

Kol HaNeshamot

Voices of Jewish Spiritual Care

Reflecting on October 7



*Neshama: Association of
Jewish Chaplains*

**A collection of writings and words of comfort
by members of
Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains
on the first year anniversary of
October 7
September 2024/Elul 5784**

Dear Reader,

As both the Chagim (holiday) season and the first *yahrzeit* of October 7th are approaching, we at *Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains* have compiled this concise spiritual care companion as a resource for Jewish chaplains, rabbis, and the wider Jewish lay community. For the last year, the Jewish people have been in *aveilut* (mourning) as a nation. And we have simultaneously been fighting for our future, our homeland, and our places of belonging— at work, with friends and peers, and even in our neighborhoods.

In this companion, you will hear the voices of Jewish chaplains who have been working on the frontlines over the past year providing spiritual care in the midst of horror, loss, and fear. Each has expertise in trauma-informed care, grief and bereavement counseling, and resiliency training. As Jewish chaplains, these authors have been first responders, after 9/11, during Covid, and now, in our post-October 7th Jewish reality across the world. Some have actively worked or volunteered in Israel to address the current widespread trauma and mental health needs. Each has been both the advocate for Jewish patients, families, staff, and clients as well as the target of marginalization, antisemitism, fear, and grief. All integrate Torah into their spiritual care work.

Our humble tefillah (prayer) is that the words in this compilation serve as a source of chizuk (strength), insight, and support in the holy work you are doing. As Jewish chaplains, we constantly care for the human spirit of the other, while also holding our own pain and lived experience. We believe that sharing the expertise in these pages, as well as the voices of these individuals, is a unique contribution that Jewish chaplains can and must offer. We will continue to show up and embrace the privilege of serving Am Yisrael (the Jewish people), and our multifaith patients, families, staff, and clients— building bridges from within and without.

Right now as Jews we are holding the full gamut of human emotion, more than some of us have ever felt before. The wisdom of Jewish chaplaincy is that we can hold both hope and realism, joy and loss— seemingly contradictory human experiences are not mutually exclusive. We may need to sob. We may feel numb. We may need to step out. We may need to laugh, dance, and hold our child or loved one close. Let us be gentle with ourselves and each other in our prayers and at our tables over this holiday season.

Thank you to all of the authors who contributed and to those who worked behind the scenes to bring this vision to life. A huge thank you to Allison Atterberry (our executive director), Gabriel Sniman (our office assistant), and Rabbi Lynn Liberman, our president-elect, who took the lead on this holy project, as well as the original brainstorming committee.

Through our observance of these Chagim and this first *yahrzeit* of October 7th, may we merit – for ourselves and God – to turn our mourning into dancing. We pray for peace and safety speedily, in our days.

With gratitude,

Rabbanit Alissa Thomas-Newborn, BCC
NAJC President

Shalom L'Kulam,

Nachamu, Nachamu ami – “Comfort, Comfort Oh my people” proclaims Isaiah in the first Haftarah chanted after the observance of Tisha B'av, the ninth of Av. Our rabbis have taught us to seek comfort, to find care and to reconnect at a time when we feel most bereft, historically in this case, at the time of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. These are ancient prophetic words that remind us of the possibility of hope in each other and of redemption for all.

As the one-year anniversary of the attack of Oct 7 approaches, it is with courage, reassurance and gratitude that we draw upon the voices of NAJC Chaplains as a source of insight, support, comfort and meaning at this time. Over these past many months, the world has truly felt dis comforted and shaken. It is our hope that this collection of writings, including poetry, D'verei Torah, personal reflections, images and spiritual messages will provide the reader with a source of *Nechemta* and *Hizuk* – comfort and strength.

With deep appreciation, thank you to our NAJC professional staff, Allison and Gabe, as well as NAJC members who initiated this project. Thank you to the editors of our regular publication, Journal of Spiritual Care, for being able to include some submissions sent to that publication for inclusion here. A note of deep gratitude to all who submitted writings for this special volume. Your voices are strong, caring, insightful, compassionate and present – an example of the very special and important work we do in our care for others as Jewish Spiritual Care providers, as chaplains.

With my prayers of gratitude to the Holy One and blessings for much *Hizuk* and peace to all.

Shalom u'vracha,

Rabbi Lynn C. Liberman, BCC
NAJC President-Elect and Project Manager

Table of Contents

p. 6 Reflections on Being Strangers in Our Suffering	Rabbanit Alissa Thomas-Newborn, BCC
p. 9 Symbols, Simanei Milta and How We Struggle with Trauma	Rabbi Bryan Kinzbrunner, BCC
p. 11 In Dreams	Rabbi Sara O'Donnell Adler, BCC
p. 12 After loss	Rabbi Sam Seicol, BCC
p. 13 Screaming Into the Abyss	Chaplain Hagar Ben-Eliezer, BCC
p. 15 Prayer for <i>Hadlakat Nerot</i> (Candle Lighting)	Rabbi Fred Klein, BCC
p. 16 Our Narrow Bridge	Rabbi Robert Tabak, BCC
p. 19 Feeling alone in the middle of a crowd	Rabbi Shira Stern, BCC
p. 20 Yizkor 5785	Rabbi Melanie Levav, BCC, LMSW
p. 22 NAJC Healing Prayer	NAJC <i>Chesed</i> Committee, edited by Rabbi Ziona Zelazo
p. 23 On Grounding and Witness: A Chaplain's Post-October 7 th Visit to Israel	Rabbi Beth Naditch, BCC
p. 25 Sacred Light	Rabbi Sara O'Donnell Adler, BCC
p. 26 330	Cantor Rabbi Rob Jury, PhD, BCC, CRADC, LCPC
p. 28 Resilience	Rabbi Sam Seicol, BCC
p. 29 The Sound - the Journey to Hope	Rabbi Lynn C. Liberman, BCC
p. 31 On the First Anniversary of October 7, 2023/Shemini Atzeret 5784: A Reflection, a Story, and a Piece of Torah	Rabbi Joseph S. Ozarowski, D. Min., BCC
p. 32. Author Biographies	

This volume contains forms of God's name (but not Shem HaShem). Please exercise care.

"Reflections on Being Strangers in Our Suffering"

Rabbanit Alissa Thomas-Newborn, BCC

In the midst of the yovel laws, God tells us directly what it is to be a Jew: כְּיִגְרִים וְתוֹשְׁבִים אַתֶּם עִמָּדִי, “You are strangers and settlers with Me”. This pasuk is often understood to be an instruction to cultivate humility. As the Sifra teaches: אַל תַּעֲשׂוּ עִצְמְכֶם עֵיקָר, “Don’t make yourselves the center” (Sifra 4:8). God is in charge, not us. We are merely strangers and settlers in this world. דַּיּוּ לַעֲבֹד שִׁיְהִיָּה כְרַבּוֹ. כִּשְׂתִּיהִיָּה שְׁלִי הָרִי הוּא שְׁלֶכֶם. “It is enough for the servant to be like the Master. What is Mine [God’s] is also yours”. Here (in the context of the laws of shmita and yovel) we cultivate gratitude to God and recognition that whatever is God’s in this world, God gives us as His people, and whatever we have, was given to us by God and ultimately returns to Him.

