

**We Will Dance Again**  
**Yom Kippur Morning 5785**  
**October 12, 2024**

About a month ago, pollster Frank Luntz and Professor Michael Wissot ran a focus group with Jewish college students. The session was an exploration of safety and antisemitism. The discussion was deeply disturbing.

There are tough times. And they are not likely to magically be all better, all at once. Now that classes have resumed, early evidence from campuses across the country confirms this.

Towards the end of the webinar, Luntz asked the students what they want to hear from their rabbis during this High Holy Day season. And the answer they gave? What do they need? Pride, they said. And hope.

In speaking last night about coming home, about a sense of connection I meant to evoke – or at least allude to - the theme of pride. This morning... this morning we will attempt to end on a note of hope.

We will get to that. But. We will not begin there.

The diameter of the bomb was 30 centimeters and the diameter of its effective range about 7 meters, with four dead and 11 wounded. And around these, in a larger circle of pain and time, two hospitals are scattered and one graveyard. But the young woman who was buried in the city she came from, at a distance of more than a hundred kilometers, enlarges the circle considerably, and the solitary man mourning her death

at the distant shores of a country far across the sea  
 includes the entire world in the circle.  
 And I won't even mention the crying of orphans  
 that reaches up to the throne of God and  
 beyond, making a circle with no end and no God.

“A circle, with no end.” I will return to that as well.

The poem was written in 1975. The poet died in the year 2000. So, Yehuda Amichai was not there to see the Dolphinarium discotheque, blown up on June 1, 2001. Not there, but the words apply.

I remember the nightclub, on the beach in Tel Aviv. I remember the 21 lost, 16 teens – mostly girls who had just come from the former Soviet Union.

But I also remember, in the days after the bombing, in the rubble and the ruins, near what had once been the entrance someone... someone had put up a sign. The words on the sign read: “*Lo Nafsik Lirkod. We Shall Not... We Will Not Stop Dancing.*”

Three months later our own country was attacked. We had just... my family had just moved to Maryland. At the conclusion of my remarks to my then new congregation on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, I distributed a small, ivory colored card. Years later, some friends told me they carry it with them still, in wallets or purses. The card read: *Lo Nafsik Lirkod.*

A year ago, there was another dance, and yet another day of destruction. This time it was hundreds, not dozens. And this time... this time the words which have emerged are different.

It's only a small change, but it is significant. It is a tattoo, inked onto the arm of Mia Schem, above the date of October 7, after she was one of the few released from captivity in Gaza. It is the motto engraved on a pendant, jewelry now available throughout the Jewish world. And it is the name of a documentary about the Nova Festival, playing now on Paramount Plus.

The words are "*Nirkod Shuv*. We Will Dance Again."

We will dance again. Not "we will not stop." Not this time. To not stop? That... that's just not possible. This is a rupture, a wound too deep.

But, someday. *Nirkod Shuv*. We will dance again. It is different. But, still, somehow... determination. Defiance. And a hint of hope.

**It is the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei. It is Yom Kippur. It is the Day of Atonement. On this day we are to feel both pain and promise. The whole point is to know both – to hurt, and to heal. To let ourselves feel, to be vulnerable. And to know that it can be better. We can do better. We can be better. The world can be better.**

The origins of Yom Kippur are found in an ancient ritual. It is an act of purgation, of purification, of cleansing. The impulse around impurity, to deal with it and heal from it, finds full expression in the book of Leviticus.

And there, also in that book, you can find any Bar or Bat Mitzvah student's *least* favorite Torah portion. *Tazria-Metzorah*. This part of Leviticus is about rituals around purity, priests playing doctor, leprosy and skin disease, isolation and integration, weird mold and streaks of colored fungus growing on the walls of houses and homes. Not exactly exalted stuff. It is not that easy for a teen or any other human being to derive meaningful life-lessons from the surface level of these portions.

And yet, there they are, in the Torah. They must mean *something!*

From *Sippurei Chasidim*, Stories of the Chasidic tradition: Rabbi Asher of Stulin would complain about the behavior of some of his fellow Chasids. "When they come in to see the rebbe, the leader of their group, they would accentuate their good points and conceal the bad." In modern terms you might say they would pad their resume. "In contrast," Asher of Stulin said, "when I would study in the presence of my teacher and rabbi, Shelomoh of Karlin" (and he would kiss his fingers at the name, at the sweetness of the memory of his rebbe) "I would conceal from him the good. I would show the problem, reveal what is bothering me, not hide what is in me. For the teacher is like a priest who heals. And for this reason, the priest needs to see the affliction."

To heal, Asher of Stulin knows, you need to show the wound, reveal the hurt, expose the injury. That which we keep covered too long festers. What grows in darkness is healed in open air.

We need to open ourselves up. To be vulnerable. To feel the flaws, to sit with the pain. That... is part of treatment. It is the way we get better.

And then... Then we can look ahead. And begin to begin again.

**To say *nirkod shuv*, to say “we will dance again” is a concession, a commitment, and a promise.**

**It is a concession** to silence, an acknowledgement that there is a time to not dance. To be stunned. To feel pain. To take stock of where we are, in our lives and in history. There are Jews who hid, this past year. Part of us, perhaps part of our soul is in hiding as well. For some of us, maybe even God is hiding now.

