Good News and Bad News.

Let's do the bad news first as it's probably what we are all most familiar with

1. Antisemitism in Canada Post-October 7th:
    a. Increase in Incidents: Following the events of October 7th, 2023, there has been a significant surge in antisemitic acts across Canada. For instance, Montreal witnessed a 670% increase in such incidents, with Jewish schools being targeted and universities becoming centers for anti-Jewish harassment.
    b. Community Impact: A survey by the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) revealed that 82% of Canadian Jews felt less safe after October 7th.
2. Prior to October 7, 2023 there were deep divisions, boarding on ruptures in and between the Jewish communities of North America and Israel.
    a. Judaism has always had debate and division but the things we could all agree on were becoming fewer and darker. Pew survey found that:
        i. 76% agreed that remembering the holocaust was essential to their Jewish identity.
        ii. 75% believed antisemitism was increasing
    b. Jews in Israel were deeply divided over the future of Israeli democracy.
        i. Zionist minded North American Jews tended to support the protest movement, but divisions over diaspora criticism of Israel became increasingly contentious.
    c. We also saw deep divisions between liberal and religious Jews
    d. Diaspora vs Israeli perspectives
    e. Generational Gaps: Younger Jews were more likely to be critical of Israel and embrace intersectional activism, while older generations tended to have a stronger attachment to Zionism.
    f. Political Affiliation: Many Jewish communities leaned liberal, but a vocal conservative minority supported Trump-era policies, particularly those favoring Israel.
3. Then 10/7 happens and beyond the existential threat to Israel and the horrors of that day and the 500 plus days that followed. The attacks revealed deeply disturbing anti-Israel and anti-Jewish sentiments amongst groups that on October 6 we thought were our friends, allies and fellow warriors in the struggle for social justice which for many non-Orthodox Jews was their raison d'être for their Jewish identity, affiliation, philanthropy and practice.
4. In April 2024, six months after 10/7 Franklin Foer's writes a piece for The Atlantic titled "The Golden Age of American Jews Is Ending," was published in The Atlantic.
5. In this piece, Foer explores the resurgence of anti-Semitism from both the political right and left, suggesting that these rising hostilities threaten to conclude an unprecedented era of safety and prosperity for Jewish Americans. He argues that this shift not only endangers the Jewish community but also undermines the liberal order they have significantly contributed to establishing.

6. Yosi Klein Halevi argues that this event ended the post-Holocaust era, a period characterized by Jewish resilience and optimism following the atrocities of World War II. He suggests that the attack shattered Israelis' confidence in their state's ability to protect them and challenged the American Jewish community's sense of security and acceptance.
    a. **Erosion of Security and Resilience:** The article emphasizes how the attack undermined the longstanding belief in the safety and resilience of Jewish communities worldwide. This sentiment resonates with the Canadian Jewish community, which has experienced a surge in antisemitic incidents post-October 7. For instance, in Vancouver, the Schara Tzedeck Synagogue was targeted in an arson attack in May 2024, leading to heightened security measures and community unease. mapleridgenews.com+1Wikipedia+1

    b. **Global Rise in Antisemitism:** Halevi highlights the global increase in antisemitic sentiments and actions following the attack. This trend is evident in Canada, where Jewish institutions have faced threats and violence. Notably, in Montreal, two Jewish schools were targeted with gunfire in November 2023, reflecting the broader climate of hostility discussed in the article. Wikipedia+1Wikipedia+1

    c. **Challenges to Jewish Identity and Solidarity:** The article discusses the challenges to Jewish identity and the need for solidarity in the face of adversity. This is pertinent to the Canadian context, where communities have come together to commemorate the victims of the October 7 attack and address the ensuing challenges. For example, in Toronto, approximately 20,000 people gathered at the Prosserman JCC's Sherman Campus to hear from survivors and show unity, reflecting the themes of resilience and communal support highlighted by Halevi. thecjn.ca

    d. **Reevaluation of Jewish Life in the Diaspora:** Halevi suggests that the attack prompted a reevaluation of Jewish life in the diaspora, with communities reassessing their safety and role in broader society. This is mirrored in Canada, where Jewish organizations have called for increased security measures and greater awareness of antisemitism. The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) reported that 82% of Canadian Jews felt less safe after October 7, underscoring the need for a reassessment of communal strategies and support systems.
7. **Katz Center Article**
    a. **Campus Climate and Academic Discourse:** The article highlights how the attack intensified activism and debates on university campuses, particularly concerning free speech and institutional responses. In Canada, similar dynamics have been observed. For instance, at the University of Toronto, student groups organized rallies both supporting and opposing Israel's actions, leading to heightened tensions and discussions about academic neutrality and freedom of expression.katz.sas.upenn.edu