There’s a teaching of Degel Machaneh Ephraim (Moshe Chaim Ephraim, the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov) that reads our pasuk quite differently. Not as a vertical model with God as Master and us as His servants, but as a horizontal model, building a relational dynamic with God as Partner. He explains: “A stranger doesn’t have a people to identify with, to be close with, to tell his sufferings,” וְיָדוּעַ הַקֶּב"ה הוּא כְמוֹ גֵר בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, “And it is known that God is like a stranger in this world”... “This [he says] is what is hinted at in our pasuk,” כִּשְׂתִּיהִיָּה בְּבַחֲנֵינָה גֵר בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה... “When you experience being a stranger in this world...” אַז אַתָּם עִמָּדִי כִּי אֲנִי גַם כֵּן גֵר בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, “then you are with Me, for I too am a stranger in this world”. Degel Machaneh Ephraim gets at the core of being a Jew in relationship with God when we face vulnerability, isolation, struggle, and fear.

At first, imagining God as a stranger is staggering-- but when God does not have people to partner with Him, He too has no one to turn to. God is not only naturally ‘other’ as the only Infinite Being, but when we act out of hate, or don’t draw close to Him through Torah and goodness, we ostracize God from the world.

And as Jews, we are by nature strangers-- we are other and vulnerable. God made us this way. But make no mistake-- this is not the same as painfully being *made* a stranger by our fellow human beings. *People* have historically taken advantage of our identity as strangers for evil ends -- persecuting and marginalizing us to the point that many times we have felt lost and alone without friends, or God forbid, even without our Creator to turn to. I think of a video that circulated this year where Jews from the time of churban bayit, expulsions and pogroms throughout history, the Holocaust, and October 7th shared the same story. All variations of unexpected alienation, destruction, and fear. Followed by the timeless story of Jewish resilience to somehow keep going. In this short video, strangers across history tell the same story together. Feeling alone, together, and modeling intergenerational resilience. Degel Machaneh Ephraim explains a similar message, but rather than connecting us with the pain of Jews throughout history, he connects us with God’s pain as the ultimate Other.

This is at once heartbreaking and comforting. It challenges us to remember that God is with us, and we are with God together as strangers, אַתֶּם עִמָּדִי. And it’s only when we understand this aspect of ‘Jewishness’ that we see a uniquely intimate side of God. God as heartbroken. I think of how in Bereshit God created man as a partner in this world, but it wasn’t until Adam meets Chava, that Adam says “zot hapaam” – “Finally, this is the one who is my eizer, my partner!” How lonely God must have felt, kivyachol. Especially in the stories that follow, where we leave

Gan Eden, and with each generation become less connected with God, until Avraham, when the reunion begins. But even when God takes us out of Mitzrayim to be His people, we rebel many steps along the way. And as we see even in the Mishkan, God yearns to be close to us, but the barriers to such closeness are still felt. Only the Kohen Gadol goes into the Kodesh HaKodashim. God is consistently reaching for us and yet we are just out of reach, like Michaelangelo's God and Man painting. "Other," but yearning to be together.

Powerfully, through God's paradigmatic "Otherness", we are met with a call to action. With God's company, we can turn that lingering feeling of fear into a pathway to empathy and goodness. For when we realize that we know better than most what it is to be vulnerable and attacked-- we could never put others or God in that same place. We can be metaknim — repairing— our othering of God in the Tanach.

We were Divinely called to understand and love the stranger-- to build internal compassion. And in doing so, we become people who notice others who are alone and bring them in. Perhaps *this* is why God made Jews the "other"-- a people the world desperately needs. And this is how we partner *with* God. Giving others the support that God gives us as His people.

As a chaplain, rabbanit, and NAJC president, I have been involved in many efforts over the past year to build interfaith bridges and educate on antisemitism, constantly dwelling in that identity as "other" (as many of you have). Some of these efforts have been life-giving, grounding, and hopeful. Others have been heartbreaking and demoralizing. I want to share one moment that held both experiences simultaneously— something chaplains are constantly challenged to do. I was sitting on a panel with leaders from the Muslim American Leadership Alliance, an organization that has bravely been a strong moral voice against the horrors of October 7th and Hamas.

I reflected with them on a comment a Muslim chaplaincy colleague had made to me. My chaplaincy colleague had said to me that when we are in a place of trauma, we are unable to empathize with another's suffering. We don't have the tolerance, space, or bandwidth to hear another's pain. When I heard this, I thought to myself (and said to her), "Isn't it really the opposite though?" When we experience trauma, the greatest comfort can come when someone who is the other, the ger, the stranger, supports us and when we are able to transcend our suffering to empathize with the other. I think of Viktor Frankel's "Man's Search for Meaning". When we have purpose beyond our own suffering and trauma, we have a reason to live and fight. We become more than our trauma. When interfaith friends and colleagues have expressed heartbreak to me over October 7th and the rise of antisemitism, that has been a support nothing short of divine.

My colleague's inability to do this seemed to miss the point entirely. And pained me to my core as an interfaith spiritual care colleague. I shared this with a Muslim leader on the panel from the Muslim American Leadership Alliance just before our program. She agreed and said, "When a person can't have empathy that's the beginning of lacking humanity, and a dangerous path to go down. This is a value we learn from our Jewish brothers and sisters". To put in our terms, she was lifting up the Jewish ethic of *כי-גרים ותושבים אתם עמדי*.

As chaplains, we talk a lot about trauma-informed spiritual care. This means not retraumatizing and instead exploring sources of resilience and safety. Trauma-informed care from any clinician holds and empowers the patient/client, with nuanced theory and practice. It's ok to not be ok. And now, how do we keep going? Over this past year, I have come to view our tradition through

this same lens. Trauma-informed Pesach. Trauma-informed Tisha B'Av. Trauma informed Yizkor. Trauma-informed Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur.

In Moment Magazine a few years ago, several millennials were featured describing their relationship with Judaism. Almost all of them explained that their connections deepened when they felt othered-- on campus or in the workplace-- encountering antisemitism personally. Reflecting on this article today is surreal. We shouldn't make the hallmark of our spiritual meaning about a history of being attacked. And yet the truth is as Jews we consistently choose to make our being othered an opportunity to create more goodness, do more mitzvot, and ultimately be more Jewish. It's our calling, in our spiritual DNA. We are trauma-informed Jews, living in the past, present, and future-- not denying our loss and pain and also somehow standing together with each other and God.

I want to offer a framing kavanah we can incorporate into our davening this Chagim season, including our memorializing of those brutally murdered on October 7th and since. May this kavanah be received through the lens of trauma-informed prayer, and as a chance to create space for empathy even as we continue to live in our own trauma:

Imagine a time you felt othered, a stranger.

It may have been recently.

And now imagine God standing with you in that otherness.

Atah/at imadi. Saying, "I am with you".

Notice how that feels, and sounds.

Allow that to become a refrain in your davening. A place you can access anytime.

A place of comfort.

And safety.

A space you can share with the "other" when they need it. Without losing anything in you by sharing it.

A place that can change you for the better.

