

# Vine

## USING OUR ROADMAP TO NAVIGATE TROUBLING TIMES

BY RIELLE MILLER GABRIEL

### FROM RABBI ZEMEL ..... MATTERS OF EXISTENTIAL NECESSITY

DEAR FRIENDS,

I am as sad as I have ever been in my life. While driving to Micah this morning, I started crying. As I pulled to the side of the road, I found myself flashing through Jewish history, our tragedies and our triumphs. I considered the Khmelnitzky massacre of Jews in the 17th century, the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903, and other dark times. I also



thought of the moments of great courage: Daniel in the lion's den (always a personal favorite); the biblical David and his slingshot. I am also angrier than I have been in a very long time, as I struggle with how to make sense of the ignorance and prejudice that has surfaced — or, perhaps, resurfaced — since the Hamas massacre in Israel on October 7.

Zionism was meant to solve the “Jewish problem” of Europe. This was Herzl's great vision. Amos Oz captured this painfully in his short book, *In the Land of Israel*, published in 1983:

“I would be more than happy to live in a world composed of dozens of civilizations, each developing in accordance with its own internal rhythm, all cross-pollinating one another, without any one emerging as a nation-state: no flag, no emblem, no passport, no anthem. No nothing. Only spiritual civilizations tied somehow to their lands, without the tools of statehood and without the instruments of war.

“But the Jewish people has already staged a long running one-man show of that sort. The international audience sometimes applauded, sometimes threw stones, and occasionally slaughtered the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3 ►

WHEN I WROTE and spoke in the Spring about the Board's intention to more fully utilize our Roadmap, I never imagined we would need it to help us navigate the largest terrorist attack on the Jewish world and the largest loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust. But after the shock of the Simchat Torah attacks wore off, and our clergy and lay leaders came together to figure out our collective next steps, our Roadmap did indeed become our most important tool.

Tackling our community's variety of thoughts and feelings about Israel has been a core component of the Roadmap itself since its inception. During the research phase, Israel came up time and again as a topic that our community was in need of discussing, and also was a topic that was identified as so hard to engage with in a Micah-y way.

At our Annual Retreat this past June, the Board had a break-out session devoted entirely to noodling on how we tackle the tough conversation of Israel in this upcoming year. We had many perspectives in that small group—what specifically about Israel was so tough to discuss? What sort of “space and conditions” do our congregants need? How do we bring “the Israel issues” home to Temple Micah? We had many questions, and few answers, in June. It was a topic we knew we needed more resolution on and identified for further discussion later in the fiscal year.

Then, October 7 happened. As the days went by and we had time as individuals to process the details of the tragedy in Israel (and then Gaza), our clergy and lay leaders came together.

We knew we needed to do something. Our amazing clergy had already given multiple sermons, sharing their inner monologues, their pain and anger, but we recognized we needed to do more.

As we debated the various ideas—brainstorming results from the staff, thoughtful meditations from the rabbis, ideas we had seen from other congregations and non-Jewish entities—we needed something to help us focus.

Throughout the discussion we were using language informed by the Roadmap, referencing our “shared humanity” and “wrestling with complexity of thoughts.” It became apparent, almost organically, that the options to pursue would be those that centered on the Human Project and create the space and conditions for the hard discussions we needed to have. We realized that options meeting these goals would be the most impactful as we, as a congregation, had determined that this is what we collectively value.

Using the Roadmap does not guarantee that the actions and decisions of our leadership will be perfect, or agreed with by everyone in the congregation. It does guarantee, however, that our collective priorities and beliefs in who we are as Temple Micah are guiding our leaders' actions and decisions—that my voice, your voice, our voice is heard. ●



"Every person shall sit under  
his grapevine or fig tree with  
no one to make him afraid."  
MICAHA, CHAPTER 4, VERSE 4

# Vine

Vol. 60 No. 2

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## LIBERAL ZIONISM: A BRIDGE, NOT AN ISLAND

BY RABBI STEPHANIE CRAWLEY

Dear Friends,

It is a lonely time to be a liberal Zionist in America. I know many of you feel abandoned: friends outside the Jewish community deciding they deserve an opinion on the fate of your people, wading into a conflict from the comfort of their living rooms. A broader Jewish community that is also split: Jews in tallit and kippah chanting "*From the river to the sea...*" Jews, also wearing kippot, taking advantage of this moment to incite violence against Palestinians in the West Bank. Co-existing in this moment feels hard. Conversation feels all but impossible.

I ask myself, after too many hours on social media: "Where are the people who want both justice and peace? Why does the lonely bridge of liberal Zionism feel even more lonely right now, when we need it more than ever?"

I have found myself reflecting on visits to my favorite Jewish site in Eastern Europe: the Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw. Unlike much of Warsaw, which was destroyed in World War II and has been rebuilt, the cemetery is still intact. Walking its paths has great wisdom for us in this moment; one immediately gains a sense of the vibrancy of pre-Shoah Jewish life in Europe from the names on the stones. Traditionally observant Jews are buried near a memorial for secular Polish Jews who fought for Polish independence. Just around the corner from the prominent Yiddishists Anski and Peretz is the grave of Ludwik Zamenhof, the creator of Esperanto. The simple headstones of Bundists, Socialists, and Zionists surround the ornate ohels of prominent Hasidic Rabbis.

Their Jewish community was vibrant—with so many different ways to express Jewishness. Some were skeptical about Zionism, others strongly opposed to it. Some believed that the return to the land of Israel was for Messianic times only, others believed a dream of home could, in fact, be realized in the Diaspora. Some sought universalism, while others deepened their particularism through language and culture. And they lived together, even as they vehemently disagreed what the Jewish world should look like and how it should be achieved.

The Jews of Warsaw lived together partly because they had to—because other people



told them where to live. And it certainly wasn't a utopia. Those real ideological differences prompted significant schisms. But there was something about the Jews of Warsaw being in each other's presence—first in life, and now in death—that reminds me of what we risk losing today.

Yes, right now, in this moment we feel the unity of the Jewish people. But I already see threads unraveling, particularly amongst younger generations. It's true, it's marginal when compared to the whole. But it's loud and it's growing.

I worry that soon, there will be no shared table for our community to come to.

I worry that the narrow bridge of liberal Zionism is actually an island.

I worry that in our postmodern society, we don't even have the comfort of all having to be buried together.

I look back to Warsaw because I need to know how a community survives antisemitism on a scale I've never experienced. I need to know how a community lives together where all parties admit the complexity of our moment, but are not mired in it.

This requires a re-embrace of liberalism. Liberalism, *davka*, is the ability to sit with people who are different from you. And then, one day, to be buried with people who are different than you. This requires us to be open to *conversation*—even as we do not drop our convictions. And for us, here, that conviction is Israel's unquestionable right to exist, and the dedication for it to be the Jewish state that embodies the best of our values.

This is difference without abandonment. This ensures our bridge never turns into an island.

In solidarity and love,  
Rabbi Crawley

# WE HAVE ENDURED BEFORE

By Michael J. Feuer

A week after 9/11, I rode my bike down to Gravelly Point, that beautiful park at the tip of the runways of National Airport, where you can be real close to the planes as they come and go. There was no coming and going that day. Planes sat on the tarmac in silence, except for the sonic booms (to scare birds) that had not been turned off. I looked at the scene and wept. Then, a couple strolling nearby approached me. The man was in military garb, possibly on active duty or a veteran. He patted me on the shoulder and said,

“Don’t worry. We’ll be back.”

It may be tempting to single out Jews and Israelis, now, as the sole victims of the Hamas onslaught. We were, and are, the first victims. But all of civilized humanity is — or should be — grieving at the reports and images of people of all ages murdered in their bedrooms and at a music festival; taken at gunpoint into transports; paraded naked in the streets of an urban hell, raped and beaten, tortured or beheaded. To quote President Biden, what Hamas did is sheer evil. It was the largest single-day

massacre of Jews in 80 years, roughly proportional to ten times our country’s losses on September 11.

The Jewish people, in and out of Israel, have endured horrors before, and will be back. The question is whether, and how, the rest of humanity will. ●

*Member Michael Feuer is Dean of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development and Professor of Education Policy at the George Washington University.*

## Rabbi Zemel FROM PAGE 1 ►

actor. No one joined us; no one copied the model the Jews were forced to sustain for two thousand years, the model of a civilization without the ‘tools of statehood.’ For me this drama ended with the murder of Europe’s Jews by Hitler.

“I am forced to take it upon myself to play the ‘game of nations,’ with all the tools of statehood, even though it causes me to feel (as George Steiner put it) like an old man in a kindergarten. To play the game with an emblem, and a flag and a passport and an army, and even war, provided that such war is an absolute existential necessity. I accept those rules of the game because existence without the tools of statehood is a matter of mortal danger, but I accept them only up to this point.”

We, the Jewish people, must have a country in order to survive, but its very existence has led to more tragedy. We went home, but the Palestinian family that had moved in was not interested in sharing the house. And then, some in the newly created Jewish nation, most notably the settler project on the West Bank, decided that the Palestinian family needed to move out. We know the history, the wars, the deaths.

Like many of you, I am distraught about what is happening in Gaza. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s order to shut off water, fuel, and electricity was ghastly and forbidden by Jewish law. But, as I have said before, Netanyahu himself is ghastly and should be forbidden by any moral law.

The situation in Gaza is horribly painful for all of us. It defies our Jewish sensibilities. However, I cannot support an imposed ceasefire. I do believe that Israel has a right to defend itself. Oz allowed for war as an “existential necessity.” Israelis who live near the Gaza border have, for years, faced a regular barrage of rocket attacks that force them into shelters and safe rooms. Would Americans stand for occasional missile barrage from terrorist thugs in Canada? We all know the answer to that, even though such an attack would not threaten this country’s very existence. Still, I fear an Israeli ground invasion because I think it will result in massive death on both sides. That decision is one that Israel has to make itself.

My anger extends from Hamas to the larger Arab world. Why will neither Egypt nor Jordan take any refugees from Gaza? Why was Egypt so reluctant to allow humanitarian supplies to enter Gaza, doing so only under international pressure?

At home and around the world, I see antisemitism spreading.

In the U.S., many on the political left — people with whom Jews have locked arms on a plethora of other issues — have lost their moral bearings. They have forgotten that it is possible to simultaneously condemn both the barbarism of Hamas and of Israel’s right-wing government, to call for the destruction of Hamas and the reversal of Israel’s unforgivable tactics on the West Bank, including the destruction of Palestinian farmers’ crops, expropriation of Palestinian land, and other forms of regular harassment.

Some of you have asked me about whether Temple Micah is sending money to provide humanitarian relief to Gaza. At this point, the temple’s leaders have decided not to create such a fund. We are concerned the money would end up with Hamas. Billions of dollars have gone to Gaza over many years. Hamas’ leaders have not used that money to build an economy to benefit the Palestinians in Gaza. Instead, they have stuffed their own pockets and built a war machine. After the war ends, we will reconsider.

There is more on this particular question — a Jewish more. Emotionally, it is too soon for me as a Jew. I remain in a period of *onenut* and am not yet in *avelut*. Onenut is the mourning period before burial. There is no real translation for it. The death has just occurred, and the loved ones are preoccupied with getting ready for the funeral. Avelut is the traditional mourning period that begins after burial and continues for a year. During this time, the loved ones adjust to their new reality. Avelut unfolds over time. Onenut is simply getting over the immediate shock. I am not ready to tend to Gazans. I remain in shock, with my own people to tend to.

I continue my prayers for peace and understand my need to double down like never before on the Enlightenment values that I cherish — a bold commitment to the possibility of human moral progress, to equality for all, and to open, tolerant education for all. I believe that it is only by advocating passionately for these values that we can achieve the world we want.