b. **Interfaith and Intra-community Relations:** The reflections emphasize the strain on relationships both within Jewish communities and between Jews and other groups. In Canada, debates over Israel's military responses have led to polarized opinions among Jewish Canadians, affecting communal cohesion. Additionally, interfaith dialogues, particularly with Muslim communities, have faced challenges, necessitating renewed efforts for constructive engagement and mutual understanding.

c. **Media Representation and Public Perception:** The article discusses the role of media in shaping narratives post-October 7. In the Canadian context, media coverage has influenced public opinion, with some outlets accused of bias either for or against Israel. This has impacted the Canadian Jewish community's efforts to address misinformation and advocate for balanced reporting.

THE GOOD NEWS

CONVERSION LETTER (one of many)

Though my parents were raised Christian in communist Czechoslovakia, neither of them wanted a life like that for me, so I was not baptized, nor made to go to church. Instead, I was dedicated as a child of the universe to choose my own path.

I am a deeply spiritual person, finding great connection and comfort in the natural world, with the phases of the moon, the cycles of the yearly seasons, food, friends, family, and giving to others.

Most keenly I identify as following a druid's path -- walking this world gently, doing right by all of G-d's/goddess's creatures, and embodying joy and wonderment each day.

When I was 13, my dad took me to the Old-New Synagogue, and Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague, and my soul became tethered.

I started learning about my dad's uncles, my step-dad, and their family histories.

These incredible humans left a deeply personal impact on me, as courageous, kind people dedicated to making the world a better place, in light of what the Shoah took from them.

From there on, I read and watched countless memoirs, biographies, and films to educate myself further

Since October 7th I have dedicated myself to learning –albeit slowly – more about Judaism in order to be a better ally, to honour and support the Jewish community world-wide.

Lately I feel an acute need for connection, and to bring ritual into my life, for stability, community, and mental wellness.

There is much about Judaism I am learning online, through groups and other channels; gems of wisdom parallel to how I have been connecting with the world so far.

As you take in all that I have shared, what are your thoughts?

Are my feelings genuine, or a symptom of some misguided, wayward soul looking for connection?

1. Strengthened Community Engagement and Identity:

- **Increased Participation:** In the United States, there has been a notable resurgence in Jewish identity and community involvement. Many individuals have become more active in Jewish community activities and support for Israel. Major Jewish denominations report increased participation in services and events, and a survey found that 43% of American Jews are now more engaged in Jewish life. The Wall Street Journal
    - We are seeing more people at services here, more involvement in Hillel, Chabad and other Jewish campus groups. BBYO had its largest convention ever, 3500 Jewish teens and it sold out in 7 minutes.

- **Innovative Cultural Expressions:** Younger generations have reimagined traditional Jewish practices to resonate with contemporary lifestyles. Events such as "Hot & Shabbat" in New York feature chefs, DJs, open bars, and dancing, attracting both Jewish and non-Jewish attendees. These modern interpretations of Shabbat are about community and inclusivity, as well as redefining Jewish traditions in contemporary settings. New York Post

2. Enhanced Security Measures:

Federal Initiatives:

- **Canada Community Security Program (CCSP):** Launched on October 1, 2024, the CCSP provides time-limited funding to communities at risk of hate-motivated incidents, including Jewish institutions. Eligible organizations can receive support for security equipment, infrastructure enhancements, security assessments, training, and temporary security personnel. This program replaces and enhances the previous Security Infrastructure Program (SIP), offering more flexibility and responsiveness to community needs. publicsafety.gc.ca+1Government of Canada+1

- **Expanded Security Infrastructure Program (ESIP):** In November 2023, the federal government introduced the ESIP with a $10 million investment to assist communities in enhancing security measures. For example, in March 2024, Montreal's Congregation Beth Tikvah Ahavat Shalom Nusach Hoari received $25,272, and the Federation CJA West Island received $10,977 to hire security personnel and improve safety. Government of Canada+1federationcja.org+1

Provincial Support:

