

“Strive to be Human”

October 20, 2023

Rabbi Darren Levine

In a place where there is no humanity, you should strive to be human.”

Hillel the Sage, 1st Century CE

Dear Tamid,

Yesterday I had lunch with a bar mitzvah student of ours who is now in college. He's become a pro-Israel student leader. shared stories about how unsupported he feels as a Jew on campus and how it seems that everyone is taking a side - either Israeli/Jewish or Palestinian/Arab. We know that his experience is shared by many students and faculty members. I'm hosting a support session for our college students next week and I hope you will pass along the invite.

I continue to hear from many of you about how hard it feels to be Jewish right now. I understand. I feel your concern, your confusion, your anger, and your disbelief. One of you likened this moment to mourning the death of a loved one. This all makes sense to me.

There is a lesson in this week's Torah portion that is instructive. We learn that God floods the earth to eliminate lawlessness and evil, but sends Noah, Noah's family, and every type of animal into the Ark. While the waters flood the earth, those in the Ark find safety from the raging storm.

Where can a person feel safe right now?

There is a Muslim family in our neighborhood circle. They have a toddler in the same play group as our son, Zeke, and we've gone on outings and had park playdates together. Last week, she began to post stories on her social media account which are decidedly pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel. Some of the Jewish mothers are asking whether or not they can face her anymore in person, especially at her son's upcoming birthday party.

And the cycle continues.

This morning I said to Elizabeth, "invite them over for Shabbat dinner so we can sit and enjoy a meal together." I said the same thing to our bar mitzvah boy yesterday. "Try to find one person on campus who is a member of the pro-Palestinian group and invite them for hummus and pita. Then find another. Find one faculty member. Then find another. Help to create a Third Way that is not about fear, anger, revenge, and unilateral side-taking. Make peace, one person at a time.

The wise sage Hillel said, "In a place where there is no humanity, you should strive to be human." What other choice do we have?

On November 3rd at 6 PM, we're meeting for our next community Shabbat gathering and dinner. Please come. Please invite your Jewish and non-Jewish friends. Let's be human, together.

We may not have the influence to change the direction of the Middle East or have a clear post-op plan for Israel, Gaza, the US or Iran. But in our little Ark at Tamid, we're going to keep acting like human beings so that you will have a place that loves you and your humanity, and where you and your children will always feel safe and protected.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Darren

"One Thing for Israel"
Rabbi Darren Levine
October 13, 2023

Dear Tamid,

As shabbat comes this evening, I'm thinking about you, your children, your extended family and I'm praying for you. I'm mindful that many of you have spent the week in complete anguish.

I spent an hour with our 4th and 5th graders at Hebrew School this week because they had a lot of questions about what is going on in Israel and they were noticeably on edge. While listening to their questions and hearing their imaginations, I was mourning for their precious minds and beautiful souls. And I feel similarly for all of you. You are precious to me and I think and care about you every day, now more than ever.

Many of you have written, texted, and called me this week. I'm always so glad to hear from you, to be welcomed into your inner lives, and to share in your experiences, good and bad.

Here are some of the phrases that you've shared with me.

"I'm heartbroken. The evil is shattering my sense of humanity."
"How could this happen? The children. The babies. The young kids."

"I guess I'll never see peace in the Middle East in my lifetime."

"I feel helpless. It's so overwhelming. I don't know what to do."

"Will Israel be ok? I heard they are attacking from Syria and Lebanon, too."

"My school sent a letter to the families. It was nice but it missed the point about terrorism."

"This is like 1973 all over. Like the Holocaust. It's our curse."

These are painful words to hear but I know they reflect many of your feelings and reactions.

I've also witnessed a level of local support and generosity that's on display.

The Va'ad Council, Robb, Alla, Jeffry, and Jamie, are singularly focused on your well-being and eager to support our community and beyond with genuine concern.

Phil Jackson, Trinity's Rector, offered a beautiful prayer for Israel from the pulpit on Sunday Michael Bird, the Vicar of Trinity Wall Street wrote to me immediately offering their unconditional support for our congregation.

You posted real action items on our "Stand With Israel" online bulletin board and are adding to it daily.

And of course, the outpouring of support from our Mayor, Governor, and President.

As you know by now, we have five families at Tamid that are Israeli. They've told me how utterly devastated they are but also mindful of good moments. They've shared heartwarming anecdotes about the spirit of unity, acts of unselfish heroism, and expressions of kindness that have rekindled a hope for a more unified Israel after the war ends. The director of the Kibbutz where I lived in 1996 wrote to me and said, "We are Israeli. We are strong. We will survive."

I'm hopeful for those days of unity in the future, but there is a different urgency right now. Of all the loss and more that will come, I am particularly haunted by the hostage situation. You're aware of the up to 150 children, women, men, civilians, and soldiers that are in captivity.

Please use your social media outlets, your relationships with elected officials, your influence, to advocate to bring the hostages home immediately. Politicians and military leaders refer to the hostages as a factor. But like us, every one of them has a name, a precious mind, a beautiful soul, and a family that loves them.

You may recognize my closing benediction at every Tamid prayer service when I say, "*Shalom Shalom l'rachok u l'karov*. Peace, peace to all of those near and far." It is a quote from Isaiah 57. I hope that you will pray with me today, and say these words every day until the hostages are released and are no longer far from home. Many of their names are below.

Similar to when I wrote to you each week during the COVID pandemic, I'm going to start writing to you again. I hope you will do the same in return, I'm eager to be in close touch with you. We are in the acute phase of this crisis, but I promise that it's not the only thing on my mind which you will learn more about in my upcoming writing to you and when we meet in the

neighborhood. But for now, "*Shalom Shalom l'rachok u l'karov*. Peace, peace to all of those near and far."

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Darren