

Reflections on Israel at This Moment

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This week, I spoke with a friend in Israel who recently had a baby. She shared, in that well-known Israeli sarcastic way, that her six-year-old proudly said about his newborn little brother: “For him, it’s only his first war. For me, it’s already my third”.

That story reflects the reality of many in Israel, living once again under the shadow of war, while the effects of previous rounds are still felt: communities that were displaced have not fully returned, parts of the north are nearly empty, many families carry loss with them, thousands of reservists continue to serve, and small business owners struggle to survive month after month.

Purim arrives this year against a complex backdrop, and in many ways, the story of the Book of Esther brings to light many of the feelings I have about what is happening in Israel right now. The central motif of the Book of Esther is concealment (“*hastara*” in Hebrew) - something hidden, unrevealed. The name Esther comes from the word *hester*, meaning concealment, reflecting how she hid her Jewish identity and acted with strategy and subtlety within the palace. Just as she operated in hidden ways, the Megillah itself contains no mention of God’s name and no open miracles, with everything appearing political and natural. This is a story in which things are not always what they seem, and the meaning of events becomes clear only in hindsight. Purim also places us in a world of royal decrees, dramatic gestures, and political maneuvering.

Despite all the attempts to make sense of the chaos-the countless interpretations, the constant updates about what is happening in the Middle East, and the endless calculations of missiles, rockets, and complex military operations—clarity remains elusive.

Despite the constant effort to answer the many questions this war raises: How long will it last? What will the outcome be? Will the Iranian regime fall? What role will other countries in the Middle East play? What is our moral responsibility toward the people of Iran, who have suffered for decades under a cruel regime? So much remains uncertain.

In this chaotic reality, I have personally found a little bit of comfort this Purim in the hope that there is a real and profound concealment here. We do not see the full picture. We do not understand all the forces at play.

And within that concealment lies the greatest question of all: whether this moment and this war-contains the possibility of creating a better and safer reality for Israel, for the Middle East, and for the world?

I pray for the safety and success of our soldiers, for peace and security for all the people of Israel, and for the well-being of your loved ones in Israel and around the world.

Please see the updates below from our Westchester Shinshinim from previous years who are currently in Israel. We reached out to ask how they are doing, and some have shared pictures and updates about their current experiences on the ground.