- **British Columbia Anti-Hate Community Support Fund:** In April 2024, the B.C. Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General allocated $200,000 to the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver. This funding assists local Jewish organizations in covering expenses for enhanced security measures, including security personnel, alarm systems, and protective barriers, addressing the increased number of antisemitic incidents affecting these organizations. Canadian Institute of Journalists

Community-Led Efforts:

- **Federation CJA's Community Security Network (CSN):** In Montreal, Federation CJA has invested over $10 million since 2019 to bolster security across Jewish institutions. The CSN provides training, conducts site assessments, guides organizations in applying for government grants, and advocates with law enforcement. Physical enhancements, such as installing security cameras, access controls, and reinforced barriers, have been implemented in numerous schools, synagogues, and community centers. federationcja.org

- **Bitachon Volunteers and AICTE:** Has led to increased engagement, involvement with traditionally unaffiliated groups, like Israeli Canadian Jews, and non-religious Jews.

3. Philanthropic Initiatives:

- **Jewish Future Promise:** This campaign encourages Jews to designate at least 50% of their charitable giving to Jewish or Israel-related causes. As of October 2024, over 80,000 individuals had pledged more than $600 billion, ensuring sustained support for Jewish institutions and initiatives. Wikipedia

4. Political and Institutional Support:

- **Jews at the center of the political debate:** This has been +/- as we discover who are our true friends and who are not. Politicians reach out to Jewish leaders frequently, but we are also being used as wedge issue and as we just saw at Columbia University, things are being done in our name that are contrary to our core values of justice, due process and certain freedoms (speech, assembly) that we have ourselves relied upon in other times.
    - Civil Rights Movement, Skokie

5. Cultural Renaissance:

- **Jewish Bling:** The Stars of David, the hostage pins, people wearing outwardly Jewish symbols in public. For every call I get worried if they should take their mezzuzah down, I have 3-5 more conversations about ways Jews are publicly showing pride and solidarity.

The Bad News: Challenges and Divisions

1. **Surge in Antisemitism:** How has the rise in antisemitism since October 7 affected your sense of personal and communal security? Have you changed any of your behaviors or habits as a result?
2. **Erosion of Security and Resilience:** Do you agree with Yossi Klein Halevi that October 7 ended the post-Holocaust era? If so, what does that mean for Jewish communities in Canada and beyond?
3. **Jewish Community Divisions:** Before October 7, Jewish communities were deeply divided along religious, political, and generational lines. Have these divisions widened or narrowed since? In what ways?
4. **Diaspora and Israel Relations:** Many North American Jews found themselves shocked by the response (or lack thereof) from progressive allies post-October 7. How do you think this betrayal has reshaped Jewish identity and activism in Canada?
5. **Political Realities:** Franklin Foer wrote about the "Golden Age of American Jews" ending. Do you see a similar shift in Canada? What factors do you think will determine the future of Jewish life here?

The Good News: Resilience and Growth

6. **Jewish Pride and Public Identity:** Have you noticed more people openly expressing Jewish pride—wearing Stars of David, attending Jewish events, or engaging in Jewish life? Have you personally felt a shift in your own identity?
7. **Strengthened Jewish Identity:** The post-October 7 period has led to increased engagement in Jewish life. What aspects of Jewish tradition or community have you found particularly meaningful in this time?
8. **Security and Safety Measures:** With increased security funding and programs, do you feel safer in Jewish spaces now than immediately after October 7? What more needs to be done?
9. **Conversion and New Connections to Judaism:** We read an excerpt from a conversion letter. What does this story tell us about the enduring appeal of Judaism, even in difficult times?
10. **Jewish Political Influence:** Jews have been at the center of many political debates since October 7, and Jewish leaders are being courted by politicians. Is this a good or bad development for the community? How should we navigate this increased attention?
11. **Rebuilding Interfaith and Intra-Community Relationships:** Given the strain on relationships between Jews and other groups (as well as within Jewish communities), what are some constructive ways to rebuild bridges?
12. **Media Representation and Public Perception:** How can we better advocate for fairer media coverage of Jewish and Israeli issues? What strategies have been effective in countering misinformation?

Big Picture Reflections

13. **Defining a New Era:** If we accept that October 7 marked the end of one era, what do you think the next era of Jewish life will look like? What should our priorities be?
14. **Hope and Action:** Despite the challenges, what gives you hope for the future of the Jewish community in Canada? What role do you see for yourself in strengthening Jewish life moving forward?