

# CONGREGATION AGUDATH JACOB

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*From the Desk of  
Rabbi Ben-Zion Lanxner*

## **Am I Right, as your Rabbi & Spiritual Leader, to Have AMBIVALENCE Emotions in this so called “deal” between Israel & Hamas?**

Have you ever experienced contrasting emotions or ‘mixed feelings’ toward something or someone? Have you ever had a hard time making a decision because you had felt both positive and negative emotions toward the decision? Maybe you felt trapped, stuck, torn by two opposing forces?

If your answer is yes, what you have experienced is an emotional state called **ambivalence**. It surely isn’t pleasant, but it is an inevitable part of the human experience. It’s not uncommon and there is nothing weird about for people to have these kinds of thoughts.

We Jews in particular are more complex than most people, we are different from most other people too, ( and that is ok, that is who we are supposed to be, since G-d chose us to be His Treasured/Chosen people to transmit His Torah to the World at large, commanding us to be **“Am Kaddosh La-Hashem”** – **“to be a Holy / Separate people,**

**[different] for G-d**" (from other people) and with that (*the consequences of our 3000 years of history of being exiled and persecuted for no other reason than being Jewish, having suffered upsurge of explosive pogroms, and scapegoats for all the ills of societies unfortunately until today*), comes the complexity of our thinking and emotions. Although we would like to have a perfectly clear picture of what we want and how we feel at all times, because of this complexity, it is not always possible.

We all experience mixed feelings from time to time; it's an inseparable part of human life. But it's also an uncomfortable state, the one we often don't know what to do with.

Our minds like to be certain – that's what helps us feel safe – and ambivalence brings just the opposite of that. Having seemingly contradicting feelings toward something can make us anxious and torn between options.

So, how do you get rid of ambivalence quickly and effectively?

I am no psychotherapist and never claimed to be one, and so, I asked a professional Psychotherapist for help. Long story short: his answer was: you don't and you shouldn't. Instead, you learn to deal with it. After having gone through explaining who I was and the people whom I represent and try my best to be a role model for them to observe and practice their faith, their Judaism, he also added and explained to me that this feeling/emotion of "Ambivalence" is not my Problem, my Intolerance for Ambivalence is!!

That did it for me! Intolerant? Really?

This is the conclusion of a psychotherapist after I was very composed and "cool as a cucumber" explaining how "unfair and very upset" I was by what just happened a week ago with the ceasefire "Imposed on Israel" by our new Administration.

Only look at previous IDF engagements with Hamas terrorists or with Hezbollah, our Administration never misses the opportunity to stop and prevent Israel and the IDF, to "Finish the Job".

But instead, always giving our adversaries a "break/a time out" that gives them a chance to regroup, rearm and start over and over again!

When is enough, ENOUGH?

Notwithstanding the good news about the hostages who were let to finally go home after over 470 some days in "inferno", I am thankful to G-d of Israel for Bringing Them Home...

***"G-d brings the isolated home, sets free those held captive with weeping and with song"*** (Psalm 68:7; Tractate Sanhedrin 22a).

After close to 500 days of unimaginable darkness of captivity, this long-awaited day leaves us with an ambiguous, ambivalent, confused, entangled miscellany mixture of feelings.

We rejoice with the hostages who are being released, and we weep with those remaining in the hands of Hamas barbaric terrorists.

We rejoice with the hostage families reunited with their loved ones, and we weep with the many left waiting.

We rejoice with the IDF soldiers able to return to their families, homes, and daily lives, and we weep for those who will not.

We rejoice with those whose heroic sacrifices have brought our State of Israel outstanding successes, and we share the frustration of many of them that their mission remains incomplete.

We are infuriated by the “**UNEQUAL**” trading of monstrous terrorists for innocent hostages, and we are fearful of the evil those monsters seek to unleash tomorrow.

We are grateful that the new administration worked with the old to bring the necessary pressure to bear on Hamas, but we are incensed that the world has allowed this to go on for so long.

We are grateful to President Trump for moving quickly to bring freedom to many, but we will not forget for even a moment the many who remain.

My question, and frustration due to my ambivalent emotion and my intolerance regarding these Hamas monsters is:

When is President Donald Trump promise of “**there is going to be Hell to pay**” if **ALL THE HOSTAGES** are not return before I am entering the White House on January 20, 2025?

