



Jewish Community Center of Paramus  
Congregation Beth Tikvah  
304 E. Midland Avenue – Paramus NJ 07652- 201.262.7691

## A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday April 14 , 2023 ~ Parsha: Shmini

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

### **How about some good news for a change?**

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The news from Israel this past week has been terrible. As we gathered for Passover, for what seemed like the first normal *Seders* since the pandemic began, it was painful to hear of missile and rocket attacks from Lebanon, causing damage but fortunately no casualties. There were rocket attacks from Gaza, as well as two terror attacks that claimed the lives of an Italian tourist as well as an Israeli mother and her two daughters. Most of you saw the reports that made the national news earlier this week of Israeli police conducting what certainly looked like heavy-handed measures against worshippers at the Al-Aksa mosque in Jerusalem. Yet those same reports consistently failed to mention the reason for the Israeli police presence there in the first place; to prevent rioting by hundreds of worshipers who were stockpiling weapons and had barricaded themselves in one of the mosque's chambers. Though this is not the point of my message today, I once again urge the congregation to remember that each week, tens of thousands of Muslims gather for prayer at this holy site without any interference from Israeli authorities. Yet at the same time, Israel also has a responsibility to maintain order and security, as that mosque is directly above the *Kotel*, the Western Wall. None of us want to see violence at anyone's sacred religious institutions. So, before we are tempted to criticize, let us remember that Israel's security forces are quite aware that the Temple Mount area is among the most volatile places in the world. If Israel sends its security forces there, you can bet your mortgage that there were good reasons for doing so.

These are extraordinarily tense times in Israel. So, I really want to share some good news, a story that demonstrates our common humanity and our ability to rise above the tensions and animosity that exist.

The Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* reported earlier this week about a Palestinian resident of Hebron who, in an act of tremendous decency and personal courage, saved a Jewish couple traveling to their home in a nearby Jewish community.

Early in the morning on Tuesday, April 4th, Amichai and Nitzan Baron were traveling from Jerusalem to their home in Karmeit Zzur when they tried to avoid a barrier of rocks that was placed on the road. Though the reports did not give the reason for why this makeshift barrier was there in the first place, the inescapable conclusion is that it was there for the purpose of harming Israelis traveling on the road.

Their car disabled, the Israeli couple realized they would not be able to drive all the way home. When they drove by the home of a Palestinian man identified only as "M", he came out of his home and shouted at them to enter his home. At first, the Israeli couple was afraid to enter but quickly realized that "M" was trying to help them. "M" protected the couple as they entered the home from rocks that were being thrown at them, and then, he reached out to the area's security authorities. Later, a special Israeli military unit arrived to rescue the couple and bring them home.

All the details were confirmed by Israel's Defense Forces.

I share this story with you today because too often we only hear of difficult, controversial, and violent confrontations between Israelis and Palestinians. The major news outlets rarely share stories of the thousands of normal, cooperative and even friendly interactions that Arabs and Jews, Israelis and Palestinians engage in every single day. There is no shortage of tension, and I am afraid that the current uptick in violence, the worst in 20 years, could easily deteriorate into actual warfare as it did in May of 2021. This story, I hope, reminds us that despite the difficulties, there are many who are capable of rising above the narrative of hatred and bloodshed and

embrace our common humanity even as we acknowledge the differences that separate us.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner