WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE
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Rabbi Hugo Gryn famously told a story of his father in the winter of 1944, while they were together in a concentration camp called Lieberose. Having announced that it was the eve of Chanukah, he took a homemade clay bowl and lit a wick immersed in his precious, now melted ration of margarine. Before he could recite the blessing, Hugo looked at his father and protested "we need the food – we can't afford to waste it on a candle" his father looked at Hugo then and then at the lamp, then back at Hugo—and responded, "You and I have seen that it is possible to live up to three weeks without food. We once lived almost three days

without water; but you can't live at all without hope."

What gives you hope in our shattered and broken world?

As Jews we see antisemitism flourishing, almost unquestioned or challenged. This past week an 80 year old member of our congregation called me in tears as she learned about Canadian cyclist Leah Goldstein who was disinvited as speaker at a women's event because of past IDF service three decades ago.

As a nation we see the vastness of our problems and the feebleness of our political leaders of any party to come together for wise and lasting

solutions. Easier to blame and divide than to share responsibility, compromise and come together.

As human beings, which is not different from being a Jew, or a Canadian - but of course less particularistic and tribal we see the suffering of innocents in Gaza due to Israel's war to destroy Hamas and the calls are only for Israel to cease fire, not for Hamas to stop or renounce its terror, let alone release the Israeli innocents it holds has captives. And we see suffering and inhumanity elsewhere, caused by fellow humans and wonder, is this just the way of human nature, are we no better than animals with no conscience or moral code?

I will admit to you that I am finding it very hard of late to be optimistic about the future. I'm 53 years old and I find myself yearning for simpler times. Which by way of reference weren't so great either.

I grew up during the Cold War when nuclear annihilation was just a US-Soviet miscalculation away. AIDS ravaged my home town of San Francisco when I was a teen, and with it all the racism, homophobia and Religious Fundamentalism that accompanied that fearful time. The late 90s were a brief reprieve, but the dotcom bubble burst, then the housing bubble followed. 9/11 changed the world and COVID changed it again.

I lay in bed at night sometimes wishing I could turn back the clock. It's an Alexa and I'm pretty sure it is listening to my every thought and doesn't care, plus the time is set by the internet so there is no going back.

Is there room for hope? Is there a place for optimism in a post October 7th world? As a Jew, as a Canadian, as a human being?

There is much in the psychological literature differentiating hope from its cousin optimism, but I prefer the explanation of the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. He teaches that optimism, "is the belief that things are going to get better. While, hope is the belief that if we work hard enough, together we can make things

better… It needs no courage, just a certain naiveté to be an optimist. It needs a great deal of courage to have hope. No Jew knowing what we do about history and our own past… can be an optimist. But no Jew who is true to our teachings can ever give up hope."

The halakhic literature uses the word יאוש/Yayoosh, despair, the opposite of hope, only with reference to property. We are permitted at times to give up any hope that a lost object will be returned. But יאוש is never applied to people. Whether it is a personal tragedy or an unceasing pandemic, our tradition teaches that we may not despair.

And sometimes hope shows up when you least expect it – when you are facing something even more difficult than the reality of today.

Many of you are familiar with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief. Right after the fifth and final stage, **acceptance**, Kübler-Ross describes another sentiment: hope. She writes of hope as something that "occasionally sneaks in" and that gives "the terminally ill a sense of a special mission in life which helps them maintain their spirits".

Even when encountering life's biggest challenge, a terminal illness, hope can help carry us forward.

This afternoon I sat with a member of our community who has a terminal illness, their body is wracked with pain and they have chosen MAID, Medical Assistance in Dying. I asked them, as I always do in such situations, what led them to this decision?

Answers are particular to each person's condition but they share a common thread, the hope that in choosing how and when to end their life they will be able to leave a legacy to their loved ones. That they will be remembered, not for how they died but for how they lived. The hope that they will spare their family the pain of watching them suffer.

I have watched, in these moments and many times when MAID is not the choice of the terminally ill families find hope in the possibility of a cure, despite the odds, or hope for the ability to maintain personal dignity in a diminished state, or hope to provide ongoing love to one's family and wisdom to one's descendants, or hope for life after death. However it manifests, with the power of hope, even in the most difficult of circumstances, we are strengthened to move forward.

In another memory, from another survivor Victor Frankl recounts "The prisoner who had lost his faith in the future… was doomed. He also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical

decay." Sufficient hope of course was no guarantee against death; a lack of hope however seemed to almost guarantee it.

Kübler-Ross and Frankl were speaking as scientists and the role that hope can play when individuals confront their own mortality. I, though, speak to you as your rabbi and the role that hope plays for me and can perhaps play for you – whether in dealing with an "October 7th and after" world or any of the challenges that come our way.

Know this: Hope is not something we believe. It is something that we create.

Hope is the scaffolding upon which we build our lives. Even more significantly, it is the outcome of a life lived in accordance with Judaism and Jewish teachings, the core of which are the mitzvot, the commandments, the obligations we have toward ourselves, each other and nature/the universe/G-d however you understand or define those things to be a calling in your life. That is the scaffolding that allows us to build hope in times of despair.

When I am feeling broken and despair I find I listen to a lot of music. One song that has been on repeat for me of late is the Israeli folk classic"יהיה טוב" a song in which the singer David Broza looks out his window and sees a country

with troubles. Nevertheless, he declares יהיה טוב, one day it will be good.

The chorus for "יהיה טוב" starts like this.

יהיה טוב

יהיה טוב, כן

לפעמים אני נשבר

It will be good

It will be good, yes

Sometimes, I am broken

"יהיה טוב" is a song in which the singer looks out his window and sees a country with troubles. Nevertheless, he declares יהיה טוב, one day it will be good. For the time being however he admits that sometimes – not always – but sometimes,

אני נשבר. Sometimes, he confesses, he is indeed broken on the inside.

It is **to hope** that I turn in my "brokenness of sometimes". My goal is not to eliminate the brokenness completely. To be hurt, sad, or angry is part of the human condition. My desire though, for me and for you, is to limit the frequency and length of the hopelessness.

I'll tell you one moment last week that helped me through, helped me find hope in the midst of my brokenness and I want to thank my teacher Rabbi David Wolpe who first articulated this observation from an experience we both shared. I was at the BBYO International Convention in Orlando FL. 3,700 Jewish

teenagers, 12 of them from Vancouver, 10 from Temple Sholom.
Rabbi Wolpe was on a panel, and was asked "Rabbi, what gives you hope?" He was the last to answer, all the easy answers had been taken, he said this,

"What gives me hope?"

"I imagine myself in a conversation with my great, great, great grandfather. And I say to him, it's terrible what I'm seeing at Harvard. And he says, you're at Harvard? And I say, yes, but there's a lot of anti-Israel sentiment there. And he goes, there's an Israel? And I say, yeah, but you should hear the administration is talking about shaving some of the billions of

dollars of aid. And he goes, and America gives it billions of dollars of aid? And I say, you know what, you're right, we have problems, but compared to our great great grandparents, we are very, very blessed, shabbat shalom!