כִּי-גֵרִים וְתוֹשָׁבִים אַתֶּם עַמִּי.

When we have purpose beyond our own suffering and trauma, we have a reason to live and fight. We need this now more than ever. May HaShem be with us in our otherness. And in this New Year, as we continue to process our communal trauma and care for ourselves, our families, our Jewish community, and our wider world, may we know closeness and kinship in our otherness.

Symbols, Simanei Milta and How We Struggle with Trauma

By Rabbi Bryan Kinzbrunner, BCC

We have been anticipating this moment as we do every Rosh Hashanah. The table is set for our Yom Tov meal, replete with Kiddush, Challah and apples and honey. We look forward to this new year, this new beginning, when we start off our year with the additional gesture of dipping a slice of apple into honey as a symbol of our hope that this year will be a sweet year:

יהי רצון מלפניך שְׁתַּחֲדֵשׁ עָלֵינוּ שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְתוּקָה

May it be Your will to renew for us a good and sweet year.”

Symbols are at the core of how we relate to the world. We find ourselves looking for and creating symbols, rituals to signify moments in our lives. In a way, everything in our life is a symbol. We have symbols that help us visualize a celebration and we have symbols to help us ritualize tragedy. We use these symbols to share a message, to share something we have trouble saying in words or to share something that needs constant reiteration. Pertaining to Rosh Hashanah, the symbolic usage of food and the accompanying prayers denote our hopes for the year, from the call for a sweet new year full of hope to our turning to God to remove evil and those who perpetrate it from the world.

I have been thinking a lot about symbols since my trip to Israel this summer. Actually, I have been thinking about symbols since October 7th, when all around us posters and placards went up, both of messages we embrace and of messages we reject. Yet the moment this all became crystal clear to me was arriving in Ben Gurion airport in July. On previous visits to Israel, heading down the corridor to baggage claim, the message was always simple and inviting. In big letters it said, **ברוכים הבאים, welcome**. Personally, this welcome always feels different, making me feel embraced in a way that I don't feel when driving from state to state. Yet, on this trip, the welcome was different because it wasn't the first message I saw. As I got to the corridor, I was first greeted with, “Bring Them Home Now! and “הלב שלנו שבוּי בעזה”, Our Hearts are Captive in Gaza.”

Throughout my time in Israel, in addition to visiting the Nova festival site, Sderot, and Hostage Square in Tel Aviv, the symbols of bring them home, of the war, of יהוד נוצה, etc., were all over the country. This was telling because in my previous trips, the primary signs and flyers throughout the country were the Chabad משיח flags and ג נה נחמ נחמן מאומן, both of which gave me a sense of the constant hope and spirit of the country. These remained, now added to with what we hope to be those *temporary* signs mentioned above.

5784 has been a difficult year for all of us, regardless of our individual Monday morning quarterbacking. We have struggled in our professional lives and our personal lives. We have come up against vitriolic hate, ignorance and intolerance. And for us, in our various spiritual care/chaplaincy environments, we have had to continue to navigate our personal feelings of trauma and struggle with the care we provide each and every day. As we work to navigate caring for others and caring for ourselves, we grab onto symbols and rituals as well. When we walk into the patient's room and look around, we search for their symbols, for those things which help tell their story. And when we go home, we bear witness to our symbols, the pictures on the wall, the collectibles we have worked hard to gather, the books and seforim we have learned from or yearn to study. Through all of this trauma and collective pain, we have not backed

down, we have not shrunk, we have not gone into hiding. We have faced the challenge head on, symbols and all.

And soon we will set the table again. We will set the table for 5785, with the same kiddush, the same challah, the same apples and honey, with the same wish for a sweet new year. We do this because we know that there is always another opportunity. There is always a hope that can remain, even in dark times. We do this because we need the symbol to help us find the words to pray for something we struggle to say because it can be hard to see brighter days ahead in difficult moments.

May 5785 find us in a better place than 5784. May we see brighter days ahead, where the symbols of these past months can be remembered but no longer need to be seen. Instead, we hope to see the symbols of a better tomorrow.

In Dreams

Rabbi Sara O'Donnell Adler, BCC

It starts simply.

A quiet walk in the light
green of a breeze then
the twisted bark of a silver
maple shifts into funnel
of cloud, a pillar I can't hide from,
twisters everywhere and everywhere
a glass house.

Lately, it's tunnels that tunnel their way
under my eyelids. Music drowned by
motorcycles and gunshot. It's empty chairs
mothers' tears, cousins, brothers, friends

they are standing at the edge of the wilderness,
with megaphones calling, calling their names, calling out
to the ones stolen.

I am calling too,
but my voice drops into sand. I want
to wake up, cannot wake up from this.

Dreams are also this:

loved ones coming back, innocently
sitting at the breakfast table, there beside us
as if it never happened and all that mattered
was us holding hands, drinking tea, spreading
freshly made strawberry jam onto our toast.

After Loss

Rabbi Sam Seicol, BCC



**After years of growth and fullness –
having weathered many storms –
A tree falls; to rest on the beach.**

**Out of the old, in calm repose, emerges the vibrant new.
Roots firmly planted in the past – bound to life that was –
Leaves and branches reach up.
Seeking out the nurturing light;
Filled with hope for years to come.**

Chaplain Sam Seicol
samuel_seicol@meei.harvard.edu
masseyeandear.org/services/spiritual-care



**A soft fog creeps in, feeling at times overwhelmed;
Streaks of light shine through, separating light from shade
An invitation to enter, let the haze embrace and caress;
Gentle coolness offers comfort, nurturing care abounds;
Shafts of sunshine create welcoming openings in the dark,
Inviting a vision of hope and healing yet to come.**

Chaplain Sam Seicol
samuel_seicol@meei.harvard.edu
masseyeandear.org/services/spiritual-care



Screaming Into the Abyss

Chaplain Hagar Ben-Eliezer, BCC

I grew up on bedtime stories of my father's childhood in Iraq. Swimming in the Euphrates during the summer months with his nine siblings, shabbat dinners that lasted until midnight that he helped bake the challahs for, and davening at the shul where his father was the rabbi and his grandfather before him. When the Farhoud came to Bagdad, my father walked the streets in the aftermath of attacks, sobbing as he saw so much death and destruction. He told his family, at the age of twelve, he would not let anyone hurt the Jewish people again. A few months later he was recruited into the Haganah, portrayed as a youth group where he was taught how to defend himself, how to use knives and guns and how to read maps.

He went on to complete many missions until he was captured and placed in a camp. He would tell me that he never gave up on his dream of Israel and a place to create community and live freely as Jews. Eventually he escaped and secured passage on a cargo plane to Tel Aviv. As a child I would always ask the same question, "Aba, what did you do when you finally got there? Did you go to the beach? Eat falafel?" He would always smile and reply, "Motek, we kissed the ground, got up and started our work."

I always believed that if Israel did not exist, I would not exist. Where would my father, and all the other Jews from the camps go? Zionism's definition for me has long been defined as pride, pioneers, orange groves, Coca-Cola shirts in Hebrew, summers living on the kibbutz and never forgetting how hard we fought for this piece of the desert.

