold a deep conviction in a “both/and” approach to the current crisis and not acquiesce to an extreme view on any one side.

T’ruah published a statement last week in which they said, “We choose the side of humanity. We choose the side of Abraham, the very first Jew, who in our Torah *parashah* last week models hospitality and care for strangers, pleads on behalf of the innocents in a city slated for destruction, and also attempts to protect his own family from external danger. We learn from him that making a peace agreement with a foe may carry risk, but can also bring long-term security. And in a moment when too many offer easy answers, we strive to hold complexity. We seek answers that do not diminish the humanity of anyone in Israel, the West Bank, or Gaza.”

Hevre/Friends, wherever we go in the weeks and months ahead, let us choose love, community, humanity.

With a broken heart,
Kindness & Shalom,

Rabbi Darby