

Subject line: Resources Your Rabbis are Finding Helpful Right Now

Dear Oseh community,

As we continue to process the horror of October 7's attacks on Israel and to follow Israel's response, we - as your rabbis - wanted to share a few resources and ideas that we have found helpful, covering the following four points:

- 1) A prayer for the redemption of captives
- 2) Taking care of ourselves
- 3) Insights on the situation and acting
- 4) Examples of coexistence

1) A Prayer for the Redemption of Captives

The [mitzvah of redeeming captives](#) has been very important in Judaism for centuries. Over 199 people from more than 40 countries are being held hostage by Hamas in Gaza. Most of them are civilians. They include children, infants, elderly and sick people. They must be brought home. This prayer was written by Rabbi Ofer Sabath Beit-Halachmi (who teaches at OSRS):

Our God, the One who raised Joseph up from the pit, be "a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble." (Psalm 9:10) Send complete rescue and full redemption to those held captive by the enemy.....[when possible, add names here]

Strengthen their spirit and bring them our prayers that they be protected from all harm. Implant understanding in the heart of the enemy that they may return the captives in wholeness of body and spirit.

Grant wisdom to the Israel Defense Forces that they may secure freedom for the captives without loss of life. Grant strength of spirit and courage of heart to all the sons and daughters of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar to release bonds of captivity and allow us all to live in freedom.

"They shall call upon Me, and I will answer them; I will be with them in distress; I will rescue them, and honor them." (after Psalm 91:15)

You can find the Hebrew of this prayer [here](#).

2) Taking Care of Ourselves

Western culture generally places the locus of power in our "minds" and we gain power through "information." Although that holds truth, it does not hold the whole truth. "Information" alone neither gives us ultimate control of a situation nor power. In fact, "too much" information can weaken and destabilize us. What is "too much information?" The answer is somewhat subjective, but the overarching question to ask ourselves is: as I

learn more about a situation, am I able to integrate what is helpful and release what is not?

Over the 24 hours we each have every day, there are some non-negotiables of some amount of eating, sleeping, and allowing for our most basic bodily functioning. Fortunately, we are not directly trying to survive in the midst of a war. With that luxury comes the responsibility to be clear-headed and open-hearted, assessing the situation and ready to act when it is clear what we can do.

How might we bring clear intentionality to what we each need in order to be as grounded as possible during this destabilizing time? For each one of us, we need to be mindful about avoiding the slippery slope of unconscious scrolling and non-stop news consumption.

We also encourage you to consider a) intentional time away from the news, and b) intentionally attending to the needs of your soul at this time. Some suggestions for attending to your soul include:

- Spiritual Practice! Spiritual practices are actually training for difficult times like this. If you have any kind of meditation, prayer, or other spiritual practice, now is the time to do it! If you don't yet feel that they are accessible, what songs do you know that speak to your heart?
- Getting outdoors (taking a *slow* walk, sitting quietly, looking and listening at the miracles of the natural world around you, praying and singing outdoors)
- Moving your body vigorously (taking a *fast* walk/ run, lifting weights, ... pushing your body to an appropriate and safe edge for your physical health)
- Allowing the various emotions you are holding within to safely move through you, and *out*.
 - Feeling rage? What can you safely throw or hit? Lifting a rock outside-above your head- and throwing it down on the ground while vocalizing loudly can be very cathartic. Hit a pillow/ your bed/ your couch. Use a bedroom pillow in the same way as the rock. Experiment with how you hold it so that you can get a very satisfying "smack" sound as it hits the floor. Do it again and again and again until you are exhausted.
 - Feeling helpless? Allow yourself to curl up in a ball on your bed/ couch/ etc and let the tears flow...
 - Feeling depleted? Take a hot bath and allow yourself to soak. (Add essential oils, soothing music...) Enjoy a nourishing meal.
 - Feeling lonely? Reach out to a friend. Hug. Play with your pet/s.
 - Feeling stuck? Try one of the above.
 - Feeling numb? Also, try one of the above. Also, I (Rabbi Daria) have been developing a practice for breaking through numbness to access and release stuck emotions in our bodies. I have not yet widely taught it, but this war is inviting me to "get going" with this. If you are interested in being

part of this pilot, you can click on the link [here](#). I will be offering an opportunity to learn this practice on either Tuesdays, from 5:30-6:30 pm or Thursdays, from 8:30-9:30 am, depending on which time works better for more people. It's a 1-hour, 4-week commitment, and the sessions will be only on Zoom. Contact me with questions, and feel free to share this invitation with others you think would benefit.

