

Dear Chavraya,

I offer a prayer of my heart, a reflection of my own struggle during this difficult time. It reflects one piece of the picture, one step in the quest for understanding and direction, one voice in the wilderness we are in, one person's yearning for wholeness, for surcease from the violence unfolding. May that be the *kavannah*, the intention and acknowledgement that allows us all to hear each other, each but one voice, each worthy of being heard if open to hearing another. Prayer is always a process, ever unfolding. These words of my heart are unformed and forming, a prayerful process that incorporates the struggles within myself and as encountered all around. This week's Torah portion is *Parashat Masei*, in which are enumerated the journeys of the children of Israel. Whether in the journeys of our people or in the journeys of our own lives, there are painful and difficult times that we might well wish to skip over as though they were naught. But they too are part of who we are, in Torah and in life. Weaving them into the fabric of our being, facing their challenge, the difficult times can become teachings of repair and transformation. Of Israel's painful journeys, times of sorrow and shame, the Ba'al Shem Tov says, *nishtaneh ha'davar al y'dei ma'aseyhem/the matter is changed/transformed through their deeds*. As we conclude *Parashat Masei*, we complete *Sefer Bamidbar/the Book of Numbers*, singing out together at its close, *Chazak, Chazak, V'nitchazek/Be strong, Be strong, and Let us strengthen one another*. So may it be, as in that spirit I offer my prayer.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor

Yet Again, A Prayer for Israel and Gaza  
Rabbi Victor Hillel Reinstein

B'rich At Rachmana, Blessed are You, Compassionate One,  
Have compassion upon us as we offer yet again another prayer so pained for the people of Israel and Gaza. How hard it must be for You, as we cry out yet again from this place of torment, that we have returned yet again to this abyss, that we have not learned yet again that war and violence will only bring more of war and violence, only more of grief, of suffering and pain.

In what way, with what heartache, do You hear yet again the same prayers we've prayed so many times before? Help us to hear the same refrain as we sing it yet again, that we might wonder why so many times the same. What does it take, what will it take to break out of this cycle of death and destruction, of so much hate and fear? Help us to renew the cycle of life, of all that is good, hand in hand around the world, beginning now with Israel and Palestine, container of our tears.

In the image of Your oneness, help us to know at day's end that there are no enemies, only grieving suffering humanity, Your children all. Beyond the failure of leaders to envision and imagine another way, beyond the hate and disdain of one for another, beyond the rockets and bombs, help us all as people to end the madness and find that other way before it is too late. With eyes open to recognize

when hate is directed against us, let us be neither victim nor aggressor in response.

Help us to hold all the disparate realities that plead for space in our hearts.

Help us to distinguish between anti-Israel vitriol that cares not for the state of our people, its land and its soul, and the welling up of human grief and horror that cries out from hearts that burst for the wretched state of so many innocents, for people in their suffering and pain.

Help us to feel the fear of Israelis, the psychic numbness that engulfs them all, fear for children and grandchildren, for soldier sons their bodies and souls, and the jagged despair so deep of those who are *rodfei shalom*, seekers of peace who tremble for their country, joined across the spectrum, all as one when the rockets fly. Help us to speak with each other, to listen and to cry, to be as we are meant to be, with ourselves and with others, *rachmanim b'nei rachmanim/compassionate children of compassionate ancestors*. Guide us back from the labyrinth of our wandering to know again of Torah that all her paths are peace if we make them so.

From that very place of heartsick worry for our own, may we realize that they too are also us and our own. From shelters throughout Israel, no place safe from the rockets' range, help us then to imagine the terror they must feel, no sirens or shelters beneath the falling bombs, no refuge to seek, helpless to shield their children, no place at all in Gaza to hide.

Help us not to oversimplify into encompassing categories of good and evil, nor to make more complex than the horror of one child or one parent. From the terror of rockets and the terror of bombs, the shrieks of children, the shriek of their parents, the shriek of a missile, the shriek of a plane and of its bombs, the shriek of the siren, the shrieking of children that surpasses them all.

Help us not to dehumanize the other, not to create narratives that rationalize violence through fear and despair, and help us refrain from turning our fears into mantras of need to believe that we have greater regard for life, greater love for our children, forgetting that all life is infinitely precious in Your eyes. In addition to a cease-fire, so desperately needed now, give us finally the wisdom and the courage to address and redress the needs of all before the flaring of war, all the same issues now that festered then before there were so many dead.

Help us to go beyond but half of the story as it forms in this moment of fear. Is there only one way to respond even now as the rockets fall? Not knowing just how or what, of contours and context unsteady, but believing there must be another path than the tortured one we've walked so long, we plead for guidance, will, and way. Open our hearts even now to brave possibility and our minds to consider how we came to be here yet again, how to balance what is with what might have been, what might have been to influence what is. Turn us from the corrosive way of occupation that consumes all as one, the other and ourselves.

Not to be dissuaded by hate or violence, give us the courage to chart a new vision and its way, even in the midst of the horrors of today.

And if you will, both God and people, let us say, yet again, Amen