Allow me to backtrack a little...

The inevitable consequence of the State of Israel and the IDF's failure to prevent the atrocities on October 7, 2023, and the hostage deal, is a testament to the Israeli society's success!

Outgoing President Joe Biden has described the hostage deal as a great diplomatic achievement. President-elect Donald Trump has called the deal “epic.” Iran is hailing it as a historic victory over the evil Zionists.

In Gaza, Hamas terrorists and their supporters are triumphantly parading and firing their guns in the air and bringing their police back into action in controlling all the Gazans returning to the North of Gaza through the Netzarim corridor. Ironically, the only people not reacting with unbridled joy - the reactions, in fact, are fragmented, ambivalent, confused and often agonized - are we, the Jewish People but mostly the Israeli citizens.

For us, the return of the first three hostages followed by the 4 IDF women soldiers is a moment of deep relief for some and for others profound sorrow. Fear will mix with anger, frustration with regret.

On top of this "extortion & crime", we also have to deplore the normalization of equating innocent Israeli hostages with convicted Palestinian terrorists! This is another stab in our back. This is a critical issue of false equivalence in hostage negotiations that needs to be challenged!

While Biden and Trump both claim credit, Israeli leaders—political and military—are trying to escape the blame.

Certainly, there is a need to assign blame. The minute that thousands of terrorists with blood on their hands, who killed so many Israelis either in terrorist attacks or by these suicide bombers in previous years, broke through our border on October 7, the hostage deal became inevitable.

Israel could not at the same time gain total victory over Hamas and secure the hostages' release the way that this last "ceasefire deal" was orchestrated. The minute it became clear that increased military pressure on the terrorists would not force them to free the hostages but to shoot them, the deal became inevitable. As long as it holds a single hostage, Hamas knows it will survive. As long as a single hostage remains in Gaza, Israel cannot fully live.

And yet, even when forced to decide between two massive evils, even when grappling with painfully conflicted and ambiguous emotions, Israelis can also claim victory. It is, in fact, the most basic and durable victory of all.

It is the victory of an Israeli society that did not collapse when their state failed them—a society which, in contrast, became so much more united and grew stronger and stronger every day, for the simple and only reason that they yearned for justice against their barbaric and monstrous Hamas terrorists who committed atrocious, cruel and unprovoked attacks, preying on the defenseless Israeli civilians who lived peacefully in Kibbutzim on the Gaza border, who even invited their Palestinian neighbors to share Shabbat meals with them, not knowing how each and every one of their guests was actually spying for Hamas and getting paid for.

Not only are they yearning for justice, at the same time, they hope for immense rewards for the countless good deeds they performed wholeheartedly around their close neighbors or even driving hundreds of kilometers to help their brothers and sisters in the Northern parts of Israel, constantly under rockets and ballistic missiles attacks coming from Hezbollah in Lebanon. While the IDF soldiers were risking their lives on the front lines, 80% of Israeli individuals were dedicating time and resources volunteering to support the war effort, picking fruits, feeding soldiers and their families, housing the displaced and extraordinary numerous volunteers traveling to Israel to provide aid, assistance and solidarity improving the morale of the Israel Defense Forces in the heart of the battles.

This phenomenon is so particular and almost exclusive to our people. **"One people, One Heart"** is our Jewish People's motto, **Ish Echad beLev Echad.**

More than 360,000 reservists left their homes, their families, and their lives to go out and fight.

Many served hundreds of days and some for the entire length of the war.

Thousands were injured and close to 900 IDF Holy soldiers killed, and even those who emerged unscathed physically are unfortunately likely to suffer trauma in the years to come.

Yet they rarely complained and never stopped fighting. Where else in the free world would this happen?

Who is willing to pick up a gun and fight for Belgium today? For Netherland? For Italy or For Spain?

The Israeli people are a people who fought not only on one front but on seven, overcoming insurmountable obstacles to achieve one of history's greatest military successes.

They are a people who stood in the face of a tsunami of hatred, accused of war crimes and genocide, yet never gave in to self-doubt. They know without an ounce of doubt they are innocent of those charges; they certainly know who they are, and what they are fighting for.