**It is a commitment**, a kind of determination. Reports come in, rumors from across the land: there is a kind of renaissance going on, a reconnection, what has been called a surge of interest in Jewish life. Throughout the Jewish world attendance is up, classes are more full, families are coming together, people are awakening from apathy and returning from a periphery; in some places interest and engagement and involvement are demonstrably on the rise.

We are here. If this is the news, then what is the scoop? If we are going to be targets, we might as well stand strong, dive deep, and figure out what for, and what it all means, and why this might be worth it after all.

**And it is also a promise.** There is joy in our lives, celebration and energy. No one is going to take that away forever. We will not be still. We will not be silent. And we will dance again.

Rabbi David Wolpe, recently retired from his Los Angeles congregation, had gone to his alma mater as a visiting scholar for the year. Already by the afternoon of October 7 it was clear there were many issues at the school. So Rabbi Wolpe was asked to join Harvard's new task force on antisemitism

Rabbi Wolpe said he was on a panel a few months later, with many young people in attendance. The panelists were asked what gave them hope. Unfortunately for him, he said, he was the fourth to respond. The first three speakers all gave some variation of the same response: "well, of course, all of the young people who are here, that is what gives me hope." So, he says to himself, "shoot, that's what I was going to say. Now what?"

The rabbi, pivoting, shares an imaginary cross-generational conversation he has his long-gone grandfather:

"Zayde," he says in his head, "there's antisemitism at Harvard."

To which his grandfather replies: "there's Jews at Harvard?"

"Yes," Rabbi Wolpe says. "But a lot of them really don't like Israel."

To which, of course, his grandfather says: "There's an Israel?"

We Jews are a famously argumentative folk. (I know, I can just hear you disagreeing with me about that!) So, of course, as the tradition teaches that we have 613 commandments, we can be counted on to ask: what's the 614<sup>th</sup>?

Many would say, of course, it is this: thou shalt have no Jewish function without food. (Yom Kippur might be an exception.)

Others, more substantively and seriously say: "thou shalt not give Hitler a posthumous victory! That whatever we do, however we lead our lives we should act, we should behave in such a way to ensure that we are not terminal Jews, that we are not the end of Jewish life in our own family tree.

But we can't always control that outcome.

I think, above that, is an attitude, a sentiment which has aided in our survival over centuries. What is the 614<sup>th</sup> commandment? It is this. It is forbidden for a Jew... to give up hope!

Challenges are real, and changes are coming - in our lives, for our families, in Jewish life, and in the wider world. This is not going to be easy.

But. We have faced tough times before. If we *want* to take the next steps, if we *choose* to be together as a people, if we opt in with each other, we will survive. We will thrive. And we will dance again.

A very different poem, also by Yehuda Amichai, this time, placed into our liturgy in the context of a plea for peace:

BEFORE the gate has been closed,  
 Before the last question is posed,  
 Before I am transposed.  
 Before the weeds fill the gardens,  
 Before there are no pardons,  
 Before the concrete hardens.  
 Before all the flute-holes are covered,  
 Before things are locked in the cupboard,  
 Before the rules are discovered.  
 Before the conclusion is planned,  
 Before the closing of God's hand,  
 Before we have nowhere to stand.  
 Bless us with peace.

בָּרַךְ אֶתְּהָ, יְיָ, הַמְּבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשָׁלוֹם.

Baruch atah, Adonai, ham'vareich et amo Yisrael bashalom.

You can, I suppose, dance alone. A dance is, though, better together. I end with a story which brings me both comfort and hope. It is a reminder, amidst all that would pull us apart, that the world is a far more intricate web than it first seems to be.

A warning to the very youngest among us: this is a story from some time ago. There are several professions here which some of you might not even recognize. If you don't know what, um, a telephone operator is, you can ask me later. But, for all that, I think you can still get the point.



In a small town, a woman works as a telephone operator. Every day, towards the end of the day, she would get a regular and, eventually, kind of annoying call. Every day, at almost exactly 4:00 PM, the phone would ring, and a man with a deep voice would ask her, politely, what time it was.

The operator would give the man the time, and that was it. He said thank you, and good-bye, and hung up.

But one day she just couldn't hold back. So she says to the man: "You call me every day." She takes a breath. "Every day, it is the same question. So," she asks, "why do you do that?"

The man explains. "Well, you see, I work at the factory at the edge of town. One of my jobs is to blow the whistle at the end of the day, at 5:00 PM. People depend on me. They've had a long day. They want to go home. I want to get the time exactly right."

And there is a dead silence for a moment on the other end. Finally, the woman speaks up. Very slowly, she says the following to the man. "Look," she says, "I really don't mind your call. And I am happy to be helpful." Then she pauses. "But I do think there is something you ought to know." She takes a breath, and she says: "We set our clock... by your whistle."

We are partners in this ongoing dance. The music may have paused.

The musicians may even be hurt.

But the melody is not done. Our song is not over. And *nirkod shuv*. We will dance again.

Shabbat Shalom. And *L'shanah Tovah*.