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## A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday March 13, 2026 ~ Parshat: VaYakhel-Pekudei  
Shabbat HaChodesh

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

### Strength, Restraint, and Hard Truths

For the past two weeks, our attention has been drawn to the conflict involving Israel, Iran, and the United States. Wars always produce headlines, statements, and competing narratives. Yet as we pause for Shabbat, I want to step back from the noise of the moment and reflect with clarity, humility, and moral seriousness.

There is no question that real achievements have been realized so far. For decades, Iran's leadership has pursued policies that threaten Israel, jeopardize American interests, and destabilize the broader Middle East through its nuclear ambitions and through the network of armed proxies it supports across the region, including, (but certainly not limited to) Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis. They are responsible for the murder of thousands throughout the region. Efforts to weaken those capabilities are not insignificant. The degradation of military infrastructure, the disruption of networks that enable violence against civilians, the removal of leaders responsible for decades of murder and mayhem, and the restoration of deterrence all represent meaningful strategic accomplishments.

Those achievements deserve recognition. The men and women responsible for defending Israel and protecting American interests have taken on grave responsibilities, and their courage should not be minimized. Nations have the right—and indeed the obligation—to defend themselves against credible threats. Jewish tradition has never demanded passivity in the face of danger. The Talmud famously teaches, *“If someone comes to kill you, rise early to kill him first.”* Self-defense is not only permitted; it can be morally necessary.

And yet Jewish tradition also insists that even justified force must be accompanied by humility and restraint. War is never an uncomplicated good. Military success, however significant, does not resolve every problem, nor does it erase the complexity of the world in which we live.

That is what makes the current conflict so difficult to navigate. While we are rightfully grateful for the successes that have been achieved so far, we need to face several hard truths that neither military might or skillful diplomacy can fully address. Iran's nuclear expertise cannot simply be erased. The ideological hostility of its leadership has not disappeared. The regional networks that have been cultivated over many years will not vanish overnight. What has been achieved may buy time, restore deterrence, and weaken dangerous capabilities, but it will not bring an immediate end to the broader strategic challenge. Recognizing this sobering truth does not diminish the importance of what has been accomplished. Rather, it reminds us that security is not achieved in a single moment. It requires patience, vigilance, strength, diplomacy, and cooperation among allies over many years.

At the same time, military conflict also raises serious constitutional and political questions here in the United States. Our system of government deliberately divides authority over matters of war and peace. The President commands the armed forces, but Congress carries the responsibility of authorizing and overseeing major military engagements. This structure was not created to slow necessary action in moments of crisis, but to ensure that decisions of such gravity carry democratic legitimacy and sustained national support.

Even those who support the current efforts must acknowledge that Congress should be fully informed and actively engaged in these decisions. Transparency and oversight are not signs of weakness. They are essential components of the constitutional system that has guided this nation for nearly two and a half centuries. To ignore that is to threaten the democratic ideals and institutions that have guided us for the past 250 years, and have created and sustained the great nation we call home.

These tensions, between strength and restraint, between urgency and deliberation, are not new. They echo themes that run throughout Jewish history and Jewish thought.

One of the most powerful examples appears in the Torah itself. In the book of Deuteronomy, the Israelites are commanded that when they go to war, they must still

observe moral limits. The lesson is profound: even in the harshest circumstances, we must not allow necessity to erase our moral boundaries.

This teaching also reminds us that the ultimate goal of strength is not domination but preservation—of life, of stability, and of the possibility of peace.

The prophet Isaiah envisioned a world in which nations would “beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.” That vision does not deny the reality of conflict in the present. Rather, it sets before us a moral horizon, a reminder that even as nations defend themselves, the ultimate purpose of power must be to create a world in which such power is no longer needed.

As we enter Shabbat this week, we can hold several truths at once. We can recognize the seriousness of the threats that have confronted Israel and the region. We can acknowledge the real achievements that have been realized in confronting those threats. We can also admit that the path ahead remains complicated and uncertain. And we can remember that the purpose of strength must ultimately be the restoration of peace.

On this Shabbat, we offer our prayers for the brave men and women of the American military whose courage protects us all, for the welfare of our brothers and sisters in Israel, for the protection of innocent civilians throughout the region, and for the wisdom of leaders who carry the heavy burden of decisions in times of conflict.

May the day come when the swords can indeed be laid aside, and the work of building a more secure and peaceful world can take their place.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner