

Until They Are All Here
Rabbi Elana Rabishaw – Yom Kippur 2024/5785

Last November, I had the opportunity to travel to Israel, just six short weeks after the atrocities of October 7th. Landing in Israel was surreal. The usually bustling city was eerily quiet. It wasn't just the physical space that felt vacant. It was something deeper like the air itself carried a heaviness. It was impossible to shake the feelings of loss, fear, and uncertainty lingering in the air.

It was not until dinner that night that I started to settle in. I was at a fun restaurant with dear friends. We were laughing, drinking a good bottle of wine, and catching each other up on how our families were doing. For a moment, I felt some semblance of normalcy.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw my friend Shany's wrist. As I processed what I saw, I looked closer and gasped. She had a colorful bracelet that looked like one you get at a festival. WAIT, Shany! Were you at THE Nova festival??

She looked at me and said no, don't worry. Read it.

The bracelet read: *Ad she culam kaan, culanu adayin sham*. Until they are all here, we are all still there. Over two hundred people were violently taken by Hamas that day. Without words, I knew that this bracelet was a sign of solidarity. Until they are all safely home, we are all still there - reliving October 7th - day after day. This bracelet is not just a reminder of the hostages; it's a reminder of our collective responsibility. *Kol Yisrael aravim zeh bazeh* means that we are all bound to one another in times of joy and sorrow.

She said, "Actually, I have an extra one. Do you want it?" Of course, I said.

It's been on my wrist ever since. It stays wet long after I wash my hands. One year later, it's definitely falling apart, but I don't care. I can't take it off. A nurse recently told me he had to cut it off to run a test. I said, "Use my other hand." You can't take it off. It has to stay on until they are all home.

And just as this bracelet remains on my wrist, so does the responsibility to remember. It's a tangible symbol of the expression- *kol Yisrael aravim zeh bazeh*—the value that all of Israel is responsible for one another. This collective responsibility binds us together.

And today, on Yom Kippur, this call to responsibility is amplified. We reflect not just on our wrongdoings but also on the collective healing and forgiveness we must seek as a community.

Everyone in Israel feels connected to those held in captivity, regardless of whether they know them personally. They are known. We will not forget them or leave them behind.

When I look down at this bracelet, I am reminded that the 6,500 miles between Boca and Tel Aviv do nothing to lessen my connection to Israel. From my earliest memories, I understood that part of what makes Judaism unique is this profound sense of Jewish collectivity. We don't just exist as individuals; we are bound to one another in profound and lasting ways. This sense of belonging, this shared responsibility, has been ingrained in me from a young age. As the daughter of a rabbi, people I don't know still tell me, and more often, they tell my parents, how proud they are of me. It

doesn't matter that I haven't lived in Sacramento for years—I am still one of “their kids.” That's Jewish collectivity. It transcends time, space, and familiarity.

And this feeling of connection stretches across oceans and generations. In Israel, they talk about all of the soldiers as “their kids”, fighting to defend the State of Israel. And though I don't have children of my own, I do know what it feels like to have hundreds of “kids.” When a student in religious school says, “Rabbi Elana, I got my Bar Mitzvah packet,” or when a toddler shares about their day with me, I feel that same sense of mutual care and responsibility. That is why I was in Israel last November. It wasn't just another trip but a tangible expression of a deep connection to the people and land.

It might feel like this connection becomes even more critical in moments of crisis. When tragedy strikes—like the horrors of October 7th—*kol Yisrael aravim zeh bazeh* takes on a deeper, more immediate meaning. I remember reading the news late on October 6th, and early into the morning on October 7th, tossing and turning in disbelief, fear, and denial, unable to grasp the total weight of what was happening.

At 5:57 AM - I sent a text without really understanding what I was writing: Really bad news from Israel this morning. Headlines: Hamas has invaded from air, land, sea: they're in several towns in the south. Thousands of rockets hitting all the way up to Tel Aviv and Mevasseret Zion. Captured civilians and soldiers, as many as 35 civilian hostages. Israel at war.

How could we have known what that really meant? We only knew what we felt on October 7th and the immediately following days—pain, grief, denial, fear, sadness, anger.

That pit holding all those feelings in my stomach hasn't left me since. And while my trip was already scheduled through the Amplify Israel Fellowship, being there just six weeks after the attack felt like a necessary act of solidarity. My connection to Israel transformed from a generally positive piece of my identity to a feeling of urgent responsibility to be present and to hug my people.

But this is our responsibility to the People of Israel always - in joy, celebration, and moments of pain and crisis. We need a minyan - a quorum of at least ten people, not just to recite the words of Kaddish after a loss but also to offer the seven traditional blessings at a wedding, and to share in the words of Torah. Judaism is not a religion that can be practiced alone.

On Yom Kippur, on this holy day of atonement and *teshuvah*, we are reminded more than ever of the power of our interconnectedness. Yom Kippur is not just a time of personal reflection but a sacred day of communal accountability. Tomorrow morning we will read the powerful words from Nitzavim - *atem nitzavim hayom culchem* - you stand here on this day, all of you. Today we come together and stand before God and each other, knowing that our actions—our mistakes, our growth, and our efforts to repair—deeply affect those around us.

We don't exist in isolation, and neither does our behavior. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel reminds us, “Few are guilty, but all are responsible.” His words carry an essential truth: even when we are not directly involved, we are still responsible for the world we create through our actions, our inactions, how we lift others, and when we turn a blind eye to injustice. We are accountable not just for what we do but also for what we fail to do—for the moments when we could have spoken up, intervened, or offered help, but instead chose silence or indifference.

Each of us is bound to one another through this sacred responsibility. And on Yom Kippur, we don't just ask for forgiveness for ourselves; we ask for the strength to repair what is broken between us, our community, and the world.

In the Talmud, the rabbis teach that we are *arevim*, guarantors, bound by a shared responsibility for one another. Our actions ripple outward, impacting those around us, just as the actions of others affect us. This is why, on Yom Kippur, we confess in the plural—*al cheit shechatanu*—for the sins **we** have committed. Because none of us lives in isolation. We are interconnected and accountable not only for our own missteps but for the shortcomings of our community. We carry the weight of this responsibility together, knowing that healing and forgiveness can also be a communal effort.

Each of us is bound to one another by this sacred responsibility, a shared accountability that calls on us to lift each other up, to share the burden of making things right.

And on this holiest of days, we don't just ask for forgiveness for ourselves; we ask for the strength and courage to repair what is broken within us, between us, and within our community. *Teshuvah* is not just an individual act—it is communal. We each have work we can do to make this a better year. Whether through acts of kindness, standing up for those who are vulnerable, or mending relationships in our own lives. We are partners in this work, bound by love, responsibility, and a shared commitment to improve this world. We are each other's guarantors in making this world more just, compassionate, and whole.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said: "In a real sense, all life is interrelated. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be."

Until they are all here, we are all still there.

This is the essence of Yom Kippur. We cannot become whole until we each do our part to lift one another, to confront our failures, and to make this world better. It's how we move forward from strength to strength—by committing to do better.

In striving to become our most authentic selves, we hold the power to lift each other, and through this collective journey of growth and healing, we can transform the world around us. Let us commit to making this a better year—not just for ourselves, but for one another. Together, we will make this a Shanah Tovah Yoteir - a better year than the one we are leaving behind.