



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Hillel Gold

Friday April 24, 2026 ~ Parshat: Acharei Mot-Kedoshim

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

From Mourning to Celebration: Israel's Spring 'High Holidays'

Rabbi Hillel D. Gold

In the aftermath of Pesach, this time on the Jewish calendar is particularly meaningful. Five days after Pesach ended, we observed *Yom Hashoah*, Holocaust Remembrance Day. This week we have had the back to back observances of *Yom Hazikaron*, Memorial Day for the fallen soldiers and victims of terror to be immediately followed by the celebration of *Yom Ha'atzmaut*, Israel Independence Day.

There is something especially meaningful about being able to mark these three momentous days in Israel. Solemnity and celebration, which marks this period of time, has begun to be referred to here as the spring "High Holiday" period. I write these words shortly after returning home from the ceremony marking the start of *Yom Hazikaron*, Memorial Day. It is a day filled with solemnity and sadness. Despite living here full time for only a little over three years, and despite that the names of the fallen were limited to those from my neighborhood, I recognized far too many names.... the son of the local *makolet* (bodega) owner; the husband of my children's friend, whose widow I see with ongoing frequency, so I know the family, too; the principal of one of the local schools; the son of a member of the *shul* at which I daven. **Nobody** in Israel is immune from loss. It's either a family member, a friend, or an acquaintance. Israel is a small country, but on this day, it seems to be extra small, as everyone knows at least someone whose life was cut short either in battle or by a terrorist's murderous activity.

As we mark this spring's "High Holiday" season, the mood on the ground is one of apprehension. Officially, the ceasefire currently in effect is due to end Wednesday.

Will the relative calm (for most of the country) of these past two weeks continue? Will it still be in effect as you read this message? It has been a relief here in Jerusalem to not hear the sirens demanding we drop everything and go to the nearest shelter to escape the danger of incoming missiles. Will that continue? People certainly hope so. But, by the same token, many here also feel that without eliminating the ongoing threats posed by Hezbollah and Hamas, we are risking another potential disaster and loss of life as seen and experienced in October 2023 (God forbid!). Despite the uncertainty, I know that the surface mood, at least, will be joyous and celebratory on *Yom Ha'atzmaut*. It will be a day with singing and dancing, with festive prayer services, and the all-important and ubiquitous bar-b-que's dotting the landscape on the holiday afternoon.

With the observances of *Yom Hashoah* and *Yom Hazikaron* a mere week apart, many commentators have observed that *Yom Hashoah* commemorates the price we paid for *not having* a State of our own while *Yom Hazikaron* commemorates the price that we have paid (and unfortunately will continue to pay) for *having* a State of our own. It could be coincidental, but we mark these three solemn days at the time of year that we read the Torah portions of *Acharei Mot*, *Kedoshim*, and *Emor*. *Acharei Mot* translates as "after the death" (of Aaron's sons), *Kedoshim* means holiness, and *Emor* means to tell. *Kedoshim* is also the term that is employed to reference the martyrs of the Holocaust as well as those who have fallen in battle and been killed in terrorist attacks. We honor all of these people who have become *kedoshim* because their beautiful lives were cut short. We speak about those who made the ultimate sacrifice and paid the ultimate price. But there is also *Emor*, which we will read next week. In it we are instructed to observe the major holidays of the Jewish year, days of celebration, days of coming to Jerusalem during Temple times, days of feeling close to the God. After we have mourned, we turn our mourning into dancing, and we celebrate and speak both about the fallen and about the hope that we have for the future.

We mark this seminal period on the Jewish calendar with one more special day – *Yom Yerushalayim*, Jerusalem Unification Day. It is observed on 28 *Iyar*, in three weeks' time. We hope and pray that the words of the siddur will indeed come true and elevate everyone's mood and perspective, no matter how one may feel politically or psychologically – *u'fros aleinu sukkat shlomekha* - May God spread over Israel and

the Jewish people Divine peace and protection. May our days ahead be filled with feelings of and the reality of safety, and the ability to lead our lives without fear or danger, no matter where we might be.

From Jerusalem,

Rabbi Hillel Gold

P.S. As always, I am always delighted to hear from you and have you share your thoughts with me. Reach out to me at Ravhillel@yahoo.com