In the meantime, as Oz wrote, we fight back hard as we continue to search for a constructive path to a durable peace.

The final image that came to mind as I sat crying by the side of the road was of Joseph Trumpeldor, a hero of Jewish pioneers who was killed by Arab terrorists in Palestine in 1920. It is said that as he lay dying, Trumpeldor uttered these final words: “Never mind, it is good to die for one’s country.”

Decades later, Yitzhak Rabin famously responded: “It is good to have a country to die for.”

Shalom.

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Rhannon Walsh in the  
temple office. Thank you.*

**CONDOLENCES**

**THE TEMPLE MICAH COMMUNITY**  
extends its deepest condolences to:

**DEBRA BERKE**, on the death of her mother,  
Rhoda H. Berke

**DAVID BRAVERMAN AND STACY BRAVERMAN CLOYD**, on the death of their mother and  
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the death of Nora's mother, Joyce Kitcho

May their memories be for a blessing.

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on the marriage of their daughter, Madeleine  
Weisman, to Ian Caughlan



# GINA'S

BY RABBI HEALY SLAKMAN

I can't stop thinking about Israel. Between reading the almost unfathomable headlines and "doom scrolling" on social media, I spend my days visualizing the streets of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Ramla from my Washington, DC apartment. On repeat, I run through happy memories, difficult memories, and charged memories; recalling moments, smells, sights, and sounds that help me feel close despite a physical distance that seems to expand with each passing second and day.

Far beyond historically-significant and religiously-charged sites such as the old city

of Jerusalem, more than any other place in the world, I experience Israel as having the unique capacity to express human beauty and age-old complexity around every seemingly mundane corner.

From coffee shops, to train routes, to seasonal flowers peeking out between ancient stones, Israel screams, sings, and exudes a powerful pride and profound pain shared by all its inhabitants.

During this immensely disorienting time full of longing and unease (and also during the month of Temple Micah's underwear drive) I invite you to visual-



ize my favorite discount store, nestled between the Jerusalem cafes and French fry shops of Yafo street: "Gina's."

At Gina's Underwear Store.

Women.

Amidst the little glass jars, bathroom rugs, baskets, pajamas, and fake plants.

Underwear.

Moms, daughters, grandmas, and wives.

They push. And examine.

Bargaining.

Prices are high. But cheaper here.

Still, nothing is free.

Stainless-steel pot for 20 shekels—

At Gina's Underwear Store.

On sale, shiny, and new. The things that will be cooked!

Thursday potluck, family Shabbat, picnic in the park, brunch at work, romantic dinner.

Quinoa stir-fry, tuna salad, pasta con broccoli, chowder.

Borscht, goulash, kneidlach. Chollant.

Musakhan, machshe, kubbeh. Chamin.

Savta's couscous. Teita's couscous.

For Shabbat, Eid al-Adha, Rosh Hashanah, Christmas.

Religious women—

At Gina's Underwear Store.

Head scarves, hijabs, tied behind, wrapped in front, hair strands, wigs, faces covered, eyes peeking out, bedazzled brooches, hats.

Orthodox, Muslim, Haredi, Sephardic, Ashkenazi, trendy, modest, sexy.

Maxi skirts, stockings, long sleeve shirts, loafers, high heels, shorts, skinny jeans.

They push. And push. And examine.

Bargaining.

Still, nothing is free.

Underwear—

At Gina's Underwear Store.

High waisted, boy cut, padded, thong, shorts, push-up, sport.

Cotton, lace, polyester, spandex, petite, silk, plus, nylon.

Women—

At Gina's Underwear Store.

Wrinkles, ribs, bones, skin, hair, birthmarks, bumps, scars, underwear.

Underneath.

We push. And push. And examine.

Bargaining.

For what is concealed by maxi skirts, stockings, long sleeve shirts, loafers, high heels, shorts, skinny jeans.

Still, nothing is free.