

Reaching for Light

I've been walking around in a fog. I feel a numbness of the senses. I am moving slowly, tentative, unsure where exactly I am in space. Nothing is in sharp focus. It's all feeding through a diffraction. Light is bending towards the darkness.

אֲשָׂא עֵינַי אֶל-הַהָרִים מֵאֵין יָבֹא עֲזָרִי

“I lift my eyes to the mountains. Where will my help come from?”

I watch the news, switching between CNN and MSNBC when I get bored or when a particular speaker makes me angry. Images appear, often the same ones, over and over again. Blurred bodies. Hostages being dragged away. Two trucks filled with murderous Hamas terrorists who dismount and then look for innocent people to kill. Extraordinary stories of Israelis who survived. Heartbreaking stories of slaughtered babies.

And yes, I look at the rubble of Gaza, piles of stone and twisted steel. I see the anguish of mothers and the abject fear of children. I see the weariness of rescue workers moving pieces of concrete in search of survivors. None of those images diminish my resolve to support Israel. This Palestinian misery is created with the calculated slaughter of Israelis by Hamas, the ruling power of Gaza. Hamas can construct elaborate tunnels and underground structures beneath Gaza, but who **will not build a single bomb shelter** for their people. Because they want to parade the suffering of their people as a kind of twisted banner of righteousness and liberation. It is the long game of war that the innocent will suffer. It has always been thus. And my heart aches for these innocent Gazan children.

At a certain point, I want to – I long to – turn it off. But I can't. I am a grieving bug stuck in the amber of a million tears. In some ways, this reminds me of how I felt on 9/11, and 9/12, and... Reading everything, watching it over and over, discussing it ad infinitum, ad nauseum.

After 9/11, I knew people who were directly touched and devastated by the actions of cruel terrorists. People who lost loved ones in a breathtaking act of violence perpetrated by nihilists with no regard for life.

After 9/11, I felt destabilized. I wondered what would happen and what the world would look like. I walked around a bit like a zombie, my arms outstretched, looking for balance, looking for life.

On those beautiful September days, I wondered if anything would be the same. Could I snap out of it? Would I be comfortable laughing and playing with the kids? Enjoy a meal? Listen to jazz? Or was I sentenced to a permanent shivah period?

The thing is, as Jeff Goldblum once famously said, life finds a way. Babies are borne. There's B'nai mitzvah and weddings and brises. There is love. There is family. There is light. There is shabbat.

I don't think that's naïve. I think it's simply the truth about our existence. Dwelling only in the darkness causes blindness. Dwelling only in the light also causes blindness. So we must find our way: *יְהִי-עֶרְבַּן יְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד*
There is darkness, there is light, a first day, a new day.

Like sherpas, we carry the provisions as we search for the next safe plateau. Eventually, the fog thins, and we can see again. The vista does not look the same, and we will often think of that Shabbat morning, looking at the headlines, not believing how vulnerable Israel is and, by extension, just how vulnerable we are.

So we gather and remember. We gather to embrace each other, assuring ourselves that we are not alone, that we are a proud, connected community, a temple with a history of banding together. We don't need to walk like zombies when we are together. We give each other the gift of empathy, strength, and courage.

The war will be long, and there will be moments of deep darkness and pain. We are in this for the long haul, committed to our Israeli brothers and sisters. And we are committed to each other.