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Divrei Chizuk

מרחשון תשפ"ד



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Our Spiritual Battlefield

Harav Yona Reiss
Av Beth Din



During this time, we have unfortunately been reminded about the pernicious presence of evil in this world, and the commandment of ובערת הרע מקרבך (Devarim 13:6) – eradicating evil from our midst. We are also reminded about how all of humanity was created in בצלם א-לקים (Bereishis 1:27) – in the image of G-d, and how important it is to preserve that image and that likeness in our comportment, demeanor, and behavior towards others.

As the world views the atrocities committed by Hamas, it behooves us to focus upon our human dignity and not to allow ourselves to be sullied by the barbaric images of terrorist actions. Our job is to be an עם קדוש – a holy nation, and this is even more important than ever when we confront a profane enemy that celebrates the cold-blooded murder and torture of babies, pregnant women, the elderly, and so many other innocent Jewish victims רח"ל.

Even as we are forced into battle with a vicious enemy, we are reminded that it is precisely during the time of

battle that the Torah commands us ויהיה מחניך קדוש (Devarim 23:15) – our holiness and dignity must reign supreme even when we are battling an enemy that denigrates human life. In so doing, we proclaim the kedusha – the sacredness of the Divine, קדוש קדוש קדוש ... מלא כל, הארץ כבודו. (Yeshayahu 6:3)

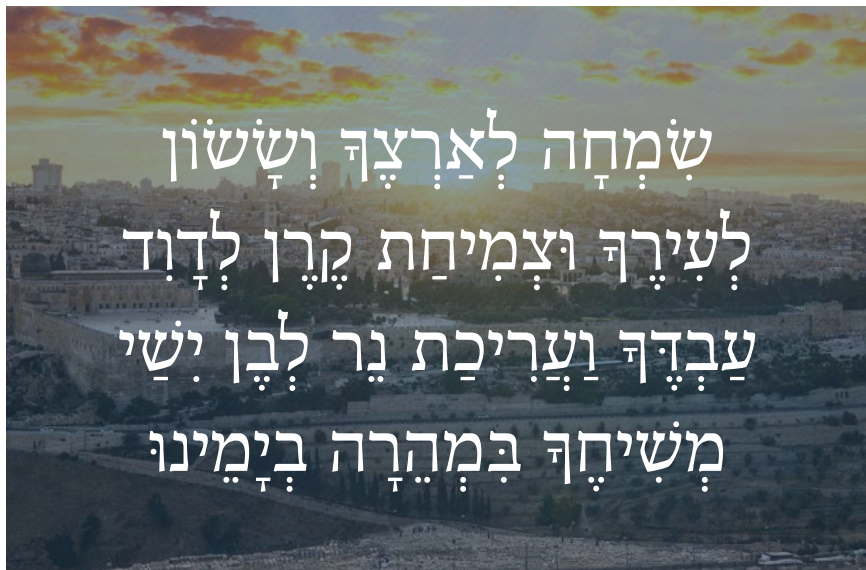
I had the z'chus of attending a bar mitzvah celebration this past Shabbos. Victory will come from our persevering as a people, which includes bringing the Shechinah to the world through שמחה של מצוה (see Shabbos 30b) by joyously perpetuating the lives and traditions for which our brave soldiers are risking their lives, and for which some have heroically made the ultimate sacrifice. The grandmother of the bar mitzvah bachur related the story of how her grandson had said as a young boy that he would be reluctant to serve in the Israeli army, and then two weeks later, after she thought he had forgotten about the conversation, he blurted out – "I changed my mind. I need to fight on behalf of my people." Now he has joined the army of the Jewish nation, contributing Torah and Mitzvos as his ammunition.

The *Midrash (Bemidbar Rabbah 22:2)* teaches us that we are all members of this army, whether fighting or engaged in heartfelt prayer. We pray daily for our brave soldiers, may Hashem preserve them and watch over them, who need to fight the military battles, but even those who are not in combat need to contribute to the cause. Each one of us must serve in terms of doing our Torah learning, *mitzvah* performance, and acts of lovingkindness, with a soldier's zeal and unbridled commitment.

