

D'var Torah

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Kabbalat Shabbat | 1/24/2023

This week's Torah portion, Vayetzey, our Patriarch, Jacob, went to Charan and you know how the story goes. He went to sleep and dreamt of a ladder to the sky. Angels of God were going up and coming down.

13 And Adonai was standing beside him and God said, "I am Adonai, the God of your father Avraham and the God of Yitzchak: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. 14 Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants. 15 Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

וַיִּקַּץ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁנָתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְיָ בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי

16 Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Wow! Adonai is present in this place, and I did not know it!"

Washington DC

I was blessed to travel to Washington, DC with Rabbi Segal last week and on Tuesday, we gathered on the National Mall to rally for the return of the 240 hostages in Israel and pledge support to our Homeland. Many have asked what it was like. My short answer has been, "it's like seeing your favorite band with 290k others!" It was profound to be there as part of the Arizona delegation, coordinated by CJP's CEO, Rich Kasper. He worked tirelessly to ensure we could meet up, get our wristbands for entry, and be counted. Just like any other Jewish event, I ran into countless friends (like a URJ Biennial), and I was fortunate to stand along side members from my home congregation, Shaarai Shomayim in Lancaster, PA, with Rabbi Jack Paskoff, my 4th grade teacher Rosanne Selfon, as well as my step mother, my little sister, and my nephew, who is currently attending my alma mater, Temple University.

There were also so many from the Orthodox community, and while we don't agree on much, Israel is likely the one thing that can bring us all together. 290k people singing Hatikvah together, chanting Am Yisrael Chai together, and sadly, the cries of "Bring Them Home" were perhaps the loudest words of them all. We heard from the four leaders of the US House and Senate, we sang with Israeli recording artists (though we noted with disappointment that no women were invited to sing, likely a concession to the Orthodox). We heard from Jewish celebrities, writers, and college students. It was truly a moving and powerful experience. I am so very blessed to have had the opportunity to go and cheer and shout and wail for the release of the hostages.

In these moments with our people, I truly felt as Jacob did. God was with us.

And here we are tonight, Shabbat Chag Hahodayah (Thanksgiving), a time when we, who live in America, stand back and show gratitude for all that we have. Friends, I am struggling with gratitude at the moment. As my dear friend, Rabbi Evan Schultz put it so well,

“Since October 7, I have felt scared. Scared for the future of Israel. Scared for the safety of Jews around the world. Scared for those poor hostages. Scared of the nightmares I've been having regularly.

Scared of the fact that synagogues require around the clock protection. Scared for what our kids are hearing at school. Scared of what college students are chanting about Jews. But yesterday, in Washington, DC, for the first time in 38 days I did not feel scared. I felt alive.

[he continues]

Alive as I prayed, truly prayed, for peace for Israel and for the Palestinians. Alive as I cried as mothers spoke about their children being held in tunnels in Gaza. Alive as I stood proudly as an American Jew. I pray I can carry the feeling from yesterday for days and weeks to come. I no longer want to feel scared. I want to forever feel alive.“

Every morning I turn on the Times of Israel Daily Briefing (it's a great podcast) and learn about what has been happening while we slept. I pray for strength and safety. I pray for an end to Hamas. I pray for peace. Today is the first day of the cease fire. 13 Israelis and 11 foreign workers were sent home today. A particular 9-year-old boy who reminds me of my son Elie from his photo on the poster, Ohad Munder Zichri, was sent home today. It is a blessing. And we must be thankful for each one who was sent home.

A Prayer from my friend, Rabbi Stephanie Crawley

11/24/2023

And today they start coming home

And children will be in warm arms

And They will see the gentle afternoon light

And they will breathe new air

And we pray

That they will remember how to smile

How to soften at a touch

How to say no, unafraid

That they will remember how to run and sing and what it's like to not have to pray

Will they ever feel safe again?

Will we?

ברוך אתה הי מתיר אסורים.

Blessed are You, Who frees the captives.