

The Hope of a Parent

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I met Liel Hoshea's parents during the recent war in Gaza.

At that time, I participated in a rabbinic delegation to Israel. Our mission to Southern Israel included many meaningful, life changing experiences. But I know for certain that I will never forget meeting Liel Hoshea's parents.

Liel Hoshea got married two years ago. He was from the Golani unit. Young looking, very boyish, and fair skinned. In the early days of the war he was hit by shrapnel that penetrated his head when his unit was met by rocket explosion. He sustained serious head injuries and, at the time, he had not regained consciousness in the week and a half since the incident.

I met Liel Hoshea's father, Efraim Cohen, in the ICU's waiting room. Efraim told us that "Liel Hoshea's wife is with him right now. She is holding his hand because he is experiencing a lot of pain at the moment." This man was majestic, deeply composed, sensitive, and thoughtful. One could not tell that his world has been robbed from him.

I remember him saying, "Liel Hoshea was almost taken from us. But then the *Kadosh Baruch Ho* (the Holy One), and prayers, and angels in white robes came and redeemed him [referring to the medical staff at the hospital]. We always called him 'Liel.' Just Liel. But our rabbis insisted that we use his second name as well. 'Hoshea' means redemption. Now we know why we always used both of his names."

"Hoshea" (redeem), "Hoshea" (redeem), Efraim mumbled to himself, to G-d, to Israel.

Liel Hoshea's mother joined us as well. Our rabbinic delegation asked her what we can do to help support them. "Only prayers...and the children should pray too." I told her that it will not

be only our prayers, but the prayers of members of our communities. She immediately grabbed a paper and wrote down, “Liel Hoshea haCohen ben Miriam” – the Hebrew name to be used in our prayers.

We read psalm 121 with Liel Hoshea’s father. “From the depths I call out to You.” Tears began flowing down my cheeks. I couldn’t feel my body, and the words refused to come out. “A-donai listen to my voice.” Efraim’s hands were held in fists and he lightly raised them upwards. “Who can withstand Your judgment, A-donai.”

As we left, Liel Hoshea’s mother said to me, “It warms the heart to see that the people of Israel are one; *“Shema Yisrael.” “Shema Yisrael!”*”

A few months after my return to Berkeley, a member of our community showed me a short article from the Jerusalem Post. The article included a photo as well. In the picture, I quickly recognized Liel Hoshea’s parents, and standing next to them was none other than Liel Hoshea himself. Apparently, Liel Hoshea miraculously regained consciousness, and was transferred to a rehabilitation center.

His parents never lost their hope. *“Od lo avdah tikvateinu”* –“Our hope is not yet lost” was their message, and I took that message with me.

According to the rabbis, the shofar also proclaims a message of hope.

In a lengthy discussion, the rabbis explore the origins of the different sounds of the shofar, including the *tekiaah* (the long call), the *shevarim* (the cut up call), and the *teruah* (the completely broken down call). The rabbis ask specifically, ‘What is *teruah*?’ From where do we learn about the broken sound, the almost hysterical sobbing cry of the shofar?

Their answer is astounding:

וכתיב באימיה דסיסרא +שופטים ה+ בעד החלון נשקפה ותיבב אם סיסרא. מר סבר: גנוחי גנוח, ומר סבר: ילולי יליל.

“It is written of the mother of Sisera, ‘Through the window she looked forth, [wa-teyabab] and she sobbed.’ One authority thought that this means drawing a long sigh, and the other that it means uttering short piercing cries.”

The sound of *teruah* is meant to remind us of the sobbing cry of Sisera’s mother. To Israel, Sisera was a vicious enemy, the hated general of the Canaanites, who lived during the time of Devorah the prophetess and general Barak. Sisera had nine hundred iron chariots and he had ruthlessly oppressed Israel for twenty years. He was corrupt, ethically skewed, and spiritually robbed.

His life became hopeless. Sisera had reached a moral point of no return.

And yet, in the song of Devorah we read:

(כח) בעד החלון נשקפה ותיבב אם סיסרא בעד האשנב מדוע בשש רכבו לבוא מדוע אחרו פעמי מרכבותיו:

28. The mother of Sisera looked out of the window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why do the hoofbeats of his chariots tarry?

Sisera’s unfulfilled life has reached its end. There was no hope for him to return – only hours earlier he found his death at the hands of Yael. But Sisera’s mother refused to give up. ‘Surely he will return, surely he will come back.’ No matter how much he had strayed, no matter how far his crooked path had led him, Sisera’s mother still had hope for him, still believed he could change.

“*Od lo avdah tikvateinu*” –“Our hope is not yet lost” was her message. Only our enemy’s mother can teach us that anybody and everybody deserves hope. If there is hope for someone like Sisera, how much more so for us!