The *Vilna Gaon* [cited in *Imrei Baruch, Bereishis* p. 4] commented on the verse (*Devorim 28:10*), "the people of the land will see that Hashem's name is proclaimed over

you, and will fear from you," that by role-modeling a proper G-d fearing lifestyle and human dignity to the other nations of the world, they too will become suffused with the fear and reverence of G-d.

Now is a time for us to extend the triumvirate of תפילה, תשובה, and צדקה from the Days of Atonement to succeed in overcoming the רוע הגזירה – to cause a rescission of the harsh decree – and for us to harness the divine image within ourselves to the fullest extent to fortify our soldiers and all of Israel through our Torah, *Mitzvos* and good deeds. With G-d's help, may we triumph over our enemies and uplift the entire world around us in the process.



The Lubavitcher Rebbe's View on Israel's Response & How to Achieve Lasting Peace

Rabbi Baruch Hertz

*Rabbi, Congregation Bnei Ruven
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe זי"ע addressed the safety and security of Jews in Israel clearly, directly, and unwaveringly over the course of many decades—setting forth a cohesive strategy that is not only the Rebbe's take, but the Torah's take on exactly how to achieve lasting peace and protection. This strategy is based on three fundamental points: the divine gift of Israel to the Jewish people, their obligation to defend it, and the humility and unity that should guide Jewish actions.

Number one, the Rebbe quoted Rashi commenting on *Bereishis* and why the Torah began with Creation over *mitzvos*—to teach us that it is a message to the world and to anyone who challenges it that G-d created the world and that He gave us the land. The land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people. This is not just historical or political. This is G-d given. Hashem gave Israel to the Jewish people as their eternal inheritance, and our deed to

this land is the Torah. The Rebbe spent countless impassioned hours imploring world leaders and the Jewish people alike to believe, internalize, and vocalize the truth of this divine covenant to the world clearly and unapologetically—and the divine mandate we have to protect it.

From this comes number two: defending the land and Jewish life. The Rebbe was clear about a resolute and proactive stance. It is our mandate from G-d to defend and protect Jewish life and Israel, a mandate that transcends political boundaries. We must project strength, the only effective deterrent that spares lives on the enemy side as well and that ultimately sets peace upon the land. There is a law in *Shulchan Aruch*, the code of Jewish law, in the laws of Shabbat (chapter 329, paragraphs 6 & 7): if non-Jews besiege a city of Jews on Shabbat and they are demanding money, you must not desecrate the Shabbat to protect yourselves. But if they come

to kill or without explaining their reason, then you must desecrate Shabbat and go out to protect yourselves with weapons. If the city is near the border, even if they come only demanding straw or hay, you must desecrate the Shabbat and fight them off using all means possible. And the reason it states is so that the rest of the land should not become easy for them to conquer. The Rama adds that even if they haven't actually arrived at the city and they just want or intend to come, we must go out with weapons and stop them. According to *halacha*, we are obligated to preserve our security at all costs and above all priorities. And the Rebbe urged that we must do so until the job is done.

The third fundamental point in this unified strategy for lasting peace

and protection is rooted in the humility and unity that should guide our actions. When we succeed, Jewish soldiers and civilians must recognize Hashem's miraculous protection and that our strength is G-d given—just as we should at all times. Further, to ensure success and protection, we must perform actionable *Mitzvos* that all Jews could perform. In addition to all of the *Mitzvos*, *davening* and *Tehillim* we should do, the Rebbe emphasized three important tasks: that as many people as possible should put on *Tefillin*; that every Jew should purchase a letter in the communal Torah; and that all women should light Shabbos candles.

Thank you to JEM and Rabbi Elkanah Shmotkin for providing the videos of the Rebbe.



The Nation of Israel Lives Forever

Rabbi Leonard Matanky

Rabbi, Congregation K.I.N.S., Dean, Ida Crown Jewish Academy



One of the distinctive facets of the Jewish experience lies in the fact that the momentous encounter with G-d at Mount Sinai was not witnessed by a single individual or a select group. Rather, it was a collective experience, shared by every Jewish soul, men, women and children.

