INTO THE FIRE
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote the following,

Prayer may not save us,

But prayer makes us worth saving.

I have been think a lot about Rabbi Heschel's words this week as I packed in my mind and as many of us packed for real our most scared belongings and cherished possessions. As the fires crept ever closer to our homes and our loved one two thought could be heard in the minds of our community. They are at once inconsistent and at the same time complementary.

Many came to realize that what was important were not their material possessions, car, boat, TV, computer, even home, but loved ones most of all. Their security, their safety, that was more valuable than the finest of things, the most expensive of toys, the largest and most sought after houses. Speaking on the phone with one of our members they said to me, "You know Rabbi we live in a beautiful community with many large and very expensive homes. My wife and I he said have scraped and saved and argued and fought for this house, we made it a priority, the tile had to be just right, the style and the furniture, we worked for months to make it perfect; our neighbors have all done the same; but as I stood outside with my neighbors watching the fires come closer to our homes, I looked out and saw families hugging one another, holding each other; no one was

hugging there home, there car, their hardwood floors. In the glow the fires we realized what was truly important and what was just stuff.

Another simultaneous reaction could also be heard in the voices of our community. As we packed our cars and our SUVs each was asked to decide what was truly precious, what they could not replace, what they could not live without. It reminded me of the many stories I read from the Holocaust. The Nazi's in there unrelenting cruelty would tell our grand parents that they were going on a trip and that they could only each take one bag of there most precious possessions with them on the trains. They did this as they hoped that our ancestors would pack fine jewels and precious antiques in there suitcases, thus making it easier for the Nazis to robe and loot our belongings.

But such is the zachoot of our ancestors, the merit of those righteous Jews went to their deaths in the fires of another age. When the suit cases were taken form our loved ones and torn open on the floor, the barbaric Nazis were not greeted with treasure and jewels, rather what they found was worthless to their cold hearts but more precious than fine pearls to our grandparents. They found silver candle sticks, tarnished and well worn, they found battered books of the Torah, a stained tallit that had been a chuppah at one time, the found faded pictures of pious Jews in the shtel and posed stiffly for a wedding photo. This was what was precious to our ancestors so much so that they would even forgo a warm coat to keep the sacred fragments of there memories with them.

And it was these same items that filled our cars and SUVs this past week. When we loaded up the truck and moved to Beverly, Hills that is, what did we put there, our pictures may have been in color, our candle sticks may have been made in a more modern mode, we might have thrown in the computer along with our grandmother's challah cover, and yes we did take the jewelry and the fine art. But the first thing we reached for was the irreplaceable, the pictures and photo albums. We grasped hold of our cherished memories and sheltered them from the raging fires so that they would not be lost to us, so they would not be lost to our children.

These two response to abandon our home but not each other, to protect the memory so that it may be passed on, that is the story and lesson of our people. How many times have fires raged against our people in ancient and not so ancient days. But we are still here, Am Yisrael Chai, the people and its sacred memories and traditions live.

Our temple was burned, our people were turned to smoke and ash, our beloved homeland has been set ablaze by the fire of terror and hatred but Am Yisrael Chai, the people and its sacred memories and traditions live.

As the fires slowly smolder down, as others confront the pain of loss and the challenge of rebuilding, as we mourn the fallen and honor the heroes. May we all embrace at least one lesson spoken aloud by so many who - facing the flames - rushed to pack up their valuables:

That memories of love and of time spent with family and friends are priceless, holy and sacred. This can never be taken away. As we rush to meet the challenge of living in this imperfect world of ours, May we slow down enough to cherish those who are truly valuable, kadosh/holy - to us.

Baruch Ata Adonai, Hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol. Blessed are You, O God, who differentiates between the truly valuable and everything else.