Most importantly, Israelis are a society that never abandoned their fundamental value, which is love of life, the principle that all Israel is

responsible for one another, "**Kol Israel Areivim Zeh LaZeh**". In contrast with their monstrous enemies who aspire and love death.

What Hamas sees as Israeli weakness, is in reality Israel's greatest strength. The terrorists can claim a tactical victory, but Israel's victory is moral, deep, and long lasting.

The deal is not the result of IDF's failure to destroy Hamas but of their refusal to do so at the expense of the hostages.

The return of Romi, Doron, Emily, Liri, along with Karina, Daniella and Naama (the last 4 released women soldiers) reminds all of us of who and what we are and that Israel, notwithstanding the failures of October 7, is very much worth fighting for.

Even as we rejoice the return of these first few hostages, it is impossible to calculate how much we don't know about the embryonic ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas.

We don't know if a treaty actually exists, at least in a form on which both parties can rely as challenges emerge over the next several weeks. As I have said before, the negotiators have taken the classic Henry Kissinger diplomatic concept of constructive ambiguity to unprecedented levels, delaying the most difficult decisions until the second phase of the agreement is scheduled to be implemented in early March.

The day after his cabinet formally approved the pact, Benjamin Netanyahu was still referring to it as "temporary."  
Hamas' leaders have sounded equally unenthusiastic.



Since many of the terms of the ceasefire are so ambiguous, we also don't know exactly when and how the remaining Israeli hostages will be released, their physical and mental condition, or even how many are still alive. We don't know if the list of Palestinian prisoners to be freed in exchange is final, or whether disagreements over the most violent terrorists will block further progress.

Furthermore, we don't know the specifics of the Israeli military's presence in the Philadelphi Corridor, which separates Gaza from Egypt, or the Netzarim Corridor that divides Gaza in half.

Which means we don't know what Israel's security capabilities will be if Hamas terrorists do become belligerent.

We don't know whether this first phase will lead to a more permanent cessation of violence, or if this fragile deal will survive even that long, as we are seeing the return of hundreds of thousands of Gazans to the Northern part of Gaza, passing through the Netzarim Corridor already being under the control of Hamas Police!

Which means we don't know if all 33 of the initial group of hostages will actually return home, and whether the remaining Israeli prisoners will ever be freed.

**What we do know is that President Donald Trump has been much more motivated to bring this to fruition than anyone in Jerusalem or Gaza City.**

Trump's warning that there would be "hell to pay" if the hostages were not released before he took office, sent an unmistakable chill down the collective spine of Hamas' leaders, and the private threats that his emissary Steve Witkoff delivered to Bibi Netanyahu last weekend, had a similar impact on the Israeli prime minister.

As I mentioned earlier, many of the terms of the ceasefire are so ambiguous, we even at this moment don't know exactly when and how the remaining Israeli hostages will be released, their physical and mental condition, or even how many are still alive....

One thing I know without any "Ambivalence" whatsoever, that as Torah observant Conservative Jews, we all need to sincerely implore and pray wholeheartedly the important prayer before the Shabbat Shacharit Amidah that G-d Almighty, **Tzur Israel** Rock of Israel, (*one of the 72 Names of G-d*) **Kuma Be'Ezrat Israel**, arise and help your people Israel, **Ufedei Chinumecha Yehudah VeYisrael**, Redeem as You promised, Judah and Israel, **Go'aleinu, Ado-nai Tzeva'ot Shemo, Kedosh Israel**, Our Redeemer is called Ado-nai Tzeva'ot, the Holy One of the people of Israel...

**May He reward them all, Measure for Measure, and beyond Measure.**

**Baruch Atah Ado-nai, who liberated the people of Israel.**

**AM ISRAEL CHAI**

*Rabbi Ben-Zion Lanxner*

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This month I would like to offer some more reflection on *emunah* and *bitachon* (faith and trust in G-d), a theme that I have referenced here more than once since last summer.

In the first few months of this new calendar year we have several days that serve as reminders of the persistence of Jew-hatred that has existed throughout our history and that still plagues us. Aside from *Tu B'Shevat*, a happy and celebratory holiday, there are *Purim*, *Pesach*, and *Yom HaZikaron L'Shoah*—each of which has elements that remind of us historical events in which we experienced grave threats to our existence. At the same time, they are also reminders of G-d's faithfulness to us if we stay the course with our faith and trust in Him.