On October 7, 2023, it felt as if my life was moving in slow motion. I remember telling myself to breathe as I watched the TV in horror. Then came the calls and WhatsApp to my fifty-seven relatives, friends, and colleagues. As a chaplain, my instinct is to meet a crisis head on, to put my trauma aside until I can assess the damage and triage the scene. As the next few days unfolded, I learned that two friends were killed at the Nova dance party and two friends I led Birthright trips with were being held hostage. There was no way to assess this type of spiritual crisis as I had no tried-and-true tools to call upon.

As my family in Israel sat in bomb shelters and panic rooms, I focused on my cousins with three kids under nine taking shelter with each siren in a closet sized panic room. With the time difference I would stay up at night and record stories for the kids and sing songs that I would send through Whatsapp. I would text everyone I knew in Israel to make sure they knew I was thinking about them. But deep down I felt helpless.

At my job at Cal Berkely Hillel, we spent Sunday trying to prepare some type of support for students. My phone and email were full of students seeking emotional support. We quickly got support groups together in both Hebrew and English and created lots of safe spaces for students to process. My client load went from 16 to 38 in a matter of days. I saw 6-8 students a day all needing support and resources. Fifteen of those students were Israeli, thirteen men and two women. Eleven of them had just finished their IDF service in August and came to Cal just a month ago.

Many lost their fellow soldiers and some, their entire units. One student shared that he was able to access the Hamas websites and watched the videos of the terrorist attacks on October 7. He had not slept in three days and is suffering from severe panic attacks.

Another student lost his grandparents who were burned to death by Hamas in their home. The student said I was the first person to offer to say kaddish, we both cried as we prayed.

An American student who spent the last year in the IDF on the Gaza border came home to start school. Their entire IDF unit was killed October 7th. This student is suffering from severe survivors' guilt and continues to have suicide ideation.

Five students have said they felt comfortable coming to see me because of my name. Each day the pain and fear permeate my office as I comfort students in Hebrew and English and in ritual and prayer.

As the shock turned to hate, the climate on campus has become hostile and unsafe. Students are experiencing professors denying the existence of the Holocaust, protestors who are violent and aggressive, and an administration that refuses to denounce protestor violence that has sent Jewish students to the hospital. My Hillel bumper sticker got me two broken windows and a souvenir rock with a swastika drawn on it. Many of us at Hillels receive almost daily hate email with disturbing images of the Holocaust burial sites with instructions to join them.

One professor in the Jewish Studies department is doing a sit-in at his office until his demands to make campus safe for Jewish students has been met. Two weeks so far of 24 hours a day in his office. He jokes that a shower would be nice, but students and community leaders continue to sit with him drinking tea and snacking on baked cookies which are regularly dropped off by supporters.

It may have been the last week of November when I started to take long baths every night. I could not stop thinking of the image of the mom of one of the hostages who goes to the Gaza border and yells her child's name into the desert. I started submerging my head in the water and screaming into my own abyss. I screamed for that mother, I screamed for all the hostages, the families sitting shiva, the Palestinians suffering at the hands of Hamas, my cousins stuck in the closet, my 88-year-old aunt drinking tea in her panic room, my cousin who calls me from the bomb shelter to tell me I would be safer in Israel than at my job.

I also scream for the future of Israel, my Jewish Disneyland, streets overflowing with soothing melodies and smells of my childhood kitchen, taking bright-eyed students to the Kotel for the first time and for the innocence of my childhood as my father chased me on the seashore in Ashkelon.

We have so much work to do, but as my father said, you kiss the ground, get up and get to work. Screaming in the bathtub also helps. It lets some of the pressure out so I can put aside my grief, my fears of my friends still being held hostage and the sadness I feel for so many of us. I love being Jewish more than anything, but defending it daily is brutal. Chaplaincy for me is about bringing G-d and comfort to those in need, so I will stick to that plan, one student at a time.

Prayer for *Hadlakat Nerot* (Candle Lighting)

Shabbat Bereishit, 5784

Rabbi Frederick L. Klein, BCC

The Earth was a vacant abyss, with darkness on the surface of the watery depths, and a great wind blowing on the surface of the water. – Genesis 1:2

As we enter the first *Shabbat* of the year, and we read the opening chapter of *Bereishit/Genesis*, our hearts feel like the Earth's primordial dark void – a chaotic and terrifying abyss. Our people – families and friends, brothers and sisters – are caught in a stormy tempest of uncertainty and fear. Following the joyful heights of the Jewish holidays, we have suddenly been thrust to confront forces of darkness so heinous, so evil, that we find ourselves shuddering in disbelief. The jarring images of the past days have forced us to confront depths of hatred and sickening inhumanity. The world we believed we knew has returned to blackness.

How do we cope? How do we respond? The same way God does. To the darkness, God proclaims, "Let there be light!" – the first act of creation, the first act of blessing in this world. We too will light our *Shabbat* candles, countering the darkness in the world and in our hearts.

Like God, we will double down, destroying a cult of doom – of death and evil. As we light our *Shabbat* candles, we commit ourselves to the Jewish vision of bringing light and life into this world. We recommit to the light of the Jewish people, bringing illumination to our families, our community and to the world.

Please, God, as we enter your holy *Shabbat* day, please bring all of us the protection we need, sheltering all of the Jewish people under Your canopy of peace. Execute judgment on those whose actions have desecrated Your holy name through desecrating the image of God. Provide comfort to the mourners, safety to our IDF soldiers in the fight and a safe return to those taken hostage.

"For each *mitzvah* is a candle, the Torah a great light." – Proverbs 6:23

Our candle lighting is a prelude to action. We will increase our Jewish commitments, our Jewish giving and our solidarity with the Jewish people wherever they may be. We will come together to pray, to learn, to mourn and to support one another. We will resolutely increase our acts of kindness and ultimately overcome the acts of wanton cruelty we have seen. We will continue in our timeless mission to be a light unto the world. In this merit, may God respond to all our heartfelt prayers.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, sovereign of the universe, who has sanctified us with commandments, commanding us to kindle the light of *Shabbat*.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר של שבת

Baruch Ahtah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-olam, asher k'dishanu bemitzvotav vetzeevanu lehhadlik ner shel Shabbat.

Our Narrow Bridge and Some Difficult Texts

Rabbi Robert Tabak, BCC

The “our” in my title is those of us – in North America, in Israel, elsewhere – who identify with Israel, in spite of its current leadership, and are deeply pained by the horrific terrorist attacks on Israelis (primarily Jews but also on Arabs, as well as foreign workers.) Yet we also are concerned about the suffering of civilians, including children in Gaza.

1. Compassion should not be a zero-sum game.

Yehuda Kurtzer, head of the Shalom Hartman Institute, recently said in a talk: “Compassion should not be a zero-sum game.”

