“Always in the Wilderness”
Dvar Acher - Elul 5784
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz

Thank you Melissa for your thought provoking and honest reflections on the challenges of writing about Israel amidst the daily uncertainty and dynamism of a post October 7 world. I too have been putting off my High Holy Day sermon topic selection let alone outlining and drafting which by Elul is usually at least in my head if not on paper. Shabbat sermons and d’vrei torah have been similarly “11th hour” as events impact perspective on a daily basis.

And yet some things about Israel and the experience of Jews in the diaspora never change even as they appear new to us as 21st century Jews. For 75+ years the miraculous existence of the State of Israel, to say nothing of Jews in the west in general; the nature, character and acceptance among the community of nations of both the Jewish State and the Jewish People has been fragile and under attack from enemies “foreign and domestic”. The fantasy we tell ourselves is that the forces unleashed on October 7 are new and different, rather than revealing something that has been there all along and that our people have faced for millennia.

Franklin Foer’s piece in the Atlantic, “The Golden Age of American Jews is Ending” makes the point that what we are experiencing now is not the exception but rather normative of attitudes toward Jews and becoming normative toward Israel. I draw some degree of strength from that sad reality. We have been here before, and are still here.

I think of the tens of thousands of sermons and articles written by our rabbinic predecessors in their own precarious times, the strength (koyach) and wisdom they gave their communities in dire moments such as these that guided our people through the wilderness. Maybe that is the burden and the blessing of being a Jew or a Jewish State, we are always in the wilderness, striving toward a promised land, a promised time, but we never quite get there. In the striving, in the wilderness journey our true character is formed and the dangers to our survival are revealed so we can confront them.