From a theological perspective, this mass revelation serves, as the *Kuzari* notes, as compelling evidence of the truth of Judaism and the unique status of the Jewish people. However, I propose that there is another equally vital lesson we can derive from the Sinai experience.

The massacre by Hamas of more than a thousand innocent souls on Simchat Torah is still so hard to fathom. The scale and brutality of this tragedy, as many have observed, are unparalleled since the Holocaust. They, and they alone are responsible for this indiscriminate and barbaric act.

In the weeks and months ahead, we will undoubtedly gain further insights into how such a horrific event could have occurred in a nation renowned for its security measures.

What did not falter, however, and in fact, stands as the pinnacle of these

challenging times, is the response of the Jewish people. Hundreds and thousands of soldiers dropped everything to answer the call of duty. Unity prevails across the political spectrum in Israel. Acts of kindness and *chesed* abound, as did the faith and trust that each person has in the sacred mission we share for our homeland.

The people, all of us, have come together. Jews from around the world are rallying in support of Israel, while Israelis are uniting in this historic moment of need. It is the masses who will guide us to victory, the common Jew who will lead us toward our ultimate redemption. It is not merely the leadership from above but the collective strength of the people from below that will make the difference.

Perhaps this is why the Torah was given to all, for the Torah and the people of the Torah can only survive and thrive when we are all actively engaged, when we collectively champion the cause of truth, and when we occupy the moral high ground together.

Yet, what is even more inspiring are the voices of those individuals, the men and women whose courage, resilience, and faith serve as our

guiding light, propelling us not only towards victory over our adversaries but also towards a profound faith in G-d.

On the day of the massacre, we began to read from the book of *Bereishit*, and on the subsequent Shabbat, we continued the narrative of Creation, encountering the first instance of murder as Cain took the life of his brother Abel.

When G-d confronted Cain about his heinous deed, He declared, קול דָּמִי, אָחִיךָ צִעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן הָאֲדָמָה, “Your brother’s bloods cry out to me from the soil!”

The *Talmud Yerushalami* (*Sanhedrin* 4) notes that the word “דָּמִי” is in the plural; it doesn’t say, “Your brother’s blood,” but rather “Your brother’s bloods!” What does this signify?

One interpretation posits that G-d was not only holding Cain accountable for the spilt blood of his brother but also for the potential descendants of Abel, who would now never come into existence.

On that fateful day of *Simchat Torah*, October 8, 2023, while defending the settlement of Kerem Shalom, a brave soul, 33-year-old Amichai Weitzen, laid down his life after enduring six hours of relentless gun battles in defense of others.

In the aftermath of this tragedy, his father, Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Weitzen, the Rav of Psagot, delivered a brief video message that resonated across the globe.

In the video, Rabbi Weitzen spoke

with profound conviction: “Though Amichai departed from us at the age of 33, on the final day of his life, he received the gift of many, many more years! He saved all the families of the village Kerem Shalom, and the years he granted them, these countless years, may they be filled with life—for all his friends, for all the families, and for all their descendants! We were blessed with a son who is now 33 years old, plus hundreds and hundreds of years... We do not seek war, but if it is our destiny, then through the crucible of war, a nation is forged, a people reborn!”

When Cain took the life of Abel, the “bloods” of his brother met a tragic end. Yet, what Rabbi Weitzen, one of the many heroes of this war—and there have been and will be many—teaches us is that even amidst the depths of tragedy, we can find salvation. Sometimes, the “bloods” of those who selflessly save others, those who make the ultimate sacrifice “*al Kiddush Hashem*,” possess the enduring power and strength to live on, not merely for 33 years but for countless generations to come.

As for what the coming weeks and months hold, that remains uncertain. However, one thing is certain: through the indomitable spirit of the Jewish people, unwavering faith in God, and the willingness to sacrifice for others, we shall emerge from these trials stronger, better, and ever closer to the ultimate “*geulah*,” the redemption we yearn for.

How Can We Respond To The Simchas Torah Massacre?

