

Israel & Overseas

A Program of the Center for Jewish Philanthropy

Sapir's Corner (November 2025)

A few weeks ago, an entire nation took a breath, the first real one in over two years. For so long, we smiled, but with hesitation, and joy was laced with unease, relief tangled with longing. It's a strange thing to feel so connected to people you have never met before. And still, near or far, everyone felt it. After 738 days, Jews all over the world could finally exhale.

In Israel, people filled the Hostages Square to celebrate. And yet, reality quickly returns, a stark reminder that some families still wait for the return of their loved ones' bodies, some will never see them come home, and others are embarking on the long, painful journey of healing both body and heart.

920 heroes paid with their lives for this moment, and now, here it is. None of us will ever go back to who we were before, and maybe we're not supposed to. Perhaps the only way forward is together, to look ahead with the hope that the sacrifice of our soldiers will be worthy of us.

Perhaps from this deep wound, a small seed of peace can grow- something gentler, something lasting, for generations to come. It is a reminder for us to be kind, patient, and to act as brothers and sisters.

I've been far from home this past year, watching everything unfold from a distance. There's something unbearable about sitting thousands of miles away, glued to the screen, while your heart beats in another time zone. All I've wanted was to be there- to stand in the square, surrounded by people who understand without words. To cry the same tears and to feel that collective heartbeat of a country that refuses to give up.

There's something deeply grounding about Pardes, where I spend part of my time teaching and learning in a space dedicated to study and reflection, and where our senior team meetings always begin with a d'var Torah. It's one of those quiet traditions that sets the tone before diving into the rhythm of the week. This time, it was my turn.

As we recently completed reading the Torah and began the cycle anew after Sukkot, I was reminded how timeless these stories are. Written thousands of years ago, yet still profoundly relevant today. I opened the calendar and smiled- my portion was *Parashat Noach*.

The Torah describes Noah as a "righteous man, blameless in his generations; Noah walked with God." Yet even in that time, the world was filled with **chamas** "חמס" - violence, cruelty, and injustice. Humanity had lost its way.

Reading those words, I thought back to just a few years ago, when Israel faced deep division- Political, social, and religious tensions pulling us apart. Then came October 7th, a tragic reminder of what happens when unity falters. The word *chamas* - used in the Torah to describe corruption, is the same as the name of the group responsible for that dark day. It's as if the Torah itself reminds us- violence and hatred destroy; unity and compassion rebuild.

And yet, amid the pain, we witnessed extraordinary light. Families opened their homes, volunteers filled the streets, and Jews around the world stood together. Out of darkness, unity and kindness emerged, and when we heard news of hostages being released, we were reminded again of that truth. There is still pain and uncertainty, but also light- each person who returned home is a spark of hope.

Like creation itself, renewal takes time- it grows through small acts of care and faith. Even in our darkest moments, when we choose compassion, we bring healing and light back into the world.

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