

Both Things are True
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One of the most poignant verses in the Tanakh comes from Psalm 118, part of the Hallel for Sukkot:
“Min hameitzar karati Yah—I called out to God from the narrow place. / Anani vamerchav Yah—God answered me in the broad place.”

I’ve been thinking of this verse this week because of the hostages who have been held for two years, quite literally in a narrow place—the tunnels beneath Gaza. We just can’t even imagine the suffering they’ve endured.

God willing, in the coming days they’ll be released from that dark captivity into the arms of their families and friends and the whole Israeli community.

For now, we just have to pray Hamas follows through on the agreement.

In the meantime, I know some people are struggling to make sense of what’s going on. I don’t mean politically or diplomatically; I mean spiritually.

If some prophet had told us back in January that, by the fall, the United States, Israel, and nearly every major Arab and Muslim country would work together to force Hamas to free the hostages, I am confident that people who love President Trump would have said, “I knew he’d get it done! He’s the best deal-maker in the world!”

And if that prophet had also said that, by October, armed American troops would be patrolling Washington, Chicago, and Portland to suppress protests, I am confident that people who oppose the president would have said, “Of course they are! Trump’s a lawless authoritarian who’s out to destroy democracy!”

Well, here we are. The hostages are coming home, and National Guard soldiers are on American streets.

Turns out, everyone was right. “Eilu v’eilu,” as the say in the Talmud: both things are true.

The world is strange and full of contradictions. And the stories we create to make sense of it—the ones that tell us who’s good, who’s bad, who’s right and who’s wrong—don’t hold up well when reality pushes back.

Still, we cling to them anyway because they’re comfortable. We tell ourselves things like:
“Trump’s horrible—so if he made a peace deal, he must have done something sleazy we don’t know about.”

Or: “Trump’s fantastic—so if he’s sending troops in, things must be so bad that he has no other choice.

Cognitive dissonance is uncomfortable, so we twist ourselves into believing whatever keeps our picture of the world intact. We’d rather distort reality than sit in uncertainty.
But that’s a very narrow way to live, and I believe Sukkot comes to challenge it.

How so?

Most of the year, we take our sturdy, well-built houses for granted. But then, for one week, we step outside into something temporary and exposed—the sukkah—and we remember how vulnerable we are and how little control we actually have.

Sitting under that thatched roof, looking up at the vast sky, we realize that real strength doesn't come from what we build. It comes from being willing to live with vulnerability and uncertainty, even though that means we'll get blown around by the wind a bit.

The same is true of the narratives we construct to make sense of the world. They feel solid until something breaks them open. Then we see how artificial they really were—and how freeing it can be to let them go.

In the Torah reading for this Shabbat of Sukkot, Moses pleads with God, "Let me know Your ways; show me Your Presence!"

But God says no. To be human is to live with mystery.

Not everything makes sense—and that's okay. Stop trying to force it.

Living spiritually means learning to dwell inside the uncertainty.

That's what the psalm means: "Min hameitzar karati Yah, anani vamerchav Yah—I called out from the narrow place, and God answered me in the broad place."

On Sukkot, we are invited to move from narrowness to expansiveness.

To trade certainty for ambiguity.

To make room for contradiction.

Is Trump really sending armed soldiers in to crack down on protestors? Yes, he is.

Is this the same guy who brought Arabs, Muslims, Europeans, and Israelis together to free the hostages and end the war? Yes, it is.

Eilu v'eilu. Both things are true.

That's the world—complex, messy, paradoxical, inscrutable.

But we should embrace it, because that's also where God dwells: not in the safety of certainty, but out there in the open, where the roof leaks a little, and the wind blows you around, and reality doesn't always match our tidy little stories.