Rabbi Elisha Prero

Rabbi Emeritus, Young Israel of West Rogers Park



The horrific news of the Simchas Torah massacre of our brothers and sisters in Israel has left us reeling. Many of us, myself included, have been so preoccupied by the obscene, bestial attack that it has been extremely difficult to concentrate on almost anything else. The difficulty is compounded when we contemplate all the people whose lives are profoundly affected: the hostages, the wounded, the bereaved, the soldiers, the families, the citizens and others residing in Israel whose lives have been turned upside down. Add to the mix our revulsion at the response of many in our own country – our own city – whose sense of morality is so disgustingly corrupt, that their response to the massacre is to jump to support the cause of the terrorists.

Our souls urge us to respond -- but how? From the *tefilla* of *Un'saneh Tokef* that we said several times last month during the *Yamim Noraim*, we learn “Repentance, Prayer and Charity” remove the harshness of the decree.

Let's start with charity, *tzedaka*. Those of us who are in the IDF have the *z'chut* to battle on behalf of the Jewish people and destroy the terrorist infrastructure and the terrorists themselves. Most of us are not in a position to do so. We can, however, support those who are. Open your hearts and your wallets to support the troops, the communities and the people of Israel. Find a cause - find several - and contribute generously.

A regrettable word of caution: in our day, truth is elusive. This observation extends to appeals for money to help the cause. It is reported (I have not verified) that some on-line appeals are actually being made by our enemies posing as our brothers. Be smart in selecting the beneficiaries of your contributions. In addition, some needs are more pressing than others. A good place to start in determining to whom to give is your rabbi or well-established and recognized charitable organizations.

Our contributions not only help

with whatever money can buy, they are also a source of encouragement. Our participation is a tangible way of saying “we care - we are with you in your time of need.” Most of us have friends, relatives and acquaintances who have been appealing for funds. If they are reporting a first-hand familiarity with a need, then our contributions not only address the need but give much-needed *chizuk*, both to the recipient and to the giver. Even a relatively modest donation can have high and positive emotional impact.

How about prayer? We can start with the *tefillos* we already say – and say them with more focus, while attempting to not only understand the words, but to live by them. Most shuls have been adding the recitation of extra *Tehillim* after regular davening. You may have noticed that the words of *Tehillim* aren’t always easy to understand, and even when we understand the words its phrases may be difficult to parse. Now may be a good time to get ahold of a commentary on *Tehillim* that resonates with you and learn the book – all of it. You could read a chapter a day, and study it to the point that you are confident you understand the chapter. Then you can say the chapter two or three more times. That way, you increase the likelihood that the next time you say a *perek*, its meaning will be evident.

Be sure to say special prayers for the soldiers, the hostages and wounded and sick, daily. Some have suggested saying *Avinu Malkenu* after *davening*. One area in which most of us could improve is respect for communal *tefilla*. Let’s restrain ourselves from unnecessary talking during *davening*, particularly at the places in *tefilla* in which any conversation is completely forbidden. Let’s rededicate ourselves to learning where those places are and doing only what we are supposed to do in those places. Respect for *tefilla* affects not only you, but those around you, and makes our *tefilla* more potent. Our rabbis have taught us that prayer is our special weapon in times of trouble. Let’s not squander the opportunities to support all who could benefit from our prayers.

This brings us to *teshuva* –repentance. This is our main spiritual response to suffering. Tragically, our people is not a newcomer to the question of how to deal with tragedy. *Chazal* teach us that when suffering comes, we must examine our ways and seek to do *teshuva*. Each of us has our own areas in which we can improve spiritually. My rebbe, Rav Ahron Soloveichik, z”l, taught me that we must not seek to explain the suffering of others by pointing out their spiritual shortcomings. That, he said, is *chutzpah*. Rather, we contribute to the spiritual level of

our communities by working on our own areas that need improvement. Most of us have a pretty good idea of where we need work.

