Ep #23: “Shiva” – Poems of October 7

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Hebrew College

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Jessica: Welcome to Speaking Torah. I'm your host, Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal, spiritual leader of Temple Beth Shalom in Melrose, Massachusetts, and 2019 graduate of Hebrew College. In this podcast, Jewish leaders from around the world, Hebrew College faculty, alumni, and students discuss how Torah can help us navigate the most pressing issues of our time. Together, we explore the ways Torah can help us approach the world with creativity, healing, and hope.

This year, Hebrew College launched a renewed and expanded set of adult learning programs under the name Tamid. The Hebrew word Tamid means perpetual or eternal, and we chose it because we believe that lifelong Jewish learning connects us to an enduring sense of meaning and purpose. It honors our past, uplifts our present, and inspires us to face the future with a spirit of creative possibility and hope. In this season of the podcast, we are focusing on some of these experiences.

In the months following the horrors of October 7th, Israelis wrote poems to express the nation's feelings and emotions. Well-known poets alongside new, fresh voices appeared daily on social media and in the literary supplements of daily papers. They described the inability to speak. They gave voice to choked tears, rage, and despair. The anthology called Shiva: Poems of October 7th includes 59 Hebrew poems printed alongside their English translations. The book includes a link to brief recorded commentaries about each of the poems.

This week, we take a deep dive into some of the poems in this anthology with Hebrew College faculty member, Rav Rachel Adelman, and two of her rabbinical students, Deborah Anstandig and Matthew Schultz, both of whom were studying in Israel when the October 7th attack took place. We were lucky enough to join Rachel, Matthew, and Deborah as they read and discussed some of this remarkable poetry. But before we listen in on their discussion, we hear from Michael Bohnen, one of the anthology's editors and translators, who discussed the anthology in a spring lunch and learn session for our Tamid of Hebrew College adult learners.

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Michael: All of us were around when September 11th happened. I don't remember an outpouring of poetry following September 11th. But there was an outpouring of poetry following October 7th. And I think it's fair to say that this is something Jewish. This is what we do after some kind of tragedy. After the temples were destroyed, we had the book of Lamentations. It was poetry. During the Crusades, there were poems written about communities that were destroyed. During the Khmelnytsky problems, we had also poetry came out of that. Following the pogroms in Ukraine, we also had poetry come out of that. So, and of course, after the Shoah, it's not exceptional that this happens. Maybe it's just a Jewish thing.

And one of the reasons is, right after October 7th, what were people saying? They were saying, "Ein Milim." There are no words. But we found that words could be said often in poetry that were harder to convey in prose. Poetry has a way of expressing emotion and going beyond just the words themselves. So, that's really what this book is all about.

The title of this poem is Strong as Death, and it's by Shlomit Naim Naor. There's no point in sleep. Images surface. There's no point in waking. The visions are real. The moment before rising, I know nothing of the horrors of war. Every night I hold something in my hand that slips and shatters. Glass shards of reality scratch my face. Teardrops of dawn. God is hiding in a cellar, bereft of prayer, trembling for his deeds. His whole being is a scream. Slashed women are running towards me, holding headless babies, a flock of hanging ravens. Gaza is like death.

So this poem starts out with the concept that there's no point in sleeping or waking. You try to sleep and you have nightmares. When you wake, the nightmares turn out to be real. The only moment where a person doesn't always think about the horrors of war is just one brief moment before waking up. Other than that, we're now far enough away from October 7th in so many ways, but at the same time, we know that the impact of October 7th continues at so many levels. And so I would imagine that a lot of this, which was true in the days right after October 7th, still has some truth to it, that it's all around us and it's hard, whether you're asleep or you're awake, what happened is there.

And then we have these very powerful, gripping images, the glass shards of reality scratching my face, teardrops of dawn. And then this next paragraph is really fascinating. And we'll see this isn't the only poem we're going to read that takes God to task. God is hiding in a cellar, bereft of prayer, trembling for his deeds. His whole being is a scream. The Hebrew is Elohim mushtar b'mertef. God is hiding in a cellar. There's a concept that goes back to the Bible and it's in the Talmud and it's in the liturgy called Hester Panim, which is God hiding God's face. Very often people say that's how they explain the Holocaust. God was hiding his face. Here, God is hiding. Why is God hiding? And God is bereft of prayer, and nobody's praying because nothing's happening. God is trembling for his deeds. So the author is saying God has some responsibility here for what God either did do or what God failed to do. And God's whole being is a scream. We'll see this image of a scream come up in some later poems too, but the almost the only reaction that people could have to October 7th was a scream. I went back to Ein Milim. The initial reaction was just some emotional outcry because none of it made any sense.

