

“Hovering From Darkness to Light in Israel”

Bereisheet 5784

We are blessed to gather today for a joyous occasion.

This is an affirmation of life during this most terrible week... and it continues.

We gather amidst the darkest of days for the Jewish people since the Holocaust.

And it is not over - as we pray for our 150 [hostages](#), the bereaved families, the injured, our soldiers, and all the civilians who are threatened on both sides,



And even we, here in the US, Jewish institutions have been threatened.

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But we will not be intimidated.

We are here. And ...It's Shabbat.

And we are gathering as we do every week.

This is when we read the [Torah](#) - as we Jews have every Shabbat for thousands of years.

This is when we come together to pray, to learn, to support, and to celebrate with each other.



No matter what has befallen the Jewish people, we continue.

In the concentration camps of the Holocaust, we tried to gather as best as we could.

Why?

Because the Jewish people are strong - no matter what - we have never, ever, during all of our history, given up hope and we will give up hope today.

It is a miracle of history that the Jewish people still exists after the horrors, the attacks, the hate, the anti-Semitism, the Holocaust - thousands of years of

violence and loss - but we have not been lost into the mists of history; we are still here.

This is the miracle of Jewish existence and continuity that we celebrate today.

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Last Saturday night, we were learning of the horrors that had occurred and were still unfolding in Israel as we were gathering for Simhat Torah - our most joyous night of the year -- when we celebrate completing the annual reading of the annual cycle of reading the Torah, the Five Books of Moses.

What do we celebrate?

We celebrate study.

We celebrate learning.

What can be greater than learning?

What did we do?

We minimized part of our celebrations...



But we still danced and sang - as best as we could.

We held fast to the Torah and let our [dancing](#) be our prayer.

There was joy, and there was sadness as there is in every moment - in every time.

And sometimes, we feel both most intensely.

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This is not new - we have been here before.

Edith Rothschild wrote this about observing Hanukkah as a child in a slave labor camp in Czechoslovakia.

"It was the eve of Hanukkah, and we took a potato, cut it in half, and made a hole in the middle. We stole some oil from the machines we worked on, we pulled thread out from the sheets and made it into a wick – and that is how we lit the [Hanukkah](#), in the window overlooking the river, where there were no houses or anything,



no possibility of being seen... we sang “*Maoz Tzur.*” We knew the blessings by heart... and then what did we get? A tiny saucer of real potato soup... we treated it like ice cream, we licked it to make it last.”

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The Talmud recounts the following dilemma (*Maskhet Semahot* 11:6). There is a small town with one intersection, and from one side comes a funeral procession carrying the deceased.

And at exactly the same time, a wedding procession from the other direction accompanies the [bride](#) and groom.



What do we do?
There is not enough room for both of them to proceed side-by-side.

Which goes first?

Which takes precedence?

On the one hand, one might argue that the dead take precedence. There is a clear *mitzvah*, a commandment: *k'vod hameit* - to honor the deceased and to bury them as quickly as we can.

On the other hand, there is also a mitzvah to bring happiness to a *hatan* and *kallah* - to the two partners who are getting married.

But on the other hand, we are also commanded to console mourners - *nihum aveilim*.

Oy, Tevya would have had a time with this one!

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So let's turn to our Torah reading and let's look there for insights.

It begins famously - the universe is created.

There is an initial moment of love, of *hesed*, that creates the universe.

Light and Darkness are created in the big bang from the first words of the Divine: "Yehi Or - Let there be light."

But what comes before the light, before Creation?

וְהָאָרֶץ הַיְתֵה תֵהוּ וְבָהּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת

עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם

“The land, the world, is unformed and void; there is darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water.” (Gen 1:2)

There seems to be nothing concrete, no order, just *tohu v'avohu v'hoshekh*- chaos and darkness.

But there is something. There is the wind of God sweeping, hovering over some kind of primal depths, a cosmic abyss.

What is this wind?

Perhaps it's a spirit of life, of love that is always present in the universe: God's life-giving, creative, sustaining, protective energy.

But then we find that God's spirit is: “*merahefet* - hovering, sweeping over. God's energy is not surrounding this pre-world. It is just above it.

We also find this verb at the very end of the Torah, which we read last week - there, it describes an eagle hovering over its young.

The eagle is not sitting on its young but is just above them - blanketing them with love, protecting them, but it is

not a perfect shield. They cannot be protected from everything.

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And so it is with us. God cannot protect us from everything.

Parents cannot protect their children from everything. We try, we hover, but there is still vulnerability.

And so it was last week - some parents lay on top of their kids and saved them by [sacrificing themselves](#). But many, so many, could not.

Israel was not able to hover close enough.

Israel is our bastion of safety.

The country that did not exist during the Holocaust was created to be a home for the Jewish people but also to be a safe place to which any Jew could run and be safe.

That image of Israel is shattered.



Deborah and Shlomi Matias died shielding their 16-year-old son, who survived a Hamas assault at Holit Kibbutz in southern Israel.

(Courtesy of Troen family)

Israel could not protect its people from these thousands of terrorists.

There is love above us, but this blanket of protection is imperfect; it is hovering. Like so many other aspects of our existence, it, too, is imperfect..

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It's also important to note the order of creation - the Torah starts with darkness - that's what there is.

But out of the darkness comes God's presence, God's love, which speaks the world into existence through words.

The world is suddenly filled with light that flows into the darkness. Energy - physical and spiritual - fills everything.

Out of even the greatest moments of darkness, or maybe especially those moments, there is a possibility of new light, new beginnings, new hope.

The Talmud teaches us that "this is the way of creation - first comes darkness, then light." That's why each day of creation begins with the evening and then the day: "

The Midrash teaches this *Ruah Elohim*, this spirit of God is the spirit of the *Moshiah*, of the Messiah, the Messianic time, a time when the world is redeemed, a world that is saved - perfected, that is healed.

That is the work in which we need to participate.

We are partners in joining with the Divine spirit.

Find the spark of God, the spark in your *neshamah* - in your soul, the spark of goodness that lies within each person, and bring that into the world -- to others.

Create and recreate a world of love, of hope, of peace, of joy.

The goodness and love are hovering around us - waiting for us to grab them and bring them more fully into our world.

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Let's return to the dilemma from the Talmud.

Which goes first?

The funeral or the wedding?

Mourning or celebration?

The Talmud says the celebration takes precedence
“*mipnei she’k’vod haḥai kodeim et hameitim* - the honor of
living comes before the honor of the deceased.

Joy takes precedence.

We take advantage of moments of *simḥah* - of
happiness, whenever we can. Like every living person,
they are precious and fragile.

We grab onto every opportunity to spread love over
the darkness in the world.

We shine light into the darkness.

As God’s spirit
hovers over us, let this
be a time when we hold
fast to each other and
bring in the [light](#).

