

Shabbat Shalom!

In Parsha Beshalach, we witness the dramatic events of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, the splitting of the Red Sea, and the challenges they face as they wander in the desert.

At the shores of the Red Sea, the Israelites faced an imminent threat from the pursuing Egyptian army. In this moment of crisis, God instructs Moses to stop praying and start moving. This underscores the idea that hope, when tied to passivity, is incomplete. The courage of Nachshone ben Ahmeanadav (Nachshon ben Aminadav), the first to step into the sea, exemplifies the active role humans must play in their own redemption. Even in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges, the Israelites had to take the first step.

The subsequent battle against Ahmalek further emphasizes this transition from divine intervention to human partnership. As Joshua leads the Israelite army, Moses lifts his hands and inspires the people to connect with God, fostering courage and determination.

This double narrative, where God initially takes the lead and then invites human partnership, repeats in the construction of the Tabernacle and the formation of the two tablets of the ten commandments. God transforms from a doer to a teacher, encouraging interdependency and active participation from the Israelites.

Life post-October 7th brings forth a reminder that hope cannot be passive. Last week, I was visiting my daughter, Sarah, who is currently living in Jerusalem. We spent a day at Kibbutz Nir Oz and the Nova music festival,

to bear witness to the atrocities of hate that occurred there. What we heard and saw is hard to put into words. It's an extreme dichotomy of the most horrific events. You have a music peace festival filled with 3,500 20 to 40 year olds celebrating "friends, love, and infinite freedom" . It was a modern day Woodstock. The festival grounds have now become memorialized by posters of those who were killed or taken hostage. I was struck by one banner of a beautiful soul and took a picture. Afterwards, someone came running over to tell us that was her daughter, and to never forget her. This dvar is dedicated to her, Eden Ben-Rubi.

Kibbutz Nir Oz gave off the same feeling of love and peace that Nova did. A neighborhood of 400 people, basically every house displayed artwork, sculptures, and pottery, with many things looking homemade by very talented artists. Many of the residents living there, including hostage Oded Lifshitz, were peace activists. Living less than a mile from the Gaza border, they dedicated their lives to treating their neighbors like themselves. On the other side of the border, Hamas was preparing and organizing for this attack. There were over 10,000 Gazans working in the area, and they had detailed maps of the Gaza envelope, and intimate knowledge of which houses were empty, which houses had soldiers living in them, who had guns, who had guests or on vacation themselves. How many children or women were in the home, etc. Hamas attacked Nir Oz from 4 different places by multiple mediums—by tank, cars, motorcycles, paragliders—100s of grenades were dropped by drones. At Kibbutz Nir Oz, 40% of the houses were destroyed and at least 50% of those need to be completely demolished. The safe rooms were still standing, however burnt. Of the 400 residents, 100 of them were either killed or taken hostage. When we were taken to the Kibbutz dining

hall, we were warned that it still smelled heavily like dead bodies. Sarah said it was reminiscent of Auschwitz and Treblinka, which she experienced on the March of the Living. It's heartbreaking that we are here again. It's important to note, today is International Holocaust Day.

As Jews, our whole existence has been about facing challenges. Our strength and resiliency have always enabled us to succeed, but it takes hard work and believing in something. I witnessed that in Israel. The country is working together to help support and rebuild, both physically and mentally. There is movement coupled with hope and faith. Everyone, but especially the soldiers, display strength and a purpose. They show a sense of obligation with pride.

In the face of the current challenges, Jews must remain hopeful, not in a passive sense, but by actively promoting understanding, dialogue, and working towards a world where we all can live in peace.

Just as the Israelites were not mere spectators in their redemption, we must actively contribute to creating a better future in Israel and here. It reminds me of how I feel about Melville Jewish Center. We're not in our strongest position and we have many obstacles to defeat, but as I look into the audience and see the strength we possess, I have hope and faith that we will once again thrive with the support and involvement from us, staff and the community.

Hope, when coupled with action, becomes a powerful force for change. By following the model set in Parsha Beshalach, we can turn hope into a

transformative energy, partnering with God to shape a brighter future for ourselves and others. Shabbat Shalom!