

I come to you today as Jewish clergy.

I come shaped by Jewish memory, Jewish prayer, Jewish grief, Jewish ethical tradition, and the stubborn Jewish insistence that human life is sacred.

I also come carrying uncertainty. I know that gatherings like this can hold many different assumptions, convictions, and emotions. Some people arrive feeling hopeful. Some arrive angry. Some arrive exhausted. Some arrive wary of one another before a single word is spoken.

Many Jews, especially right now, enter public spaces carrying a quiet question in our bodies: Will there be room for us here in the fullness of who we are? Will we be asked to leave parts of ourselves at the door in order to belong?

And I imagine many Palestinians and their allies carry their own questions too — questions born of grief, loss, displacement, despair, and the longing to have suffering acknowledged rather than debated.

I do not believe peace begins when everyone agrees.
I believe peace begins when human beings remain willing to encounter one another despite disagreement, fear, and pain.

In Jewish tradition, we are taught that every human being is created *b'tzelem Elohim* — in the image of God. Every person carries something sacred that cannot be reduced to a slogan, a flag, politics, or a single story.

That teaching feels increasingly fragile in our world.

We are living through a moment that rewards certainty. A moment that pushes people toward camps and identities that can become so rigid that we stop being able to see one another clearly. Grief hardens. Fear hardens. Language hardens. And eventually hearts harden too.

But I did not come today as a Zionist or an anti-Zionist.

I came as a Jew trying to live honestly inside Jewish and human values.

I came because, in the end, identities alone cannot save us. Human dignity might save us. Compassion might save us. Listening might save us. Open-hearted encounter might save us. Peace will save us.

And so today, I offer a prayer.

A prayer that Israelis and Palestinians may one day live in safety, dignity, freedom, and peace.

A prayer for Jews carrying fear and trauma.

A prayer for Palestinians carrying grief, displacement, and devastation.

A prayer for every family living with unbearable loss.

A prayer for children growing up surrounded by violence instead of possibility.

I pray that Jewish pain never makes us incapable of seeing Palestinian pain.

And I pray that Palestinian pain never makes the world incapable of seeing Jewish pain.

I pray that we resist the temptation to dehumanize one another, even when we are hurting. Especially when we are hurting.

I pray that artists, musicians, storytellers, teachers, and spiritual leaders continue creating spaces where human beings can still encounter one another beyond caricature and beyond fear.

And I pray for courage.

The courage to stay in dialogue.

The courage to remain soft-hearted in a hard world.

The courage to mourn every innocent life.

The courage to listen without immediately hardening into defensiveness.

The courage to believe that another future is still possible, even when we cannot yet see the path toward it.

In every Jewish prayer service we say:

Oseh shalom bimromav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu v'al kol Yisrael, and many of us, for many years have added: *v'al kol yoshvei teivel*.

“May the One who makes peace in the heavens bring peace to us, to all Israel, and, the more recent addition, to all who dwell on earth.”

V'al kol yoshvei teivel.

To all who dwell on earth.

May we make ourselves worthy of that prayer. Amen.