We can also help by spreading the *d'var Hashem*, the word of the Almighty. Our rabbis teach that Israel will be redeemed only with *teshuva*. Let us be the beacon of light to our Jewish brothers and sisters. If you work with Jews who may not have had the opportunity to learn much Torah or perform *mitzvot*, the current tragic crises presents a new opportunity to spread much light. Jewish hearts are open. With a word of encouragement, a woman in your workplace who may have never lit Shabbat candles may begin to do so in support of our cause. With a gentle suggestion, men who have never worn *tzitzit* may begin to do so as a tangible – if private -- act of solidarity with our IDF soldiers. And everyone can give *tzedaka* daily, in an affordable measure, in support of our cause. If you have felt reluctant in the past to make these suggestions, you may find more receptive audiences during this time of trouble.

And let us not forget our non-Jewish friends and neighbors, many of whom are looking for the right time and place to express their sympathy, encouragement and solidarity. For better or worse, how we treat our non-Jewish friends and neighbors is frequently the basis on which they

evaluate the rightness of our cause and what we as Jews stand for. All humans are made in the image of G-d. Tragically, some evil people have desecrated that image, and continue to do so, by attacking us and threatening our very existence. Others, however, appreciate their Jewish neighbors and want to express their support of Israel. Greet all people warmly, with at least a pleasant face, as difficult as that may be these days. They deserve it – and we need all the friends we can get.

A final word of unsolicited advice: Forget debating politics, whether Israeli or US, whether now or after the dust settles. Debating politics can be like sports-talk radio; a black hole into which you risk getting sucked, to the exclusion of worthwhile endeavors. Learn Torah instead. Our rabbis teach that Torah protects and saves. If you haven't yet made a daily routine of learning, start now. Get serious about learning the *parsha* of the week and go from there. The sky's the limit. "*Hashamayim shamayim laShem, v'haaretz natan livnei adam*. The heavens are G-d's; He gave the earth to man," to which my father z"l would comment: "He gave us the earth – to make it like the heavens." Let's do our part to transform the hell on earth to the heavens on earth. In that merit, may we witness the arrival of *Mashiach* and the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash* speedily in our days. חזק חזק ונתחזק.

Learning from David HaMelech

Rabbi Daniel Raccah

Dayan, cRc Beth Din

Rabbi, Ohel Shalom Torah Center



As our minds struggle to understand the extent of the horrific events that transpired last week and our hearts are unable to contain the vastness of our pain, our souls yearn to receive *Chizuk* to guide our thinking and behavior during these troubling and fearful days. Perhaps, we can draw inspiration from one of our greatest leaders and warriors, David HaMelech.

There is a fascinating passage at the end of *Sefer Shmuel I* (chapter 30), with haunting similarities to some events this past week. Let's briefly summarize the passage before sharing comments. David and his warriors had left their families unguarded in the village of Ziklag, as he accompanied Achish. During their brief absence, Amalekites marauded through the area and came upon Ziklag, which they set afire. They then took captive all the women, including David's two wives, and children. Upon discovering the situation, David and his men raised their voices and cried, *עַד אֲשֶׁר אֵין בָּהֶם כֹּחַ לְבִכּוֹת* –

“until they no longer had strength to cry.” However, the bitterness of the people towards David was so intense that David was truly distressed. At that moment, with his wives captive and his warriors deeply vexed by him, the Navi tells us what David did: *וַיִּתְחַזַּק דָּוִד בַּה' אֱלֹהָיו* – *“and David strengthened himself with Hashem his G-d”*. Following this, David inquired of the Urim ViTumim saying: *אֶרְדֹּף – “I will pursue after this band, will I catch them?”* The response was: *רָדֵף כִּי הִשָּׁג תִּשָּׁג – “Chase them, because you will surely catch them, and you will certainly save.”* David pursues them with 600 men, but shortly after leaving, 200 can no longer accompany him due to exhaustion. With the help of an escapee from the Amalekites, David finds the marauders. Although severely outnumbered, David and his men attack the Amlemites and annihilate them so completely that only 400 youths on fleetfooted camels escape. David saves all the captives and retrieves all the plundered possessions, with everything

accounted for. In addition, there was the spoils of the Amalekites and their loot. When the returning victorious warriors came upon the 200 warriors that had not accompanied them, some mean-spirited warriors who had accompanied David questioned whether those that had not fought could receive any portion of the spoils. David responded: לֹא־תַעֲשׂוּ כֵן אֶחָדִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר נָתַן ה' לָנוּ וַיִּשְׁמַר אֶתְנוּ וַיִּתֵּן אֶת הַגְּדוּד הַבָּא עָלֵינוּ – “Do not do so my brothers, that which Hashem has given us, and has protected us, and has given the band that came upon us into our hands.” David instructed that everything be split equally, and the warriors accepted it, making that the accepted practice going forward.

