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Bet Am Shalom Friends,

The crisis grinds on, as it surely will for some time to come. Many, if not most, of our congregants have direct ties to Israel and Israelis. Some of our member families are worrying and praying for Israeli loved ones called up to military service in the last few days. Some know relatives or friends who were among the victims of wanton Hamas slaughter. Certainly, all of us feel the injury and insult of this massacre. We mourn for our people and stand by Israel's right and obligation to respond militarily and otherwise.

Indeed, we are one family of Yisrael, and we don't need horrors like this one to remind us of that precious fact. We need to hold one another close, especially those among us whose dear ones are in the path of danger.

There have been, and will continue to be, **gatherings and vigils** we can attend in order to share our anguish, express solidarity, and "do something" beyond watching the news:

On Tuesday, **Westchester Jewish Council held** a county-wide rally at Temple Israel Center that brought us together as one Jewish family like nothing else. There was an impactful mix of speeches, prayers, and words of solidarity.

On Wednesday, **Westchester Reform Temple** hosted a ceremony and rally with the participation of numerous congregations (including Bet Am Shalom) with a focus on prayer and spiritual strengthening.

Other vigils are taking place throughout the week at **various local congregations**. All are invited.

Our congregation will again add appropriate prayers, readings, and songs during **Shabbat services** (as will synagogues throughout the world). These additions should allow everyone to find some of the "comfort in numbers" that we all seek.

Safety: Bet Am Shalom is in partnership with security personnel, from the White Plains and County Police to CSI (Community Security Initiative). We are maintaining a safe and monitored environment at all times.

Updates: Many have asked where and how they might join **online briefings** from people on the ground. Look on the websites of the [UJA Federation of New York](#), the [American Jewish Committee](#) (AJC), the [Anti-Defamation League \(ADL\)](#), [J Street](#), [AIPAC](#), the [Magen David Adom](#) (AFMDA), or other organizations that you might be part of. These briefings range from military updates to information about the unfolding humanitarian crisis. Briefings are happening multiple times a day, and they are generally better than tuning in to the news. *Tzey ul'mad*, as the Rabbis of the Talmud say. "Go and learn."

Counseling: Surely there are many among us who could use some **pastoral or psychotherapeutic counseling** at this point, or even a kind ear to listen to our feelings of despair. I am more than available for pastoral counseling (not psychotherapy), as are other rabbis in our congregation. We also have many therapists who can direct us to professional help. The **Westchester Jewish Community Services**

(WJCS) is a local treasure when it comes to this sort of thing. Please reach out to them! (Gillian Rittmaster, 914-761-0600 x2142). *This goes for our children and teens as well!*

Giving: I recommend the [Israel Emergency Fund of UJA-Federation of New York](#) for those who want to contribute **financially**. They have a vast network of agencies in Israel, including the all-important **Israel Trauma Center** that is serving those most affected in the south; and the **Kedma Youth Villages** (also in the south) that were the recipients of terror on Shabbat. I also recommend [American Friends of Magen David Adom](#). They are the chief operators of ambulances and “Red Cross” services in Israel.

Our good friends at **Keshet Israel** (the educational team that plans and runs our Israel trips) have set up an **Emergency Relief Fund** to collect much needed *physical items* as well as funds for Kibbutz Nir Am and Be’eri, who took the brunt of the terror attacks. ([Donate here](#) administered by Rabbi Arnie Gluck).

I also received an **impassioned call for help from [Ben Shemen Youth Village](#)** in central Israel.

I’ve seen a number of worthy causes and organizations coming through the email. I will let you know of them as they come to my attention. Remember that you can always help by giving to your own favorite tzedakahs at a time of crisis.

People have asked if we’ve heard from our **Muslim friends** in the area. Indeed, we have. Emre Celik from Peace Islands, the Turkish Muslim organization with whom we’ve shared many iftars, Sukkot dinners, and other exchanges, wrote to express his shock, outrage, and unqualified solidarity with the Jewish community. I pray that other such voices will follow.

Let’s close with two thoughts from our rich liturgical tradition. One is the verse we read every morning from Psalm 30: “*You turned my mourning into dance.*” *Hafachta mis’p’di l’machol li*. Surely that thought was in our hearts as we transformed the usually carefree *freilach* dancing of Simchat Torah into an intense form of spiritual resistance. I hope our children felt the embrace of tradition and continuity, while our adults were able to go beyond mourning and toward hope and solidarity on that first day of the war.

The second is a traditional prayer for the safety and return of captives. May all of us say it with conviction, and may we stay united in keeping faith with the hostages and their families:

acheynu kol beyt yisrael han’tunim b’tzarah uv’shiv’yah – “Our family, mired in sorrow and captivity...hamakom y’rachem aleyhem – May the Omnipresent have mercy on them...v’yotzi’em mitzarah lir’vachah – and bring them from confinement into open spaces... ume’afeylah l’orah – and from darkness to light.

May it be so. Peace, strength, courage,



Rabbi Les Bronstein