I have considered myself a Jewish leftist. On the left (including not only the radical left), there has been a move, after the initial shock on Oct. 7, to focus on Palestinians and their suffering, and to ignore or even justify Israeli suffering. I am disappointed and saddened by Jewish groups (as well as progressive allies) that can’t make a forthright statement condemning Hamas’s violent attack against children, women, men and old people, killing hundreds, wounding more and taking many civilians as hostages. Yes, some of these groups have said something against killing innocent people, maybe even against harming Israeli civilians. But their statements are usually not forthright. A humanistic statement against violence continues with the spoken or implied word, “BUT ... ”

When I worked as a hospital chaplain, one of my colleagues from whom I learned a lot, Rabbi Bonita Taylor, said that when a patient puts “but” in her story or statement, you can usually delete the part that precedes that word. The essence follows “but.” I have that experience again listening to many statements from the Jewish “left.” They say they are sad that Israeli civilians were killed, BUT I am searching for their empathy with fellow Jews.

And, of course, there is a strong sense of anger and even shame in Israel and the wider Jewish community that sees the murders, torture, rape and kidnapping in Israel, and has no space to consider the lives of Palestinians. Speaking of the suffering of multiple groups at a time of war – speaking of Jews and Arabs, of Israelis and Palestinians, may get you branded as a “traitor,” subject to attack from your own community.

So we are on a narrow bridge.

Some ties are stronger than others. This is not evil or inhumane. In an interview in July, Peter Beinart (now editor-at-large of the non-Zionist journal *Jewish Currents*) talked about his ties to fellow Jews. Beinart said we are family. And when pushed by the moderator, he said he is concerned about all children in the world. However, he said that he has a special tie and responsibility to his own two children. So he feels a special tie/responsibility for Jews, even in Israel, of which he is a strong critic. I also feel a direct connection, beyond shared humanity, to Jews and other residents of Israel, part of my *mishpakhah* (“family”), even when we do not agree.

2. The Destructive Force Unleashed

My college Hillel rabbi, Moshe Adler, z”l, taught me this during protests at the University of Wisconsin against the Vietnam War that threatened to turn violent. It is from the *midrash Mekhilta* (Bo, 12:22), commenting on the Exodus passage about the 10th plague in Egypt – the death of the Egyptian first-born. “When permission is given to the destructive force [or “Destroyer”] to wreak havoc, it does not distinguish between the innocent and guilty.”

משנתנה רשות למשחית לחבל אינו מבחין בין צדיק לרשע

Is this text a description of a tragic reality, of the innocent casualties, the “collateral damage,” in any conflict or war? Or is it a cautionary warning that once unleashed, some forces cannot be controlled? It is more than ironic that the word I translated as “wreak havoc” (*lekhabel*) is the root of the modern Hebrew word for terrorist, *mekhabel*.

3. The Desire for Revenge

Many Jews (or fans of Bob Marley) will recall the opening of Psalm 137, “By the waters of Babylon.” It continues with another well-known line, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem ...”

This entire psalm, though, is disturbing. The second part concludes,

Fair Babylon, you predator,
a blessing on him who repays you in kind
what you have inflicted on us;

a blessing on him who seizes your babies
and dashes them against the rocks! (NJPS translation)

I can only read these horrifying words (perhaps written as a fantasy in exile) of violently smashing their babies in a non-literal manner, contrary to the *peshat* (simple reading of the text): “God, keep us from becoming people who would do such things.” This second half of Psalm 137 has been dropped from all liberal Jewish liturgies that I am familiar with. It still is the introduction to the weekday grace after meals (*Birkat Hamazon*) in the Orthodox Ashkenazi tradition.

The desire for revenge is a real human emotion. We need to be wary of Jewish voices, so pained by the violent violations, that want more than justice – random and violent retribution or revenge.

4. No Preemptive Punishment

In Genesis 21, Hagar and her child, Ishmael, have been expelled by Abraham and Sarah, and are wandering in the wilderness. The water in their canteen is gone, and the child is dying of thirst. Hagar cries out to God.

R’ Yitzhak said, “We do not judge a person except on the basis of their deeds at that time.” (Rosh HaShanah 16b)

God heard the cry of the boy, and a messenger of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is.” (Genesis 21:17, NJPS)

Hagar opens her eyes and finds a well of water.

The final words of the verse, *be-asher hu sham* (“where he is”), lead to a discussion in the Talmud about pre-emptive punishment. After all, Ishmael will grow up and become the ancestor of the Arabs – future opponents, even enemies – of the people of Israel. Why not let this child die to prevent future harm?

R’ Yitzhak said, ‘We do not judge a person except on the basis of their deeds at that time,’ citing this verse and the phrase “*be-asher hu sham*.” (Rosh HaShanah 16b) Where is he now? A child in the wilderness dying of thirst.

The commentary *Torah Temima* by Baruch ha-Levi Epstein (ca. 1900) adds: “Even though in the future, after a time he (Ishmael) will do evil to Israel and even kill (Jews) ...” At the moment, he is a suffering child.

So we are on a narrow bridge. May the Source of Peace make peace for all Israel and all who dwell on Earth.

*Originally published in Evolve: Ground Breaking Jewish Publications
November 11, 2023*

Feeling Alone in the Middle of a Crowd

Rabbi Shira Stern, D.Min, BCC

Feeling alone in the middle of a crowd,
I turn to You
For comfort,
For strength
For *chizuk* to move forward
Shiva is like that
Mourning alone, surrounded by people
 Friends and strangers
Sinking low into the chair
Tunnel vision directed within.

But what if the opposite is also true?
What if the common/uncommon pain of death
Connects us in ways we did not expect,
To each other, on our way to You
 In anger
 In sorrow
 In shared grief with tears overflowing
What if we created a space of spiritual awareness of each other?
What if we held up each other's arms when we saw the other faltering?
What if we created a safe place where we could hear our own screaming and the screaming of others?
What if we had a place where we could empty our hearts to make room
 For those who look to *us* to soothe their own
This is exhausting.
Help me do this Holy Work so that
Your hands guiding ours
Restore a small measure of peace to the world.

Yizkor 5785

Rabbi Melanie Levav, BCC, LMSW

“There are no words,” we often hear from the first person to speak at a funeral, only to then have the experience of sitting through many, many words. We use words in eulogies to share memories of the dead, to attempt to paint visual pictures of a life, to try to make their memory into an actual blessing. We say words of blessing for so many rituals and daily experiences – 100 blessings a day, recommended by the rabbis of the Talmud (BT Menachot 43b) – and yet, there is no blessing for lighting the yahrzeit (memorial) candle we kindle on the days Yizkor is said.

Yizkor, the memorial prayers said in memory of the dead on Yom Kippur (and each of the pilgrimage holidays – Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot) offer words to make memory into blessing, right in the middle of the dress rehearsal for death that is Yom Kippur. This year’s trauma of unexpected deaths, of horrific deaths, of deaths in large numbers – it feels almost too much for words.

When we make a visit to a shiva home, it is customary not to speak to the mourner until they have spoken first. We enter in silence and we sit in silence until it is broken by the mourner. Yet, when we leave a shiva home, it is traditional to say the words, hamakom yinachem... may you be comforted among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem, recognizing that mourning is not a solitary experience. We need to probe the cliché “there are no words,” to reconcile it with the reality that there are many, many prescribed words, a whole Jewish language used for death, dying, and grief.

