

On Wednesday, I underwent the Community Emergency Response Training alongside Etz Hayim and preschool staff - the same training many of you went through as well as it was offered to the congregation at large. The bulk of it was focused on immediate action we should take in the case of a bloody emergency. Tourniquets and wound packing, sealing and burping wounds.

But we also learned about what to do when someone may be going into shock - though what to *do* may not be the right way to put it. We might say, rather, how to *be*.

Be with them. Be next to them. Warm them however you can, speak to them, above all, make sure your presence is known. Make sure they know they are not alone.

One of the educators at the training told a story of a man during 9/11 who was standing stock still on a pile of rubble. Clearly frozen, clearly in some sort of shock or trauma. Another man went up to him and asked, "are you all right? Do you need help?"

The man answered, "No, I'm fine."

Well clearly he was not fine.

So the other man stayed with him for a period of time, checking in, asking again and again if he was all right or if he needed anything, and always he was rebuffed.

"No. I'm fine."

After about a half hour when it became clear that the man on the rubble was at least physically all right, at least physically out of danger, the man standing with him stepped away to continue his work - and finally, the man on the rubble said more than just, "I'm fine."

"Thank you," he said. "You were so helpful."

Today, Conservative-Masorti congregations around the world - including our own - are participating in Solidarity Shabbat, three weeks after the massacres of October 7th, five years after the massacre at Tree of Life. If you didn't know about that, that's

because when I first heard about it - and I'm going to be honest here - it was because I wasn't impressed with the initiative.

Show that you support Israel by holding a blue and white challah bake, add a frame to your Facebook photo, use a hashtag on social media.

Now, of course there is nothing wrong with doing any of those things, and in fact they might well do some good. But is that solidarity? And if it is solidarity, who is that solidarity *with*?

In a remarkable example of parasha meeting current events, we have just read that when Avraham's nephew Lot was captured and taken hostage in war, Avraham immediately musters his people in a rescue mission. And the text of the Torah is clear, and not particularly interesting, in its description: there is a war going on and Avraham joins in, interestingly on the side of Sodom and Gomorrah, because Sodom is where Lot lives. Successful in war and in rescue, he frees the hostages and returns them to their families.

But the rabbis of the Talmud are not satisfied with such a simple explanation.

They wanted to know not what Avraham's followers did in battle, but what Avraham himself did. Avraham who was an elderly man, who was unlikely to have rushed out sword in hand.

In the Tractate Nedarim, they said that he busied himself pouring Torah into the ears of everyone in his household, showering them with words.

We know that he had not received yet Torah as a document. The Torah Avraham had access to could not have been laws or instructions, could not have been the history of the world or the future of the Jewish people.

It could only have been the Torah that existed in him, as a human being. The Torah that lived in his heart. The heart of a man who was afraid for his kidnapped family, who looked out at the horizon and saw a war going on, who must have known already that the losses of such a war were only beginning, not coming to an end.

I imagine Avraham as a man standing on top of rubble, taking the hand of a terrified person next to him, and speaking softly these words of Torah: Are you all right? Are you okay? What do you need?

Or even perhaps: I know you are not all right. So I am here. I am here with you right now.

There are times when it becomes the most difficult to reach out and offer our presence to people because we have no idea what we might say, what we might make better. And usually those are times our presence is needed most.

I'm ashamed to say that I put off reaching out to a rabbi in Israel who mentored me because I thought, what could I *possibly* offer to her? And when I finally did, when I told her I was thinking of her, that I wished I could help, you know what she said when she mentioned I was one of many who did reach out?

"It gives so much chizzuk (strength) hearing your voices and knowing we are together."

And then, incredibly, she wanted to know how *I* was doing. If we in *our* diaspora community felt safe. *That* is solidarity at an incredible level.

And then I have to admit there was another person I put off reaching out to. A Palestinian friend who lives in Ramallah, in the West Bank, whose family had hosted me for a while when I was in college. I was afraid that if I messaged her, I would hear something that scared or disappointed me, something that would cut off our relationship entirely.

But when I finally did write her, I asked her how she was. She said she was fine. She asked how I was.

And I said, not so good. My community is grieving.

And she said, you know, I hated what happened. Attacking those people at the rave. Attacking civilians.

She said to me that her mother, in the middle of Ramallah, was worried about *me*. Maybe I was back in Israel, her mother thought, as last time I had visited, I had been living in Jerusalem. Maybe *I* was in danger.

I had meant to be the person reaching out, the person speaking the Torah I had inside me, the person making sure my loved ones were not going into shock and I found myself suddenly the person standing on a mound of rubble with my friends holding my hand, saying, “are you all right? Are you okay?”

It wasn't until I asked others how they were that I realized I could be the one to say, “I'm not fine.”

So on Solidarity Shabbat, here is my message to you, here is how I suggest we all act in solidarity: we learn from Avraham Avinu, our father Avraham. We learn from the man who stood next to the person in shock in the rubble of 9/11. That we learn from God Godself who proclaimed in the psalms: I am with the lowly and the brokenhearted.

We forget for a moment slogans and banners and blue and white color schemes. We set aside politics - what does it mean to “support Israel,” what do we mean when we say “Am Yisrael Chai,” because I have no doubt that even in this room we mean different things and have different politics and have different thoughts about what we ought to be doing on large scale.

But yet we remain united all the same. Somehow. The Hebrew name for our Solidarity Shabbat is Shabbat Achdut, which can also translate as the Shabbat of Oneness. Of Unification.

And we make that real by reaching out. We reach out to friends and family in Israel to tell them we are thinking of them. That we love them. That we are with them in their shock. If we have Palestinian friends, we reach out to them too. We tell them the same things. We say that as individuals we know our relationships will survive the worst examples of human enmity on display in this world.

We reach out to our loved ones from Pittsburgh and say their loss and trauma is not forgotten. We tell them too that we love them.

We comfort our mourners and our grieving. We dry the tears of our loved ones, even when we ourselves are crying.

We alleviate our own fear and our own isolation by being the ones to alleviate the fear and isolation of others.

“Are you all right?” we must ask over and over. “I’m with you,” we must say over and over.

In your brokenheartedness, I am with you.

And sometimes we’ll even hear back - thank you. That was so helpful.

Shabbat Shalom.