

There is so much from these last few months since October 7 that I have not wanted to say from this Bima.

This place that is so holy to me - to us.

I want this room to be a sanctuary in every sense
We have already read the reports, heard the accounts
I do not need to recount them all here
But the images haunt me - the depravity and heinousness that knew no
bounds

They died in the desert.

Their beautiful bodies desecrated
Battered, burned
used as shields and weapons
Our women - old, young, and younger

Their defiled bodies- the only remaining proof of what horrors had been done to them.

And what is worse - is that the women -those stolen from us and those still living -

their bodies are now once again desecrated and used as weapons of war -
now a culture war - a war of hate and online propaganda

Despite significant evidence - despite an entire movement of feminists who learned to say "me, too" and "believe women" and "No More Silence" and "Time's Up" and "No More" and "Stop Sexual Violence" and "End Rape Culture"

Despite all the growth we've supposedly done over the past decade... our women are now being questioned.

Where's the proof? Why haven't more women spoken out? How is it possible that all those injured people could really remember such explicit details? Isn't this just Zionist propaganda?

We are devastated - we did not know such evil still existed.

So I am here to say what, unfathomably, should not need to be said.

I believe you. I see you. I hear you.
We hear you. We see you. We believe you.
We hear every wordless scream.

We are shattered that your bodies and brains and souls must record the scars of that depravity.

And have to relieve it now, as people question you.

So While I so badly want to find sanctuary in this place -

I do not want to read the words which make it true

I do not want to see the pictures
I do not want to hear the stories
And I do not want to speak of them

What I can do - what we can do

Is not look away
Because that is what others want us to do
To pretend that this didn't happen.
To pretend that "believe women" and "No More Silence" don't apply to us.
To pretend that we, too, aren't included in "me, too"

But we are.

So we have to promise to not look away
To not turn away - or swipe to the next story
We must bear witness to every single story, to every single person.

It is our witnessing that allows us to survive, humanity left intact.

It is why the word for seeing is repeated over and over in our Torah portion for this week

The Midwives are instructed to R'ei-ten - see

look at the face of the Hebrew babies they are delivering¹ - וַיֹּאמֶר בְּיָלְדָן אֶת־הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וַרְאִיתֶנּוּ¹

And Pharaoh's daughter, too, sees -

וַתִּפְתַּח וַתִּרְאֶהוּ אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד וְהִנֵּה־נֹעַר בֹּכֶה²
וַתִּרְאֶהוּ - she sees a boy, and he is crying, and decides to save him

And Moses sees

...מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל־אֶחָיו וַיִּרְא בְּסִבְלָתָם וַיִּרְא אִישׁ מִצְרִי מַכֶּה³

וַיִּרְא - he sees the suffering of the Israelites under slavery

וַיִּרְא - And he witnesses the taskmaster abusing the Hebrew slave

¹ Exodus 1:16

² Exodus 2:6

³ Exodus 2:11

And Moses must stop and see the burning bush

Which has been burning all this time just waiting for someone to look long enough to notice

We have to look

We have to stop - and bear witness

To the horrific abuses and desecrations of October 7th, and yes, to all the terrible loss and pain in Gaza and Israel

Our job right now is to see and to not pretend this doesn't exist- It is the only way we can stay human

To not bury our heads in the sand

To see what is on fire in front of us

It is in that moment of seeing at the burning bush that seeing becomes something else -

The seeing calls us in

Moses says - *Hineini* - Here I am⁴

We see -

Hineini - we become present.

And like Moses in his same moment of seeing, we may be afraid - overwhelmed at the enormity of pain we must acknowledge

But we, like Moses. Like Pharaoh's daughter. Like the midwives. We stay.

And we can find that we are not alone - for we, too, hear what God said to Moses in the wilderness⁵ -

Ra,i,ti, I, too, have seen the suffering of my people
Sha'mati - And I have heard their cries
Ya'dati - And I know deeply their sorrows

⁴ Exodus 3:4

⁵ Exodus 3:7

This is how we witness - despite how inconvenient or painful it may be: we see the reality, we hear the cries, and we let that enter us as knowledge.

That is how we reach towards empathy and compassion and try our best to sit beside all those in pain

Hineinu - We are Here.

Ra'inu - we see.

Shamanu - We hear.

Ya'dati - We believe.

We will not let your stories be stolen

We will not let the world forget.