We learn from Rabbi Earl Grollman z'l, a master of consolation in a time before grief specialists, who wrote, “In times of crisis, silence is not golden.” Baruch dayan ha’emet, blessed is the judge of truth, are the words said upon hearing the news of a death or at the time of rending one’s garment as a mourner. Plenty of words exist to try to speak to the shock of death. And yet the Torah teaches that after the deaths of his sons Nadav and Avihu, who brought strange fire, an unsolicited offering before God, Aaron was silent. “Vayidom Aharon.” Psychologists suggest that silence is a trauma response.

We have seen this trauma response on full display in the last year. How can we possibly find words to speak to the deaths we have experienced, individually and collectively? The psalmist reminds us that expressing our words, our cries, is an act of hope – the hope that we might be heard: I cry out to God; I cry that God might listen to me. (Psalm 77:2) And yet the psalmist also acknowledges the reality that sometimes, I am overwrought, I cannot speak. (Psalm 77:5)

As we move into the experience of reciting Yizkor this year, how might we find our own words to respond to this moment in our lives? In her book *The Cancer Journals*, Black feminist Audre Lorde wrote, “In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality, and of what I wished and wanted for my life, however short it might be, priorities and omissions became strongly etched in a merciless light, and what I most regretted were my silences.” What are the words you do not yet have?

Dr. Ira Byock, a palliative care physician, writes in *Four Things That Matter Most: A Book About Living*, “There’s a saying in my field, ‘It’s always too soon, until it’s too late.’ It’s never too soon. Don’t wait. Say the four things: Please forgive me. I forgive you. Thank you. I love you.” What do you need to say this year in particular? How can you use words to make memories into blessings?

May the memories of those who have died, in this most difficult of years, and in years past, be a blessing for you, for us, and for all of humanity.

Originally published in the SVIVAH 2024 High Holiday Machzor Companion

NAJC Healing Prayer

NAJC *Chesed* Committee, edited by Ziona Zelazo

Hashem, we come before You with heavy hearts remembering our kindred spirits in Israel and over the ocean.

We come to you, Adonai, with a plea to protect and keep safe our sisters and brothers in Israel from the war and its impact on them. We pray for those who have been injured physically, emotionally, spiritually, and morally.

Please be with those hostages that are still held captives by Hamas. Bring them home now!

Please G-D, stay with the bereaved families, who lost their sons and daughters who have fallen in the line of duty protecting our people and our land. And keep protecting those soldiers who are still fighting in the front line.

May You bring comfort to the wounded soldiers, granting them strength as they navigate their journey towards recovery.

Hashem, we pray that all the evacuated families will be able to return to their homes soon.

G-D, surround them all with Your love and support, and provide them with solace in their sorrow. May they find hope and resilience in Your presence.

Change the channel from the dread of the news

To the tones of the music

Dancing the salsa of harmony, and trust in Tomorrow.

NAJC *Chesed* Committee:

Rabbi Ziona Zelazo, Chaplain Susan Katz, Rabbi Laurie Kurs,
Rabbi Bruce Pfeffer, BCC, Rabbinic Chaplain Joni Brenner,
Rabbi Judith Beiner

On Grounding and Witness: A Chaplain's Post-October 7th Visit to Israel

Rabbi Beth Naditch, BCC

5 things I could see:

1. Planted in the ground on stakes as if they themselves were trees, I see posters of the 364 murdered and 40 kidnapped festival goers at the site of the Nova Festival. Some of these are covered with stickers or quotes that try to capture a life. These should be on social media accounts, not the equivalent of gravestones. In front of some posters, there are memorial candles lit, protected in glass enclosures. I wonder who tends to the flames. I see that some posters are arranged back to back with partners, siblings, or friends.
2. Open fields and sparse groves of young, thin trees, impossible to hide behind as the stuff of nightmares came crashing into consciousness in the early hours of a previously peaceful morning.
3. New saplings, planted a short time ago on Tu B'shvat in memory of all those who fell, by their families, because what else could they possibly do?
4. Fields of bright red *kalaniyot*, (anemones) now in bloom for spring, inexplicably because how is it spring already in this frozen year? They cover the ground in a beautiful perversion of the blood spilled there so recently, somehow blooming and bringing back the hopeful meaning of "*darom adom*" (Red covered South)
5. A soldier, silently weeping, leaning on one of these thin trees for support, head in his hands. Another soldier stood, eyes trained on him, at a respectful distance, allowing him his moment but ready to step forward at any moment to support her friend.

4 things I could hear:

1. An older man says to a younger woman, as they lit a *ner neshama* under a young man's poster, "He was a good man." Although they weren't speaking to me, I quietly responded, "*Yehi Zichro Baruch*" (May his memory be for a blessing.) The man turned to me and drew me into their little circle of three. He explained that this man was his nephew, and then pointed to another poster, a few feet away. "He is my nephew also, he was taken to Gaza." "That one," he noted, pointing to yet a third poster, "was his brother. His memory should be for a holy blessing." I nodded, trying to pour my presence into the space between us, desperately wishing that speaking to this stranger might alleviate a 60th of this man's pain. He continued. "Another escaped." I replied, with tears in my eyes, that his whole family seemed to be there. "Everyone's family was here," he answered. "There is not one family in Israel not grieving now. Every single family has a connection." He pointed at the young woman, now just gazing at the photo of the young man, and said, "That was his girlfriend, my nephew's." Punctuating his words with gestures, he repeated, "Not one family!" We stood together in silence, until the man announced "It's time for *mincha* (the afternoon service). Excuse me," and he disappeared into the sea of faces, looking for a minyan with whom to daven.
2. Hushed tones of those paying respects to those who died at a peaceful festival of music and dance.
3. Hebrew, English, Russian, French, Spanish, German, as people gathered in this place wrapped together in sadness as if we were the tzitzit of a tallit being brought together from four corners of the earth for a common purpose of witness.
4. Explosions, the sounds of artillery from Gaza, only 2 km away, puncturing the silence and serving as a constant reminder that this is still happening.

3 things I could smell:

1. The scent of manure used in spring farming in the Gaza envelope, where 60% of Israel's produce is planted and farmed, now largely harvested by volunteers.
2. The fragrant wildflowers.
3. The exhaust from the buses bringing people to this site. The line between trauma tourism and paying respect to the dead was thin here, and I was grateful to encounter only respectful engagement in this place of mourning.

2 things I could touch:

1. The faces on the planted posters, which look so alive, in the prime of life, now reduced to smooth, glossy, two-dimensional paper.
2. The water I poured over my hands in the ritual way of leaving a cemetery, before getting on a comfortable bus to be driven away.

1 thing I could taste:

1. The sour tang of my lemon candy, carried with me to keep me grounded in the present moment and protecting me from the time collapse of trauma.

(Note: This reflection is written in the style of the 5-4-3-2-1 exercise, which is used in trauma-informed care during times of acute activation, anxiety, or stress to engage the senses and ground one in the present moment.)

Sacred Light

Rabbi Sara O'Donnell Adler

*“At what hour may one begin to recite the [morning prayer]?
When one can distinguish between a blue [cord] and a white.
Rabbi Eliezer says: between a blue [cord] and a green” – Talmud Berachot*

God of Distinction
who separates darkness from light
divides the oceans above
from mists below

God the Creator
who pries apart land from sea
gives wings to creatures of air
fins to the slithery deep

God of Prophets
who, with Your pointed finger, inscribes the law
sets boundaries around time—
forbidden and pure, holy and profane

Will you have this world be as it is?

