



Sermon Sparks -Kids Today” *Shabbat Bereisheet* By Rabbi Neil F. Blumofe

There are always one or two subjects for me, suitable for a d’var Torah that are in the back of my mind and yet, never seem to get expressed on any Shabbat. One idea that I have been thinking about for a long time is the epidemic of loneliness and feeling adrift that is especially afflicting many of our young adults. Especially during the pandemic, isolation and even depression dramatically increased. Especially among people 16-29, reports demonstrate that this group of people are a bit socially stunted.

Recent studies demonstrate factors such as increased online studies, moving back home, and increased nervousness to interact, which lead to young adults feeling that they give off a bad energy and that they are not able to make friends properly. All of this is in the foreground of increased loneliness among all ages -- exacerbated by the pandemic, the ever-increasing ubiquitousness of social media, working from home, the creation of digital bubbles, and by ever increasing costs of living. In the last year or so, quite a number of young adults have spoken to me and expressed that they feel that their lives are not relevant and that they feel as if they are disappearing.

This past week has been one of the hardest of my life. In addition to trying to respond to requests and issues that were pushed to after the High Holydays, and the obvious needs of leading our community while seeking support among elected officials and in the larger community during the worst attack against Israel ever, and the worst single day loss of Jews since the Holocaust, there has been the personal pain in my family.

What has bled my already broken heart in these days is trying to help young adults process the rage and impotence that they are feeling -- especially if they have deep and personal ties to people in Israel. I am proud that so many of our young people do. Among our Year Course crowd, those who have a year to study and experience Israel between high school and college, there are important ties with Israelis in their twenties. And tragically, these are the people who were either at the Supernova Sukkot Gathering in Re'im, Israel or who serve in the Israel Defense Forces on active duty. Many of our Year Course kids know at least one person who was murdered or who died in the line of duty in the past few days. My son knows of three. This has been an excruciating time for them.

Feelings of helplessness or dispirit among our young adults have seriously increased in the past week. We know too that as Israel strengthens its offensive against Hamas and there are more casualties of non-terrorists who in this heartrending time, are in the wrong place at the wrong time, public opinion will shift away from the tragedy of the pogrom that occur against the Jewish people, the massacre that occurred in Israel, and will focus more on the crisis of those who live in Gaza. This sympathy is easily elided to all who live in Gaza, not just those who are used most horribly as human shields by terrorists and who are unable to get to safety through Egypt or with the assistance of other countries such as Turkey, or others who could help. For those who don't closely follow this intractable conflict or who are not willing to sharpen their understanding or



Sermon Sparks -Kids Today” *Shabbat Bereisheet* By Rabbi Neil F. Blumofe

reason, this conflict then, can look absurdly like a war that is only between a superior force and those who are helpless.

It is for this reason that many organizations have been silent or who have produced messages that don't mention the atrocities that the Israelis have experienced and just call for love, peace, and understanding. While all of these positive feelings are praiseworthy, the suffering and the joylessness that so many are experiencing do not allow the murders of over 1300 Israelis to be swept under the rug. Our blood is not that cheap. Especially on college campuses, where our young people who are proudly Jewish and Zionist, they can feel besieged or that they are holding and cherishing ideas that are worthy only of the most brutish people. The intolerance of those who preach tolerance is nothing short of breathless.

Academic administrators, by their own calculus, either produce anodyne statements, if they produce them at all, or irrationally infer that any damage done to the people of Israel or to the state of Israel stems from spurious claims, their own wrongdoing or worst of all, their own illegitimacy. Some statements that I have seen come perilously close to reading that the Israelis, the Jews, brought it upon themselves. This is crushing to see.

Our young adults are on the front lines of this doublespeak or anti-Jewish, anti-Israeli agenda. Responses to this have been clear. I desperately wish our friends in spaces that are progressive, academic, or so-called enlightened, would realize that Zionism itself is the consequence of perennial, dehumanizing antisemitism. We have seen incidents of antisemitism increase in the United States. And now we see people either directly or indirectly -- either by what they choose to say or not say -- justify this pogrom, this massacre. Watch those who were silent this past week. See what they choose to post about in the days to come. This will be telling to see how they are wired and how they see the permissibility of the Jewish State and by extension, the permissibility of Jewish people.

