



## Sermon Sparks Lekh Lekha By Rabbi Tzvi Berger

October 7, 2023. 22 Tishrei 5784. Shabbat and Simchat Torah, which began on Friday night with the beauty of prayer, of joyous song and dance, by morning had become a brutal, horrific day of bestiality and carnage, of death and destruction. A day that will be etched in Israeli collective memory, causing deep scars which will remain, and will not heal.

How can one possibly respond to such horror and cruelty? This is not the place to discuss how the government and Tzahal should respond militarily. **My question is, how do we as a people, as Am Yisrael respond; spiritually and ethically?**

**One response should be clear to all, with deep and enduring solidarity, the theme chosen for this Shabbat by the worldwide Conservative/Masorti movement. Such solidarity is critical, not only for Israelis, but for Jews all over the world. It has been meaningfully and concretely expressed in a wide variety of ways, by Israelis of varying political and religious perspectives, by Israeli Jews, and also by Israeli Arabs; Bedouins, Muslims, Christians, and Druze. It has also been expressed by the support of committed Jews, as well as non-Jews, by government and public figures from many different nations.**

Our Torah portion suggests an additional, equally important response. The second verse reads as follows: “ואעשך לגוי גדול ואברכך ואגדלה שמך והיה ברכה” / “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing”. Abram, who has just been called to leave his native land and everything which is familiar, is immediately given a Divine promise of a blessed, glorious future.

Yet notice, the root ברך, to be blessed, appears twice in this verse. This suggests to me that the R. Hirsch’s interpretation of “היה ברכה” (to be blessed) which sees these words not as a promise, but rather as a command, to literally **be a blessing**, is correct. **Such a reading is an existential and ethical imperative, a call to duty designed to imbue us with inspiration and purpose!**

The heroism and self-sacrifice, not only of soldiers and police, but also so many Israeli civilians, as well as the everyday acts of those volunteering, contributing food, clothing and essential supplies and so, so much more, must continually challenge us, to strive to be the very best that we can be.