Over threads of blue and white
black and white
or green and blue,
we search for You in feeble light.

We need more light.

God of the Broken-hearted
who stitches time together
help us see as we twist
the corners of our garments,
in the twilight, the terrifying
space before dawn.

Cantor Rabbi Rob Jury, PhD, BCC, CRADC, LCPC

330, the number of days that Hersh Goldberg-Polin survived as a hostage. 330 is written with the letters *shin* and *lahmed* in Hebrew spelling the word *shel* meaning *of* or *belonging*. 330 also corresponds to the *Gematria* (the numeric equivalent) to the word נערי meaning *youth* or *youthful*. Hersh, like so many of the hostages and so many killed during the war, was a youth. The following is a co-texted prayer. Co-texting places words from two or more different texts in dialogue with one another. In times of loss, we often turn to our text as we seek meaning and connection. This prayer is co-texted in five parts with passages of the *TaNaKh* and passages from the eulogy Rachel Goldberg-Polin, Hersh's mother, offered in his memory.

Of Remembering

God remembered Rachel...she conceived and bore a son. (Bereshit 30:32-33).

I didn't know what it would be like to have a son; I didn't have a way to comprehend it. My husband leaned over to me, grabbed my hand, wiped my face and told me, "Sons are special. For them, the sun rises and sets in their mother's eyes." Then he laughed and said, "For Jewish boys, that goes double."

Of Youth

"You have let me experience it, God, from my youth; until now I have proclaimed Your wondrous deeds" (Psalms 71:17).

You squeezed into your young life a lot of experiences. And that gives me relief and comfort. You made true and deep friendships, you traveled each summer and started to explore the world, you worked, you learned, you read, you taught, you served, you listened, you even fell in love and had a deep true relationship for more than 2 years. And you shared the excitement of that new experience with us. You charmed everyone you ever talked to, old or young. You promoted justice and peace in a way only a young pure, wide-eyed idealist can. You never raised your voice to me in your life. You treated me respectfully always, even when you chose a different path.

Of Mourning

"A cry is heard on high, wailing, bitter weeping—Rachel weeping for her children" (Jeremiah 31:15).

Hersh, for all these months I have been in such torment worrying about you every millisecond of every day. It was such a specific type of misery that I have never experienced before. I tried hard to suppress the missing-you part. Because that, I was convinced, would break me. So I spent 330 days terrified, scared, worrying, and frightened. It closed my throat and made my soul throb with 3rd degree burns.

Of Comfort

May you be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

I take such comfort knowing you were with Carmel, Ori, Eden, Almog and Alex. From what I have been told, they each were delightful in different ways, and I think that is how the 6 of you managed to stay alive in unimaginable circumstances for so very long....

And I'm so sorry to ask, because we have given you nothing and you have already given us profoundly and completely, but I beg of you all: please don't leave us now.

Of transformation

"You transformed my mourning into dancing, you undid my sackcloth and fortified me for joy (Psalms 30:12).

As we transform our hope into grief and this new unknown brand of pain, I beg of you, please do what you can to have your light shine down on me, Dada, Leebie and Orly. Help shower us with healing and resilience. Help us to rise again. I know it will take a long time, but please may G-d bless us that one day, one fine day, Dada, Leebie, Orly and I will hear laughter, and we will turn around and see... that it's us. And that we are OK. You will always be with us as a force of love and vitality, you will become our superpower.

Resilience

Rabbi Sam Seicol, BCC



**When you find you doubt how far you can go,
Remember how far you have come.
Reflect on all that you have faced,
All that you can yet achieve –
All the opportunities still to encounter.
Each step grows to fulfillment.
In the journey, keep the end always in view.**

Chaplain Sam Seicol
samuel_seicol@meei.harvard.edu
masseyeandear.org/services/spiritual-care



Alone

**Yet filled with faith, willing to stand;
And to stand out.**

**Delicate strength, vibrant color;
Growing from the nurturing past;
Striving to build for the future.
Part of a tapestry – one small part –
Sharing in a beauty called:**

Hope

Chaplain Sam Seicol
samuel_seicol@meei.harvard.edu
masseyeandear.org/services/spiritual-care



The Sound – the Journey to Hope

Rabbi Lynn C. Liberman, BCC

On this sacred occasion ‘the horn’ is sounded.

ובחדש השביעי באחד לחדש, מקרא-קדש יהיה לכם--כל-מלאכת עבודה, לא תעשו:
יום תרועה, יהיה לכם

In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. **You shall observe it as a day when the horn is sounded.** (Numbers 29:1)

**A new year. A new beginning. A time to start again ...
And yet --- we are broken hearted.**

והנה ענין התקיעות היא **לב נשב**

And the content of the blowing of the shofar is a **broken heart ...**
(*Shem MiShuel, Rosh Hashana 13:21*)

October 7

**Our hearts have remained broken, torn open.
I feel tentative. I feel fragile. I feel worried. I feel anxious.**

Because we remember . . .

The moments of sound – Malchuyot, ZICHRONOT, Shofarot

Remembrances ...

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת-נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת-בְּרִיתוֹ

God heard their moaning, and God remembered ... (Ex. 2:24)

WE BEGIN, STEP BY STEP, THROUGH THE MONTH OF ELUL

A daily call, an ancient connection. The voice of time coming back upon us.

קול דממה דקה – a Still Small Voice ... crying out.

My tears fall

The shofar is who we are, how we feel, our voice when we do not have a voice...

Echoes of moments past – for Isaac the Ram’s horn,

to the Holy Temple

to Jerusalem in '67

to today, wherever Jews live.

An ancient, familiar voice is sounded – and heard.

This sound has come before our time ... It will endure well past this moment.

One, three, nine --- one long, three separate, nine staccato

Our hearts beat, in trembling, sadness, sobbing, sighing ... and in hope

We call out from the depths ...

קרא בגרון אל-תחשך, פשוףר הרם קולך

Cry with full throat, without restraint; (Isaiah 58:1)

We cry out ...

אשעור תרועה כשלוש יבבות

...the length of a terua is equal to the length of **three whimpers ...**

(Mishna Rosh Hashanna 4:9)

As the shofar mirrors our fragileness to hopefulness ... let us hear the call ...

Broken sounds that end with *Tekiah Gedola* – the GREAT BLAST of hope...

בראש השנה מצות עשה של תורה לשמע תרועת השופר

It is a positive commandment from the Torah **to hear the sounding of the shofar** on Rosh HaShanah,...." (Mishnah Torah, Shofar Sukkah and Lulav 1:1)

On the First Anniversary of October 7, 2023/Shemini Atzeret 5784: A Reflection, a Story, and a Piece of Torah

Rabbi Joseph S. Ozarowski, D. Min., BCC

Most people remember WHERE they were on major occasions, especially tragic ones. Like many of you, I was in shul on Shemini Atzeret last year, October 7, 2023. We were trying to absorb the scraps of horrible information we were gleaned from the non-Jewish synagogue staff who had access to TV. Feeling numb, we did not know what to say. But I also remember WHEN I was. You see, October 7 is my English birthday. I was hoping to have a pleasant Yomtov-dik birthday that day. It was not to be.