On *Purim*, we celebrate being saved from destruction at the hands of the Persians. Through the courage and cunning of Esther and Mordecai, we miraculously survived. On *Pesach*, we celebrate being saved from slavery at the hands of the Egyptians. Through the leadership of Moses, we were miraculously rescued. On *Yom HaZikaron L'Shoah*, we commemorate the loss of the six million at the hands of the Germans. Through the efforts of the Allies, we miraculously endured, and soon thereafter witnessed the restoration of our Homeland. In each instance, something awful preceded something magnificent and victorious, aided or shepherded by human effort but ultimately—let us always remember!—bestowed upon us by G-d.

We all pay attention to the news especially concerning Israel and our people throughout the Jewish diaspora. This is admirable and, indeed, is imperative for every committed Jew. But it is not without risk should we allow this to become obsessive. Let me explain.

First, politicized lies and disinformation about Israel pose as “news.” We all see this on a constant basis, and this bombardment can become discouraging.

Second, obsessing about the diabolical spin put on the news out of Israel can foster fear and negative expectation. We are all subject to this, even though the entirety of our people's history should render us impervious to such messaging.

Yes, we have suffered attacks, but our history is also a testament that G-d is ever our Rock and is the source of constant *yishuas* (salvations), big and small, for each of us personally and for all of us collectively. Of course, we must be continually mindful of current happenings in Israel and among the Jewish people, but let us not allow the emotion of anxiety to drown out our awareness of how G-d has *always* saved us and continues to bless us. This should bring us immense joy, even amidst the ongoing anxiety.

So, throughout the holidays of the coming months, let us always remember that after each of these historical events has played out, some of them inflicting serious harm to us, there always eventually has been a great victory for us. G-d has been ever-faithful to us, just as we are faithful to Him through our

trust in His *hashgacha pratis*, or Divine oversight. In my opinion, based on our historical experience and on Torah and on the words of the Rabbis, nothing about this relationship ever will change.

*L'shalom*,  
Jeff Levin

P.S. A second message from me this month—something that some of us may find meaningful:

A worthwhile approach when we would like to pray for someone, such as for their healing—besides literally praying to G-d, of course, which we must always do—is to recite *Tehillim*, i.e. read from the Book of Psalms, and then offer it up, so to speak, for that person. This is a traditionally Orthodox practice through which we may approach Hashem for the benefit of a person in need, whether ourselves or others, and whether for purposes of physical healing or for something other than that. This type of practice may resonate with many of us at *shul*.

Personally, I try to read from *Tehillim* every night before I go to sleep and right after I pray the *Shema*. Just a little personal ritual for me before turning out the lights. It serves a couple of purposes. For one, it is certainly comforting to read the Psalms, for sure. But, also, the Rabbis tell us that the *zechus* (merit) of this *mitzvah* can be “passed along” to someone else for a *refuah shleimah* (perfect healing) or for some other benefit. Maybe this is something that some of us would like to try as we grow our prayer life.

BTW, I find it so interesting that something akin to this practice is also found in other faiths. This includes among Roman Catholics (offering up prayers for the souls in Purgatory), among Lakota (the *Yuwipi* ceremony), among Hindus (recitation of “*Om Sri Ram*”), and others. Those with an interest in comparative religion can look all this up, which is an endlessly fascinating subject. How wonderful to know that we Jews can recite verses from our sacred writings and in so doing elevate ourselves and then, in a Jewish context, take the blessing that accrues to us from attaining that level of *kedushah* (holiness) and essentially gift it to another person for their well-being.

