The Stitching That Holds Us Together
Rabbi A. Brian Stoller
Shabbat Yom HaAtzma'ut 5785 / May 2, 2025

Yesterday was Yom HaAtzma'ut, Israel's Independence Day. On a secular level, it's like America's July Fourth, but it's different in that Yom HaAtzma'ut is also a religious holiday in Judaism.

On a spiritual level, Yom HaAtzma'ut is the cosmic remedy for Tish'a B'Av, the date in midsummer when, according to tradition, both the First and Second Jerusalem Temples were destroyed.

As the sages describe it, the destruction of Jerusalem created a tear in the fabric of the cosmos, leaving a gaping chasm between God and the Jewish people. The Talmud says that three times each night, God roars like a lion across the chasm, crying out for us like a parent who has been separated from their children. (See B'rakhot 3a)

Yom HaAtzma'ut, by contrast, celebrates the repair of the cosmos—as the psalm puts it, "Jerusalem built up, a city knit together." (Psalm 122:3) That's why modern rabbinic authorities decided that we should say the Hallel psalms of praise on Yom HaAtzma'ut just like we do on the festivals.

Indeed, its place in the liturgical calendar points to its spiritual significance. Almost exactly halfway in between Yom HaAtzmau't and Tish'a B'Av is the Festival of Shavuot, the day on which God gave us the Torah.

In our metaphor of cosmic tearing and repair, the Torah is the stitching: Its teachings of kindness, humility, ethical conduct, reverence for God and humanity alike, and hope in the face of tragedy hold our fragile world together.

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Today, the stitching in the cosmos is under great strain. On one side is wholeness, order, and peace; on the other side is chaos, violence, and the abyss.

The challenges facing the State of Israel are a microcosm of this cosmic struggle. Competing forces from both within the state and outside of it threaten to tear it apart.

After the October 7 massacre, Israel launched a necessary and morally justified war of self-defense with the twin goals of destroying Hamas and bringing the hostages home. Yet 563 days and nearly 1,000 Israeli lives later, neither goal has been accomplished, and it remains in question whether they ever will be.

The Israeli leadership is divided over what to do about it. Earlier today, IDF Chief of Staff Lt. General Zamir said that recovering the remaining 59 hostages, both living and dead, is the most

important goal of the war, contradicting Prime Minister Netanyahu, who said this week that defeating Hamas is the number one priority. (Times of Israel)[1]

The IDF, guided by a moral code rooted in Jewish tradition, takes extra measures, unlike most armies, to protect civilians, fight ethically, and help the vulnerable. And yet, with its hand forced by Hamas' diversions of food and other aid intended for Gaza civilians, the IDF has maintained a blockade on Gaza for more than two months, compounding the suffering Hamas has inflicted on its own people. (*The Times of Israel*)[2]

Meanwhile, Israel's enemies remain relentless in their aim to destroy the Jewish state. Their success in keeping the war going is taking a significant toll on Israel's military capacity and on the well-being of the country. The Israeli people are stronger spiritually and emotionally than probably any other people on earth, but no society's human and emotional resources are infinite.

As we celebrate Israel's 77th birthday, there is so much to be grateful for: that the Jewish people can determine our own destiny in our ancient homeland; that we have a strong army to safeguard our right to self-determination; that Jewish learning, culture, and spirituality is flourishing in its natural habitat; and that Jews everywhere have a sanctuary from persecution that will take them in.

Sadly, though, there is also much to lament.

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The prophet Jeremiah, who witnessed the tear in the cosmos when Jerusalem was destroyed on that first Tish'a B'Av in the 6th century BCE, described the Jewish people's despair:

Thus, said God:
A cry is heard in Ramah—
Wailing, bitter weeping—
Rachel weeping for her children.
She refuses to be comforted
For her children, who are gone.

But in the same prophecy, Jeremiah foretold the repair of the chasm:

Thus, said God:
Restrain your voice from weeping,
Your eyes from shedding tears;
For there is a reward for your labor
—declares God:
They shall return from the enemy's land.
And there is hope for your future

—declares God:
Your children shall return to their country.
(*Jer.* 31:15-17)

In 2008, Idan Raichel, one of Israel's most popular singers, wrote a song based on Jeremiah's prophecy. Like the biblical figure who inspired his song, Idan Raichel was prophetic, knowing somehow that, 15 years later, the Jewish people would need these words of comfort and hope, as we wait for the hostages to be returned and the war to end.

As in ancient days, when the very fabric of the universe feels like it's about to be torn asunder, God's Torah is the stitching that can hold us together.

Listen at the link below to Idan Raichel's song "Men'i Kolech Mibechi," Jeremiah's words to the people meaning "restrain your voice from crying":
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZCoi_FoTlg.

1 IDF says chief war goal is return ofFromhostages, contradicting Netanyahu's position | The Times of Israel, May 2, 2025
2 "IDF planning major shift in Gaza delivery in bid to thwart Hamas diversion," https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-planning-major-shift-in-gaza-aid-delivery-in-bid-to-thwart-hamas-diversion/, May 2, 2025

From TBE president Jordana Levine

Parashah Tazria–Metzora
May 2, 2025
Jordana Levine

In this week's parashah, Tazria–Metzora, we read about the process by which individuals who have experienced impurity—whether physical or spiritual—are gradually reintegrated into the community. At its core, these portions are about healing, renewal, and what it means to return, not just to a place but to a people—and to a sense of belonging.

I bring that lens to talk with you about the important and meaningful step in Temple Beth-El's own journey of transformation.

This week, as I hope you all now know from the email that was sent out, our Board unanimously voted to begin negotiations with Yeshivat Kol Yaakov and Bnot Yaakov toward the potential sale of our building—a step that, if finalized, will ultimately come to the full membership for a vote.

The news of Bnot Yaakov and Kol Yaakov possibly making a new home in our building is a moment of growth for the broader Jewish community in Great Neck—and we truly celebrate

that. At the same time, for Temple Beth-El, it marks a powerful turning point: one that is both bittersweet and full of purpose.

There is a heaviness in preparing to rightsize our footprint in a building that has been our spiritual home since 1928—and in facing the reality that the once-thriving Reform Jewish community here has shifted significantly. But there is also sweetness, because we are not winding down. In actuality, we are moving forward with strength and intention.

I believe that every change we embrace with courage becomes a beginning shaped by choice. *We* are reshaping our future: securing financial sustainability and working to realize a vibrant, pluralistic vision of Jewish life in our community.

We are proud to be remaining in our building and excited about the opportunity to partner with the yeshiva as neighbors under one roof. This, too, is a form of reintegration—not of individuals, but of communities—sharing sacred space, even in difference.

When speaking with a leader from their yeshiva today, he said to me, "We promise to make this a worldwide example of success as how Jews should strive for unity and to be together."

Tazria–Metzora reminds us that every transition is an opportunity for reflection and reimagining what holiness looks like in community. I share this with you today, to hold space for the full picture: the joy of new beginnings—and the grief of letting go.

As we mark this transition, may we find strength in the foundation laid by those who came before us—and stay rooted in our Reform values as we reimagine our sacred space for the future. May we go from strength to strength. Shabbat Shalom.