TO READ THE REST OF THE RABBIS' MESSAGE--RELATING TO EXAMPLES OF COEXISTENCE, AS WELL AS INSIGHTS ON THE SITUATION AND ACTING-- PLEASE CLICK HERE.

3) Insights on the Situation and Acting

Although many people at Oseh Shalom are likely unaware of this, I (Rabbi Josh) have an MA in Peace Studies from Notre Dame. I received it almost 20 years ago and went on to work professionally in a different field. As I spoke about at our 75th birthday celebration for Israel, I was also deeply engaged in Israeli-Palestinian peace work for over five years in the mid-2000s, lived in Israel for 2 years, and spent several weeks living and volunteering in the West Bank. These experiences inform my ideas.

I am very rarely in favor of military action, whether by the United States or Israel. It is often pointed out by intelligent commentators on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that "there is no military solution," and that at the end of the day, Israelis and Palestinians will have to figure out a way to live together.

However, it seems indisputable that Israel will soon reoccupy Gaza in their understandable and justified move to end Hamas rule. The status quo of deterring Hamas collapsed in the face of their unspeakably barbaric attacks and clearly crossed a red line. I do not see how any country in the world would tolerate a group like that right next to it.

I have found the work of [Gershon Baskin](#) particularly helpful in thinking about the situation. Baskin is an Israeli who is most well-known for being the lead negotiator to secure the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit from Hamas in 2011. He has been negotiating with Hamas for over 18 years and has also been deeply involved in working for a shared future for Israelis and Palestinians for over 20 years on a policy level. I remember reading his work while studying for my MA.

This is an incredibly difficult situation for Israel and a very divisive and heated issue for Jews around the world. Following Baskin and others, we as your rabbis believe in advocating for Israel to protect Palestinian civilian lives to the maximum extent possible. Non-combatants, regardless of their beliefs, have basic human rights.

Today I saw a picture of Palestinian paramedics in Gaza siphoning gas out of a destroyed ambulance in order to put the gas in a working ambulance. This is not ok. Israel should immediately reinstate access to electricity, food, clean water, and gas in Gaza. Denying these threatens the lives of tens of thousands of Palestinians. [JAMAAT](#)

(Jews and Muslims and Allies Acting Together), an important local DMV group, takes this stance as well.

Finally, I call your attention to the [statement](#) of the Progressive Israel Network, which I quoted last Friday night in my drash. Both Reconstructing Judaism and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association are part of this network.

It is very difficult to try to hold both the realities of Israeli Jews and that of Palestinians at the same time, but we believe deeply that this is the difficult emotional and spiritual work we need to ultimately do, even if we are not currently able to do so. We will personally be calling our elected officials to advocate for this.

4) Examples of Coexistence

It is powerful and important, especially at this time, to seek out positive stories of cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians. These absolutely do exist and there are many thoughtful and courageous Israelis and Palestinians doing the incredibly hard and exhausting work of trying to figure out a way to live together in the land they both love. [This first piece](#), published on Evolve, the online magazine of our Reconstructing Judaism movement, is by Israeli writer and peace activist Rabbi Haviva Ner-David. We found it quite moving, and ultimately hopeful. The [second piece](#) in this vein comes from Dr. Khalid Abu Ras who teaches on Sufism and contemporary Muslim thought at Israeli universities and lives in Israel. Dr. Abu Ras offers a beautiful expression of how a deeply religious Muslim rooted in Israel and Palestine is processing and responding to these events through his faith.

.... There are many who do not have the quiet and safety that we are blessed to be surrounded by. For the sake of those who are in the midst of crisis and war, as you engage in these activities, you might bring in the intention of not only doing this for your own health, but also for those who can't. As always, please reach out to us for support with any of the ideas that we have shared.

In blessing/*bi'vracha*,
Rabbis Daria and Josh