I don't think I can consider my birthday the same way ever again. Perhaps I will start observing my Hebrew Birthday – the second day (diaspora) of Chol Hamoed Sukkot.

When I went to Israel this past January on a Rabbinic mission, our group visited Kfar Aza, one of the Kibbutzim attacked in the massacre by Hamas. There, we met Shimon Alkabetz, a member of the Kibbutz. Yes, he is a descendant of R. Shlomo Alkabetz, who wrote *L'Cha Dodi*. He told us the story of how his daughter was living with her fiancé in the young people's section of the Kibbutz. There, amidst the ruins of their modest home, he told us how they were about to be married later that year, how she even had her wedding dress in the room. Hamas terrorists threw a grenade into the room. Her fiancé fell on it, killing himself but saving her. Yet, she knew they were still around. So, she hid under the bed, asked *mechila* from her fiancé, then took his dead but still warm body, and covered her hiding place under the bed with it. She remained this way for hours, while the terrorists were drinking the couple's coffee and eating their food. She was able to get out when Israeli troops finally came to the rescue.

Shimon concluded the story by saying, "We have shown the world how we can die together. Now we have to show the world how we can live together."

As a chaplain, all I could do was hug him and stammer, "*Ein millim* – there are no words."

When Aaron loses his sons Nadav and Avihu to the "Strange Fire" that they offered, the text in Vayikra/Leviticus 10:3 notes, "*Yayidom Aharon* – and Aaron was silent." Many of the classical commentaries attempt to explain Aaron's silence as passive, attempting to quietly accept the loss. But the Kotzker Rebbe offers a radically different explanation. He explains this (using the Hebrew word similarity of silence, *D'mama* and blood, *Dam*) as, "*Ah blutiger d'mama*" – A bloody silence. We may be numb but not unfeeling.

Sometimes, we need to put the birthdays and words aside. We need to acknowledge our bloody silence in the face of our sadness. There may not be words, but we still need to show how we can live together.

Author Biographies

Rabbi Sara O'Donnell Adler, BCC serves as a staff chaplain at University of Michigan hospitals. Her interests include narrative medicine, animal assisted therapy, and gardening for wildlife with native plants. Sara's poetry has appeared in multiple publications including *Poetica Magazine*, *Intima: a Journal of Narrative Medicine*, and the *Bear River Review*. She lives with her husband in Ann Arbor.

Chaplain Hagar Ben-Eliezer, BCC is a Chaplain/Therapist at UC Berkeley Hillel. She works with students on campus and internationally on Hillel Birthright trips. Hagar serves on the NAJC board, enjoys mentoring new chaplains and creating new ways to fundraise. Hagar lives in San Francisco, the best city in the world.

Rabbi Frederick L Klein BCC, is the director of Mishkan Miami, the Jewish Connection for Spiritual Support at the Greater Miami Jewish Federation. He is also the executive VP of the Rabbinical Association of Greater Miami. An Orthodox rabbi, he was ordained at Yeshiva University and holds an MA in Bible as well as an MPhil in Jewish history from Columbia University.

Rabbi Bryan Kinzbrunner, BCC is a past president of NAJC. He worked for over 15 years in Senior Care and Hospice and is now dividing his professional time between being a teacher/guidance counselor at Rabbi Pesach Raymon Yeshiva, RPRY, in Edison, NJ and providing private spiritual care support as the owner of New Beginnings Spiritual Coaching and Consulting LLC.

Rabbi Melanie Levav, BCC is passionate about helping to improve end-of-life care and conversations guided by Jewish wisdom and brings this commitment to Shomer Collective as Executive Director. An alumna of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship, Rabbi Levav was ordained as a rabbi by the Jewish Theological Seminary; she is certified as a chaplain by Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains, received her graduate degree in Social Work from Columbia University, and certification as an end-of-life doula through the University of Vermont.

Rabbi Lynn Liberman, BCC was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in 1993. After 21 years as a congregational rabbi, Lynn became a BCC and now is the Community Chaplain of the Twin Cities, Minnesota. She also works as a chaplain for law enforcement officers, a local hospice and two area hospital systems.

Rabbi Beth Naditch, BCC is an ACPE Certified Educator and the Incoming Director of CPE at Hebrew Senior Life in Boston, MA. She has a specialty in geriatric chaplaincy and in trauma-informed care.

Rabbi Joseph S. Ozarowski, D.Min, BCC is Rabbinic Counselor and Chaplain for JCFS Chicago, where he manages their Jewish Community Chaplaincy Services. He is the author of *To Walk in God's Ways: Jewish Pastoral Perspectives in Illness and Bereavement* and is the Immediate Past President of NAJC.

Rabbi Sam Seicol, BCC currently serves as the Interfaith Chaplain at Massachusetts Eye & Ear. For the majority of his professional career, Rabbi Seicol provided Geriatric Chaplaincy services for 21 years to facilities in Phoenix and Boston. During his time in Geriatric Chaplaincy, Rabbi was a founding member and Chair of the Forum on Religion Spirituality and Aging in the American Society

on Aging, a founding member of Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains, a frequent speaker on the local and national level, and the author of many articles on spiritual issues in aging.

Rabbi Shira Stern, BCC was ordained by HUC-JIR in 1983 and received her Doctor of Ministry in 2004. Rabbi Stern has been a pulpit rabbi for 13 years, a Board Certified hospital and hospice chaplain for 40, a police chaplain and a pastoral counselor for 20. She currently volunteers as a Disaster Spiritual Care chaplain and is on the Leadership Team for the American Red Cross.

Rabbi Robert Tabak, PhD, BCC is a graduate of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Before retiring he served for more than 13 years as a staff chaplain at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, where he continues to serve on the CPE advisory committee. He is a past vice president and past secretary of NAJC. He edits the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association's newsletter, *RRA Connection*. He is active in interfaith relations and in Minyan Dorshei Derekh in Philadelphia.

Rabbanit Alissa Thomas-Newborn, BCC is a Board Certified Chaplain at New York-Presbyterian Columbia University Irving Medical Center. She has specialties in Palliative Care, Critical Care, and Emergency Psychiatric Care, and she is the president of NAJC (*Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains*). She is the Schwartz Rounds facilitator for Columbia University Irving Medical Center. Rabbanit Alissa is also the Rabbanit (clergy) at Congregation Netivot Shalom in Teaneck, NJ.

Rabbi Ziona Zelazo was born and raised in Haifa and served in the IDF. Before she was ordained at Academy for Jewish Religion in 2010 she was a professor of Anthropology. Rabbi Ziona is an independent rabbi and is working as an interfaith hospital chaplain at Valley Hospital in NJ. She is also a volunteer Disaster Spiritual Care leader and supervisor for the American Red Cross in the Northeast region of NJ.



**Neshama: Association
of Jewish Chaplains**
The Professional Organization of Jewish
Spiritual Health Specialists

4200 Biscayne Boulevard
Miami, Florida 33137
305-394-8018 office
info@najc.org
<https://najc.org>