There is yet another mother who cries on Rosh Hashanah.

We read in the special Haftarah for Rosh Hashanah:

יד) כֹּה אָמַר יְקֹנֵן קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְּכִי תַמְרוּרִים רָחֵל מִבְּכָה עַל בְּנֵיהָ מֵאֲנָה לְהַנָּחֵם עַל בְּנֵיהָ כִּי אֵינָנּוּ: ם

“Thus says the Eternal One:

‘A voice is heard in Ramah; lamentation and bitter weeping!

Rachel is weeping for her children,

Refusing to be comforted for her children, for they are gone”

Rachel is crying. She has been crying for two thousand years because her children have been exiled from the land of their ancestors. But like Sisera’s mother, she waits, patiently, faithfully for them to return. Like Sisera’s mother she still believes that things can change.

And in the Haftarah, God assures Rachel that her patience is not in vain:

טו) כֹּה אָמַר יְקֹנֵן מְנַעֵי קוֹלֶךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינֶיךָ מִדְּמָעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לְפַעֲלֶתְךָ נְאֻם יְקֹנֵן וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיֵב :

טז) וַיֵּשׁ תִּקְוָה לְאַחַר־יְתֶךָ נְאֻם יְקֹנֵן וְשָׁבוּ בְּנֵים לְגְבוּלָם:

“Hold back your voice from weeping, your eyes from tears,

for your labor shall have its reward,’ says the Eternal One,

‘they shall return from the land of the foe.

There is hope for your future:

Your children shall return to their own borders.”

“*Yesh tikvah le’acharitech*” – “There is hope for your future.”

This fundamental message of hope was shared by generations past.

Adam and Eve believed that there is hope for the future. That is why they procreated shortly after being exiled from the Garden of Eden. They knew that their descendents are destined to inherit a better world.

Noah and his wife believed that there is hope for the future. That is why, according to midrash, they procreated even while the world laid in ruins. They knew that their descendents will inherit a world rebuilt.

The children of Israel believed that there is hope for the future. That is why they continued to procreate even while their very sons were being thrown into the Nile. They knew that their descendents will one day live in a world redeemed.

“Yesh tikvah le’acharitech” – “There is hope for our future” means that despite all odds we continue, the far from completed work, of perfecting the world. In the face of adversity, we continue to plant new seeds, we continue to build our homes and our communities, we continue to grow our families and deepen our relationships and commitments, and we continue to believe that we, that our enemies, and that the world, can yet change.

In the words of the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, R. Jonathan Sacks, “Faith does not mean certainty. It means the courage to live with uncertainty.”

Like Adam and Eve, we may feel like we have been exiled from an Economic Garden of Eden. Like the generation of Noah’s flood, we may have believed that the economic bubble created by corruption and greed would never burst or collapse. And like the children of Israel, we now find ourselves oppressed by economic limitations and restraints.

We thought we were secured. But now we are outside Eden’s gates. We thought we were settled. But now we find ourselves in a rocking arc. We thought we were in the Promised Land, but now we awake in Egypt all over again.

Many of us are struggling to keep up with monthly payments. We are worried about paying our dues or about putting our children through Jewish Day School or Hebrew School, or Jewish summer camp, never mind, university. Some of us planned to retire this year, or next year, but now are forced to reevaluate the future. This is the time to hear God's comforting words to Rachel, "*Yesh tikvah le'acharitech*" – We must believe that there is yet hope for our future.

Tragically, earlier this month, we witnessed the cry of another mother. Rona Ramon, the widow of Israel's first astronaut, Ilan Ramon, who died tragically during the space shuttle's failed attempt to reenter earth's orbit, buried her son, Asaf, who died tragically during an IDF training flight.

The news reports presented a broken woman, a devastated mother. Yet even during this great moment of despair, Rona Ramon offered a sliver of hope. With her voice breaking, she said, "Dad, Grandpa and Grandma, all your loved ones, will watch over you now, my child... My Asaf, take care of Dad. I know Dad will take care of you, and hug you now."

At this time, as we turn to hear the shofar, let us conjure the parents of Liel Hoshea and the mother of Asaf Ramon.

As we hear the shofar, let us conjure the mother of Sisera as she waits by the window, as she waits for a future yet to come, her commitment to hope unwavering. She still believes.

At this time, let us conjure up Rachel, who refuses to accept her children's lot, whose patient hope will meet its divine reward.

At this time, let us conjure up, every generation and generation, who lit the flames of hope, and made this day, our day possible.

"Yesh tikvah le'acharitech" – "There is hope for our future."

There is yet hope for our children and our children's children. Don't give up.

“Od lo avdah tikvateinu” – “Our great hope is not yet lost.”