If we are stumbling in these days, our kids are staggering. On college campuses specifically, our students are encountering vile and heartless protests against the need for Israel to defend itself against people, organizations, and states that call for its destruction and for the elimination of the Jewish people. They see and witness not just demonstrations, but celebrations of our slaughter. It has always been a hard time to be a Jew. In these days, it is super-duper hard.

And yet, our kids have grit and resilience. They are bright, enterprising, and proud. This week, over 5000 students from over 650 institutions of higher learning signed a letter that was authored by two students, one from Williams College and one from Tufts University, that condemns the silence of many university administrations from calling out Hamas. In the spirit of full disclosure, I am proud that my college student, who is very active for Israel advocacy and against chronic antisemitism on his campus in the Northeast, was one of the signatories.



Sermon Sparks -Kids Today” *Shabbat Bereisheet* By Rabbi Neil F. Blumofe

Here is the text of the letter that appeared in the online New York Times on Thursday and is scheduled to be in the print edition of the newspaper today.

To the Editor:

On the morning of October 7, Hamas, the Iranian-backed terrorist group, massacred, tortured, raped, and burned Israeli victims, mostly civilians, including women, children, and infants. The death toll is more than 1300.

We as students are sickened by the actions of Hamas. We are unable to look away from the massacre of our friends and family from afar, and our desperate calls go to voicemail as we try to cope with our isolation from our families and now our own campus communities.

Many university administrators have yet to call out the atrocities committed by Hamas and provide us with the support we desperately need. These same universities that were quick to condemn events like the Russian invasion of Ukraine and recent Supreme Court decisions now remain silent.

Just as they have failed to condemn the actions of Hamas in Israel, they have yet to condemn the students who are celebrating these atrocities on campus. Since administrators have failed to speak to us, it's time we speak to them. Condemn Hamas. Condemn the students supporting Hamas. Support your Jewish and Israeli students. We are grieving, and the only thing that hurts almost as much as the cries of our brothers and sisters is your silence.

Oy meh hayah lanu. What has become of us. As the Book of Job relates: people groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded cries out. The dread and powerlessness that our young adults are feeling is compounded by their baseline feelings of loneliness and isolation. When I sit with a young adult and hear them cry, and hear their fears and disappointments I seek to provide a modicum of healing. I remind them of how important social infrastructures are -- like the synagogue, and how vital it is to keep establishing a culture of connection., and how much Shabbat, unplugging, can be such a valuable spiritual technology.

All is certainly not lost. We must pay attention to the most pressing of needs in our world. At the same time, we must pay attention to that which may be afflicting us from within. We cannot do either work alone. We will gather on Tuesday at 6:30 pm at an event sponsored by our Sisterhood to connect to those who are suffering or risking their lives in Israel by writing them letters or drawing pictures. Tonight at 8:00 pm, we will gather for Havdalah as we greet the new week together and provide gentle space for each of us to connect. If you know of someone lonely, offer to pick them up and bring them here. Reach out to your neighbors: send them a simple text that says I am thinking of you. And then the next day, send the same text. If you have a young adult in your



Sermon Sparks -Kids Today”
Shabbat Bereisheet
By Rabbi Neil F. Blumofe

life, reach out to them. Many of them are retreating into addictive behavior because the world hurts too badly. Please step into the breach. Remind them that they are not alone. Help them express themselves. Keep the letters coming. out into the world that speak their truth.

We are in a maelstrom and we need all hands on deck to find safe harbor. We can do it. L'ma'an Tzion lo eh'che'seh u'l'ma'an Yerushalayim lo eshkot -- for the sake of Zion I will not be silent and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not rest. You shall be called by a new name. No longer known as forsaken, you shall be known as delightful and connected. And let us all say: for the sake of our children, we will not be silent. For the sake of their wellbeing we will not rest.

Am Yisrael Chai.
Shabbat Shalom.