## February Service Schedule

		Candle Lighting	5:51 pm
	<u>Saturday, February 1</u>	<u>Saturday, February 8</u>	
Shacharit	10:00 am	Shacharit	10:00 am
Shabbat Ends	6:42 pm	Shabbat Ends	6:47 pm
	<u>Friday, February 7</u>	<u>Friday, February 14</u>	
Kabbalat Shabbat	6:00 pm	Kabbalat Shabbat	6:00 pm

Candle Lighting 5:57 pm

Saturday, February 15

Shacharit 10:00 am

Shabbat Ends 6:53 pm

Friday, February 21

Kabbalat Shabbat 6:00 pm

Candle Lighting 6:03 pm

Saturday, February 22

Shacharit 10:00 am

Shabbat Ends 6:58 pm

Friday, February 28

Kabbalat Shabbat 6:00 pm

Candle Lighting 6:08 p



February 1

Jeff Wolf

February 3

Deborah Hersh

February 9

Simcha Via

February 13

Carrie Draher

February 17

Jeff Levin

February 22

Rick Bauer

Florence Hersh

February 28

Barbara

Dankenbring

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

**February 11**

**Steven & Carrie  
Draher**

**February 19**

**Benjy & Betty Bauer**



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

We have no announcements for the month of February. Please look for the weekly email announcements.

**THANK YOU** for your donations in January!

### *Shabbat*

Javis Howeth

Joseph Settle

Susan Raphael

Jeff Levin

Susan Lanxner

Michael Pesses

Inez Bonneville

Steve & Carrie

Draher

George & Kathleen

Keller

### *In Memory Of*

Henry Heyman

Benjy Bauer

Jake Bauer

Benjy Bauer

# YAHREZEITS

The following names of dearly departed will be read aloud by the Rabbi preceding the Mourner's Kaddish on Shabbat morning. It is fitting and customary that the nearest of kin be present in the synagogue for the recitation of this special prayer in their memory. Attendance not only honors the departed but also enhances and guarantees that a Minyan is present to recite the Kaddish.

## Kaddish will be read on February 7

Shevat 8	Dave Lebowitz*
Shevat 9	William Atlas Max Budin* Florence Rubinsky* Jeanette Shcein*
Shevat 10	Fay Goldberg Abe Hoffman* Mrs N Suravitz*
Shevat 11	A Brickman* Mrs H B Cohen* Sam Genecov* B Levinson*
Shevat 13	David R Begal* Arthur Levy* Philip H Robinson Joe Zoblotsky*
Shevat 14	Rose Miller Beerman* Mrs Jake (Cecilia) Berkman* Manuel Frank Harris* Esther Goltz Wolf*
<b><u>Kaddish will be read on February 14</u></b>	
Shevat 15	Max Harelik* Naomi Stein
Shevat 16	Jacob Koppel Bauer* Betty Safan Anna Kroll
Shevat 17	Mrs Florence Cohen* Mrs J Greenspan* Nathan Salpeter Bessie Tannenbaum Pearl Wolpo
Shevat 18	Mrs M Cohen* Sarah Lebowitz* Doris Sprecher Silver*
Shevat 19	Meyer Hoffman*
Shevat 20	Norman Goldberg* Mrs Leslie (Margaret) Hoffman* Louis Kantrovich Mrs Sam Marks*

Shevat 21	Jacob Aronson* Sam A Israel*
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## **Kaddish will be read on February 21**

Shevat 22	Hymie Greenspan Aaron Archie Hoppenstein* Frank Israel* Issie Polonsky* Frances Segal
Shevat 23	Sadie C Schaevitz* Naomi Chazanow Smith*
Shevat 24	Ann Chodorow* Sam Greenberg* Max Harris* Lauren Hoffman* Raven Jornitzky* Bernard Stewart
Shevat 25	Barney Brickman* Ben Koffman Bertha Genecov Miller Sheila Schnur
Shevat 26	M Adams* Zelig Feldt* Bella Levy Mrs A Polansky*
Shevat 27	Gertie Kantrovich Samuel Harelik* Abe Novich*
Shevat 28	Mrs I F (Toby) Aronson* Dr Stanley Hersh* Miriam Salpeter Jacob Wolf*
<b><u>Kaddish will be read on February 28</u></b>	
Shevat 29	Fannie Berkman* Esther Ann Gulman
Shevat 30	Moses David Beerman* Bert Gardner* Sharon Lee Slutsky Nathan Zidman*
Adar 1	H Baker* William Chernoff

	Mrs L Levy*
	Tama Settle
	Nathan Zidman*
Adar 2	Hyman Herzlich
Adar 3	Ruth Budin
Adar 4	Anne Goodman Deyo*
	Cecelia Dryfus
	Paul E Leka
	William Ruttenberg
	Sam Wolstein
Adar 5	Rebecca Greenberg*
	Emma Podrizki*