

Noach 5776 (10/16/15)  
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Not so long ago, I struggled tremendously to identify my feelings. It wasn't that I didn't have them, but rather that they felt elusive. Recognizing the complexity of emotions meant realizing that we as humans feel more than one thing at a time. Learning to feel without judging what I am feeling is an ongoing journey for me. After a long week of senseless violence and terror in Israel, I am certainly feeling many emotions. On this Shabbat, I join with rabbis from all the major denominations in the United States in observing a Sabbath of Solidarity with Israel. <sup>1</sup> Tonight, I want to share my feelings; feelings rooted in love for *Am, Eretz, and Medinat Yisrael*; the people, the land, and the state of Israel. I share these feelings not to spark judgment or debate but rather to encourage conversation; conversation that is real, honest, and heartfelt; conversation that is emotional and delicate; conversation rooted in respect and commitment.

Tonight, I feel scared.

The terrorist attacks that have taken place this week in Jerusalem are different. They have not been aimed at killing as many as possible. They have been intimate and random acts of violence. Stabbing someone repeatedly with a knife inflicts pain in a way different from detonating explosives on a bus. To know that many Israelis are afraid to be out in public places worried about the next attack makes me feel scared. I think about the

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<sup>1</sup> The participants in the Solidarity Sabbath are the Union for Reform Judaism, Central Conference of American Rabbis, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Rabbinical Assembly, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America and the Rabbinical Council of America, National Council of Young Israel, and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and Jewish Reconstructionist Communities. ([JTA Article](#))

walks I have gone on through the Old City at night; through the heart of Jerusalem. I am not sure I would feel safe doing that right now.

Rabbi Donniel Hartman, President of the Shalom Hartman Institute of Jerusalem wrote a moving editorial this week entitled “My Gun and I.” In it, he explains, “My gun is my barometer. It has been in my possession for 37 years. Most of the time it rests securely in my safe, taken out only when I need to pass my re-certification or to be put in secure storage in a gun store when I travel overseas. It is my barometer, for every few years I feel the need to carry it on me (for which I have a permit). Every few years my sense of safety and that of my family and my fellow citizens is undermined, as the streets on which we walk and live become the frontlines. It is my barometer for the moment when I no longer know if the person with whom I share these streets is there to pursue a normal life or to pursue me and those around me...My gun is my barometer, and today I am walking with my gun.”<sup>2</sup>

Tonight, I feel sad.

Among several dozen stabbing attacks in the past two weeks, a thirteen year old boy stabbed another thirteen year old boy. The accused is reported to have confessed to the attack, saying “I went there to stab Jews.” Thirteen. He did not come to this idea on his own. I feel sad to imagine living in a world where there are societies that teaches children to hate; where there are societies that teach children that violence is the answer.

I feel sad when I think about a conversation I had with a Lebanese man while living abroad in Belgium. He asserted that peace can be achieved only once a generation grows up

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<sup>2</sup> <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/my-gun-and-i/>

without experiencing violence. When a generation sees peace as the only option, it will be achieved.

It is hard to imagine peace in a generation of thirteen year olds stabbing other thirteen year olds. I am sad when I must admit that this is our reality right now.

Tonight, I feel angry.

I feel angry because of the way the media has reported on the events of the week. I watched as an MSNBC reporter was caught on camera, misrepresenting what he had seen. When, as an “eyewitness” he described Israelis shooting and killing an unarmed Arab, he was corrected because viewers were watching images that clearly showed the man wielding a large knife, dressed in camouflage, running at people.<sup>3</sup>

I feel angry because nowhere else do we approach terrorism by discussing what the victims did to deserve what happened to them. Yes, there is a larger context to these acts of violence. And yes, exchanges need to take place where we address and call out those—including ourselves—who need to be called out for contributing to the current climate. But that conversation cannot happen right now. Not when human beings are being stabbed, run over, and shot in the street as they attempt to go about their everyday lives.

I feel angry because I care. Israel is core to my identity as a rabbi and as a Jew.

Tonight, I want to feel hope.

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<sup>3</sup> It was brought to my attention that when this happened live on air, it likely was possible that the reporter could not see exactly what happened. I understand that. And it still means he should not have jumped to conclusions about the event that transpired. It still remains problematic when the default is to assume or assert that an Israeli soldier killed an unarmed Palestinian.

I watched a video of an Arab-Israeli journalist Lucy Aharish as she spoke angrily against the actions and incitements of Arab and Muslim leaders,

“Even if the status quo on the Temple Mount has been broken, does that allow someone to go and murder someone else because of a sacred place? Or because of religion? I cannot understand it and I cannot comprehend it. Why? Because of God? What God are they speaking of? That allows for children to go out and murder innocent people? I cannot justify it in any way. I can’t accept it.”<sup>4</sup>

Only when none of us can accept the senseless hatred perpetrated by our own people or by others will there be peace.

I want to feel hope because at the end of this weekend, the World Zionist Congress will meet in Israel. 56 of the 145 delegates from the United States represent ARZA, the Association of Reform Zionists of America. With an additional 190 delegates from Israel and 165 from the rest of the world, the 500 person representative body will look towards the future of the Jewish people.

I want to feel hope because we read parashat Noach this week. After the flood that destroys the world, God creates a covenant with Noah. The rainbow is the symbol that God will never again destroy the world. But people, too have to play a role in the covenantal fulfillment. The rainbow is the beauty at the end of a storm. The rainbow is a symbol of hope.

I want to feel hope because that is what the Israeli national anthem, Hatikvah, means.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/video/1.680623>

I want to feel hope. And I can't help but feel anger, sadness, and fear alongside it. We pray together this Shabbat for peace over Jerusalem, over Israel, and over the entire world. And we pray knowing that prayer alone will not bring peace. We stand in solidarity and we express our emotions—as varied and as complex as they may be—so that we can create the space we need to feel hope; the space we need to seek peace.

Ken yehi ratzon, May this be God's will.