

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Better Already

**Adonai natan, Adonai lakach, y'he shem Adonai m'varach
The Holy One give, the Holy One takes away, blessed be the Holy Name.**

The Book of Job teaches us to embrace happy times and difficult times as all part of God's world. What a diversity of emotions have been flowing through our people since it appears an end is in sight to the war in Gaza!

Wonderful joy when 20 living Israeli hostages were released. Mixed with the concern of how much physical and emotional damage occurred from more than two years in captivity. And with that joy, also comes the mourning for those who were kidnapped, tortured and murdered, who did not survive. And those whose lives were forever affected by having their loved ones taken away from them. And also, all those human lives that were lost and damaged with the war that came in the aftermath, both Israelis and Palestinians; and all the human beings who left their homes and now have no home to return to. It's hard to rejoice in the midst of such tragedy and such uncertainty about the future – and yet, those living humans who returned from captivity need and deserve all the care in the world.

And to punctuate these mixed emotions, we just celebrated Simchat Torah, reciting and remembering Moses' last days and then immediately beginning again with remembering the beginning. Because the initial October 7 attack was on Simchat Torah, 2023, the day we celebrate the joy of learning will now forever be associated with the most brutal of attacks. Our Simchat Torah this year was all joy, with a record crowd of children and adults dancing around and learning from a Torah scroll that encircled the sanctuary.

And so, we begin again. Begin to heal, and begin a new year of learning from Torah.

Rabbi Daniel Gordis (his name sounds a lot like mine, but he is much more learned) writes a blog called *Israel from the Inside*. Born and educated in the U.S., Rabbi Gordis long ago made Israel his home and raised his family there. I had an opportunity to learn from Rabbi Gordis, once in Israel and once when he was a guest scholar in Houston. In his recent blog, he said that, for the last two years, if you asked someone "how are you?" the response was often a shrug of the shoulders. "How should it be?" or "For us, it's fine" (if it was). Now, the response is often "Better."

Because things *do* get better. Our people have suffered countless tragedies over the centuries, from the destruction of the Holy Temple to the Crusades to the Holocaust to the wars in Israel. Every time, we bounce back. Every time, we learn from the exercise of rebuilding, both our communities and our confidence. Hopefully, we are now at a lull in our worry. As Tevya said in Fiddler on the Roof, "I know it is quite an honor to be the 'Chosen People.' But once in a while, maybe You could choose someone else?"

Despite the uncertainty of the future, I am filled with optimism. Every Sunday, I see children eager to learn, and (again in Tevya's words) "asking questions that could cross a rabbi's eyes!" Friday nights, the children are coming more often than ever before, parading with their new mini-Torahs and demonstrating that Shabbat is real family time. And when the young people are excited about being Jewish, it's truly contagious!

Two upcoming Shabbat services put an exclamation point on the spirit of TBT. **Friday, November 7** will be "Legacy Shabbat." The Houston Jewish Community Foundation will be sponsoring a Shabbat dinner for us, as we will look toward the future and honor our members who have committed themselves to a strong community. The next week, **November 14**, our students will lead services, guided by myself and Cantor Francyne Davis Jacobs, who has enhanced our children's music education program immeasurably. Cantor Francyne will also be providing the music for Legacy Shabbat.

In the first chapter of Genesis, God looks at the world every day and proclaims it "good." At the end of six days, God looks at the whole world and says, "very good."

As people, it's our job to make it better. And we will!

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon