

## **\*\*from Rabbi Heather Miller:**

We are blessed to be part of the Keeping It Sacred community with Rabbi Heather Miller. As we are all grappling with how to respond to the violence in Palestine/Israel, Heather offers some sage words and resources. I hope you will read these and also join me and the KITS community for the healing prayer circle online on Thursday morning.

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As you are aware, over the weekend, hundreds of Israeli civilians were brutally massacred, with thousands injured and countless numbers taken captive. Reading and watching footage of the human experiences of these wanton expressions of hatred are so frightening they are horrible beyond words. There is a lot of anger and sadness and concern among so many of us. A cloud over the Israeli people and Jews around the world has descended. Our Facebook feeds are paradoxically filled with images of happy couples, young families, and the elderly, with captions that describe how they have been taken captive, mutilated, violated, murdered. These people are our friends and relatives, and friends of friends and relatives of relatives.

It is awful to learn of such irrevocable expressions of hatred that Hamas has waged against people with such love and vitality in their eyes. This is what makes Hamas a terrorist organization, and not an organization of Palestinian freedom fighters. Because if they wanted to make a positive difference in the lives of Palestinians, they would know, as organizers, that killing kids enjoying life at a music festival is not a way to help the people of Gaza. It is heartbreaking to know that others all around Israel, including a woman in her 5th month of pregnancy, are being called up to active status in the military; called to plan a response, called to pick up weapons with the foreshadow of more death of more civilians in Israel and Gaza.

I am terrified of all the violence that has transpired, and what is to come. Violence breeds violence. Especially when the hands of power have a vested interest in the war machine and the political moves they make with it.

A focus on humanity needs to be centered at this time. And one voice I heard that calls us to do just that came as a desperate plea from one of the mothers of one of those taken captive. The woman's name is Ahuva, which means "love," and her daughter, Adi, is just 21 years old. She pleaded:

"I am a mother looking for her daughter; every minute that passes reduces the chances of finding her alive. And there is nothing anyone can do.

"So, I'm asking you if you have my daughter, I am asking you to remember what it is like being human.

"We are not animals. You can think, you can regret, you can fix what you did, you have to bring back everyone who is not armed, who is a civilian, all people, sick people, children, babies and women.

"You are not going to accomplish what you wanted to accomplish this way. Violence will get you nowhere. Nowhere. And what you are going to cause is on your side there will be so many mothers on your side that will tell you the same thing: 'I am a mother, I want to protect my kid. That's all that I want to do.'

"And, I am sure that all mothers in the other side, in Gaza and everywhere... are thinking the same thing. Please, please remember we are human, we are people... Please politicians... international relations please put all of this aside; we are human beings. Everybody, all of us, we are human beings. We are the same, we want the same.... Stop it now. Stop killing innocent people. You are not going to gain anything from this. There are going to be only more casualties. Only more mothers who cry about their children."

It is far too easy to push humanity to the side, to give into our baser instincts of politics and power and greed and hysteria and revenge. Especially when civilians, young and old, are being held captive, violated, and murdered.

This is why the great Rabbi Hillel said in Mishnah Pirkei Avot 2:5:

וּבְמָקוֹם שֶׁאֵין אָנוּשִׁים, הַשְׁתַּדֵּל לִהְיוֹת אִישׁ (In a place where there is no humanity, strive to be a human.)

In this awful time, it is imperative for us to sit with this challenge from 2,000 years ago.

What does it mean to respond in this moment to these atrocities and not lose our humanity?

What does it mean to be human in this moment? How can we honor, preserve, and defend life for our people and innocents on the other side?

How do we do that when the barbaric actions of terrorists are embedded with innocents?

How do we do this when they have captives who are our children, cousins, grandparents?

How can we resist giving into baser instincts and instead find new paths to a new future?

Please forgive me for asking these impossible questions but they must be asked. Someone must ask them because if no one asks them, we will just become mindless drones of a war machine that continues the cycle. And then, what of our humanity? What of the future? I ask in the spirit of the tradition that call rabbis to push us all to be intentional with our actions, to minimize suffering, and to affirm humanity. Please take care of yourself as well. I know many are taking mental health days and extra time with their families. Please make space for yourself.

If you are looking for ways to speak with children about these unprecedented attacks, there is a helpful article from a gifted educator and someone I have known for decades, Sivan Zakai: [HERE](https://www.kveller.com/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-.../). (<https://www.kveller.com/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-.../>)

UNICEF also has a guide to speaking with children about conflicts which can be found [HERE](https://www.unicef.org/.../how-talk-your-children-about-.../). (<https://www.unicef.org/.../how-talk-your-children-about-.../>)

And if you want to process what you're experiencing with me, I have opened up my calendar to make time to meet with you. Please schedule a slot at [calendly.com/kitsrabbimiller](https://calendly.com/kitsrabbimiller)

It is a huge priority to me to make time to tend to the spiritual needs of our community, and every single one of us has been impacted by these events.

As a final note, I want to thank our clergy and laity friends of other religions who are part of the KITS community— I am so grateful our community is rising up and supporting one another with tenderness and compassion. I have appreciated your caring messages, and I want our full membership to know that we are being held in all of our fears, worry, and anger. We are being held in this moment lovingly by one another.

It is a great example to encourage each of us to write to our loved ones and let them know we care. Please let them know our global community cares, as well. Please find ways to take care of yourself and reflect and write prayers and meet and gather. And please join us as we gather for an extended hour with our regular Healing Circle- this week beginning at 10am PT/1pm ET on Thursday, so that we can lift up our prayers. You may find the prayer I wrote below. At the gathering, we will also recite the prayer for the deceased, the Mourner's Kaddish, together. Register [HERE](https://www.keepingitsacred.com/upcoming...) for that. (<https://www.keepingitsacred.com/upcoming...>)

In these devastating times, it is important to make room for our humanity, and for community.

This is how together, we're [#keepingitsacred](https://www.keepingitsacred.com)...

Rabbi Heather Miller, Founder, Keeping It Sacred