



Rabbi Jonathan Roos
Introductory Remarks, War in Israel Vigil, 10.8.2023

The past day and a half has been one of the most devastating in modern Jewish history. Hamas launched a surprise attack from the air, sea, and ground and up to this point (1:30pm Oct 8th), they have killed over 700 Israelis, wounded thousands, and kidnapped over 100. Allow me a few moments to explain why this is so devastating and unprecedented for such statements are filling the airwaves but they are not self-explanatory or obvious to everyone. This attack is devastating for many reasons. First, among the dead, injured and kidnapped there are Israeli soldiers, but most of the victims are civilians. Many of the victims are from the most vulnerable segments of society – the elderly and the smallest children. These are people like Doron Asher, 34, and her two daughters, Raz, age 5, and Aviv, age 3, and Yaffa Adar, 85 years old. Second, the attack was launched on Shabbat morning, the day of a significant Jewish holiday – Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah – a day on which many Jews would have been even more vulnerable as they were not carrying or checking their phones, they were gathered in groups both religious and secular to sing, pray and dance as all people tend to do on holidays. The choice of date is not a coincidence, it is part of the message that Hamas is sending. Third, this is so devastating because Hamas and its partners are motivated by profoundly violent antisemitism. They are too often portrayed – and no doubt in coming weeks will be described – on many platforms and through many voices, as freedom fighters who are driven to desperate acts by Israeli oppression. Many people will believe that Hamas and its allies are part of a historically noble and justified strand of humanity who fight against overwhelming odds to stop oppressors. But whatever else they may be fighting for, Hamas and its partners are fundamentalist jihadists who are publicly clear about their hatred for Jews and their religiously grounded commitment to kill Jews. This is in the founding Hamas Covenant - you can google it and read it for yourself; don't take my word for it - and in their public statements regularly. Their actions over the years and over the past day especially demonstrate just how strongly they believe those words.

Our commitment to stand unequivocally with Israel in the face of attack may be a bit uncomfortable or it may seem to be incongruous to some. We have long been a congregation that vocally opposes the occupation, supports the creation of a Palestinian state at peace alongside Israel, and in recent years has been especially active and direct in criticizing the anti-democratic agenda and actions of Israel's ruling coalition. This is not inconsistent or disingenuous. We have always said that our love for Israel as a democratic, safe, thriving, homeland for the Jewish people and for Jewish culture is the basis of our positions and our actions. That is exactly why we condemn Israel's attackers, pray for Israel's victory in battle, and yes, continue to stand and fight for peace, co-existence, democracy and pluralism. But our commitment to Judaism itself and our identification as Jews have never been and will not be compromised. We gather today with four goals: to mourn the dead, to pray for healing and peace, to find comfort and strength in being together, and to show our solidarity and support for the people and the State of Israel.

The psalmist wrote: *samachti b'omrim li bet adonai neilech* – I was happy when they said, 'let's go up to Jerusalem to the temple.' We hold on to the joy of Jerusalem and what it represents and the opportunity to connect to its people and its history and to the Torah that our biblical prophets say will come forth from Zion. And in that same text, the Psalmist urges us to pray for its peace as well. As we pray for victory in battle, mourn the dead, and seek healing, we stand on the foundation of peace for all of us.