Let’s return to examine some points in this narrative. It is difficult to imagine David’s distress and pain upon discovering with his men that the Amalekites had taken their wives and children. His men were so embittered with him that they wished to stone him. As a leader, he must have been overcome with the thoughts that only a king surveying the burned out and empty city can have. Then, there were his personal fears for his missing wives. The Navi does not indicate that David responded at all to his men at that point. Indeed, the *Gaon Chida*, Rav Chaim Yosef David Azulai notes (*Chomat Anach, Shmuel I* 30:18) that the great victory is ascribed to David

because he bore the anger of his warriors with equanimity. Rather, David’s response in that incredibly difficult moment was to turn only to Hashem, and strengthen himself with Hashem. When I shared this account with my congregants, one of them understood this to mean that sometimes when we do not have the internal fortitude within us to draw the strength needed to meet a challenge, we must look to Hashem and draw strength from Him. Having reconstituted his spirit with his trust in Hashem, David turns to inquire of the *Urim ViTumim*. While most commentators, following the *Gemara* (*Yoma* 73b), understand David’s saying אֲרֹדֶה to be a question “shall I pursue”, Rav Moshe David Valli (*Moshia Chosim* *ibid*) and *Malbim* (*ibid*) understand this to be a statement, with David saying: “I will pursue, because that is my moral imperative, but will I catch them?” Possibly according to this view, he had strengthened himself with such faith that he was driven to pursue unreservedly. The *Chofetz Chaim*, in the work that he wrote as a guide for Jewish soldiers entitled *Machane Yisrael* (beginning chapter 39), writes that the *Navi* places the verse about the inquiry of the *Urim ViTumim* immediately after the verse that David strengthened himself with Hashem to teach us that the *Urim ViTumim*’s response that he would succeed was only because he

had first strengthened his spirit with Hashem! The *Malbim* teaches that David's response to those that did not wish to share the spoils was an extension of this faith. David said to them that the victory wasn't that of those who had fought, for it was Hashem who fought, was victorious and saved, and therefore the spoils aren't to be seen as the possession of the fighters alone.

We live now in a pivotal moment in history. One of "the world before" and "the world after" moments. Maybe we can learn from *Mashiach Hashem*, David HaMelech, and similarly strengthen ourselves

with Hashem. One method to accomplish that is through David Hamelech's own *Tehilim* since they have, from the day they were composed, served as a balm for the Jewish spirit; a vehicle to strengthen our spirits, while simultaneously sending our supplications to the Heavens. I would humbly suggest reading *Tehilim*, starting at the beginning, whenever we have a free moment, and to draw strength from the words, while entreating Hashem on behalf of our brethren. May we merit to strengthen ourselves with Hashem through the recitation of *Tehilim*, and thereby merit Hashem's victory as well.

אֲחִינוּ כָּל בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל
הִנְתּוּנִים בְּצָרָה וּבְשָׁבִיָּה
הָעוֹמְדִים בֵּין בָּיִם וּבֵין בֵּיבְשָׁה
הַמָּקוֹם יֵרַחַם עֲלֵיהֶם
וְיֹוצִיאֵם מִצָּרָה לְרוּחָה
וּמֵאֲפֵלָה לְאוֹרָה
וּמִשְׁעָבוֹד לְגֵאֲלָה
הַשְּׁתָּא בְּעַגְלָא וּבְזַמֵּן קָרִיב
וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן



FROM THE DAYAN'S DESK

Featuring Rav Yona Reiss
Av Beth Din of the Chicago Rabbinical Council

Weekly Shiur for Men
MONDAYS AT 8:00 PM

At Congregation KINS
2800 West North Shore Avenue
Restarting After Sukkos



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