And this poem ends with an ugly image. And we read about the Bibas twins even, you know, over a year later, we still have these images before us. So Gaza is like death.

Here's another translation challenge. This poem is a reference to the Song of Songs. Love is as strong as death. It's Aza Hamavet Ahava. So the Hebrew word for strong, Aza, is also the Hebrew word for Gaza. Now, in Hebrew, one of them is pronounced Aza and the other is pronounced Aza, but it's close enough. So you could interpret Azakah Mavet as strong as death, or Aza is like death. What we did as translators is we entitled the poem Strong as Death. It ends with the same phrase, and so at the end we translated it Gaza is like death.

Jessica: Now, let's listen as Rachel and her students, Deborah and Matthew, discuss more of these poems.

Rachel: Hello, all you lovely listeners. My name is Rachel Adelman. I'm associate professor of Tanakh in the Rabbinical School of Hebrew College.

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Today, we will engage in a close study of selected poems from *Shiva*, edited by Rachel Korazim, Michael Bonen, and Heather Silverman. These poems are a direct response to the 7th, shiva, of October.

The conversation today with my two rabbinical students, Matthew Schultz and Deborah Anstandig, emerges out of a text class from this semester. The course which I am teaching, sponsored by a grant that we received from the Israel Institute, is called Where is the Lamb? [וְאַיֵּה הַשֶּׂה, לְעֹלָה 0:08:48.0]. These are Isaac's words from the Akedah. He poses this searing question to his father Abraham as they are journeying towards the mountain and towards the altar upon which he will be bound for sacrifice. While this quote is a hint of the wrought emotions and perhaps theology behind the course, the subtitle tells you something about the content, responding to trauma in modern Israeli literature.

The poems that I want to foreground today are by Osnat Eldar, who is a rabbi, or Rabba in Hebrew, that is a female rabbi of congregation Sulam Yaakov in Zichron Yaakov in Israel. She holds a BA in Hebrew literature and Bible and an MA in Jewish Studies from the Revivim program of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She has written some of the most exquisite poems responding to the calamity of October 7th. And so together, we are going to read through some of these poems in both the original Hebrew and English translation in conversation with my two rabbinical students, Matthew Schultz and Deborah Anstandig.

Deborah and Matthew, you want to say something to tell our listeners who you are, what you bring to this conversation today? Deborah?

Deborah: I'm Deborah. I am about to be ordained by the time our listeners hear this. It's possible my Shana hey status will become future rabbi. I'm a longtime lover and grappler with Israel and had the privilege to be learning in Israel for the academic year that began in September of 2023. So that meant that, and Matthew will tell his own story, but that meant that I was in Jerusalem on October 7th of 2023 and experienced both what it's like to be on the home front of a war from the safety of an apartment in Jerusalem, but really kind of having an up close and visceral lived experience of not

observing. I wasn't on the front lines, but I was there and was able to be with Am Yisrael in a different way by virtue of my body being in Israel.

Matthew: My name is Matthew. Also a Shana hey student. Also, by the time you listen, perhaps, I'll be ordained. Like Deborah, I was in Israel on October 7th. I was living in Israel for about 8 years before Rabbinical school, and I am again moving back in June to be a rabbi at a conservative congregation in Haifa. And yeah, this class has just been a great way to explore some of the experiences and emotional experiences of the past few years in a different way, in a way that's not mediated through the headlines, but is mediated through a poetic consciousness instead, which has been very helpful.

Rachel: So the poem that I want to begin with is called 6:00 a.m. And I think I'll read it in English and Hebrew. For the conductor on Ayelet Hashachar, a psalm of David. So this is the opening of Psalm 22, which is an incredible psalm. It's the one that Azavtani Eli Lama Azavtani. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? It's attributed to Esther at her darkest hour. So it's not an incidental epithet.

Morning twilight, delicately unraveling the night's cobwebs, eyes opening with expectation as the sun cracks open the windows of the sky. The light of dawn unites with the day to birth it anew. At morning twilight, all of yesterday's horrors are cleared for publication. And through the narrow cleft between night and day, the loss of life bleeds into the silent morning routine. 6:00 a.m. is the darkest hour since that Shabbat.

[Hebrew of poem. 0:13:23.4]

That's just an exquisite poem. So 6:00 a.m. is when we first heard the sirens. And maybe, Deborah, you can tell me about where you were at that 6:00 a.m. And Matt, tell me where you were at 6:00 a.m. and how, perhaps, these images resonate for you.

Deborah: Well, I was in Jerusalem. It was closer to 8:15 when they hit where I was sleeping. When it was that Shabbat of Simchat Torah, I was drinking my coffee, was just getting over jet lag because I had arrived only

a few days before. And I was just excited to go and dance with the Torah and hear Bereshit in a new Beit Knesset, a new community. There was just a joy the previous night. The sound of that siren, I had moved into a new apartment. It was Sukkot, and I hadn't yet met my neighbors because most people were traveling and on holiday during Chol Hamoed Sukkot. So I met everybody in the stairwell of the building for the first time.

You know, when you hear a siren once, you think it's a fluke. You hear a siren a second, a third, a fourth time, and people who are observing of Shabbat are suddenly turning on their phones and trying to find out what's actually been going on. I had been in Israel for the summer of 2014 when there were sirens before. So I recognized the sound, but I remember the shattering of all joy on that day and the silence and the fear of what of what was to come. I will never forget the image of watching a chayal, a soldier in a Na Nachman Kippah putting his backpack into a car with another person driving on Shabbat around 11:00 in the morning, and I burst into tears and said, we are reaching a new reality that the joy of the morning was just immediately gone. And this poem does that. This poem contrasts the possibility and potential of the morning with what ultimately transpires each morning throughout the war. I want to give Matt an opportunity, but it's terrifying. What will the news of the morning bring? What loss will have happened overnight that we didn't even know to anticipate?

Rachel: Thank you. Matt?

Matthew: I was in Tel Aviv at my apartment with my partner Yoav, and we had a really beautiful Simchat Torah with our community in Tel Aviv. And I didn't wake up to the sirens. I woke up to a school's fire alarm across the street that had been triggered. And it had this eerie automated voice saying in English, actually, "Fire, fire, please evacuate." So that sort of still rings in my ears. And what you're saying, Deborah, about the, you know, like waking up each day to figure out what happened yesterday. There was a long time when I was incredibly disturbed by remembering that Friday night of dancing in the street with the Torah and all the joy because I would think back on that happiness and I would feel incredibly this feeling of doom. Like I wanted to reach back into the memory and sort of shake myself. And all

that joy suddenly felt really false and naive. And it took me a long time to redeem that memory and be able to hold it in a different place and not have sort of everything before be clouded with that sense of doom. You know, I wanted to because it was a beautiful night of closeness with my community and that community, like everyone in Israel has gone through so much in the past year that I think we need those memories of that those happy times also to sustain us. But yeah, the fact that even that first 6:00 a.m. had a dark realization, not just of what happened, but also just of our own unknowing and ignorance and innocence the hours before.

Rachel: What you're saying right now, or what you're asking is how can we allow twilight? You know, Osnat Eldar is still saying this time is the darkest. And what I hear you saying, Matt, is I'm trying to find a way to allow for brightness to return. It's an interesting time. It's like the Bein Hashmashot on the other end when we're in between dark and light. We're not in one reality or another. When you were speaking, Matt, I was remembering how terribly I slept for the first few months of the war and that the difference between day and night or specifically the ability to sleep at night was quite limited because of the mixing of these realities. So I don't know, what you're describing is something hopeful to redeem the time.

Matthew: Yeah. It's interesting to bring up Bein Hashmashot. That morning of October 7th was mixing. It was knowing and not knowing. Like when I think about what we really knew that morning, it was so little and so confused for a lot of hours. It was Shabbat and not Shabbat because we were all sort of struggling with how much observance to keep up as the knowledge trickled in. Are we going to go back to our holiday? Is the holiday canceled? You know, like strange thoughts like those. So you're sort of really in a twilight between a lot of different sugya concepts.

Rachel: Yeah. So she plays with this word [דמדומי בוקר 0:20:26.2], right? The twilight of the morning. And the word [דום 0:20:37.0], which is to silence or to quash the loss. And this strange phrase that comes up a lot in many of the poems, cleared for publication, cleared for publication. So you know there's censorship going on through the night news. And then what you're exposed to is what they've cleared by *boker*, by the light of the, of the

morning, the clarity of the morning. *Boker* means cleared, right, for publication. [Hebrew 0:21:13.1]. That's the…

Deborah: Which I understood Rachel also just having known personally someone who had been killed as a soldier that the family had to be informed first. And so when I read ["Hoter le-pirsum" (הותר לפרסום) 0:21:28.0], this is cleared for publication, was that the next of kin, just for folks who weren't there, that the next of kin had been informed and now this information is for the general public, which also fits the darkness of the not knowing that when everyone then knows information comes to light.

Rachel: Beautiful, beautiful. I want to move to the next twilight, which is the twilight of the Sabbath, which is really called Bein Hashmashot, between the suns, right? The between the setting of the sun and the rising of the moon. And it's a liminal period. It's when we light the Shabbat candles. And I want to bring in her poem about lighting Shabbat candles. Matt, do you want to read it?

Matthew: For Shabbat candles, Osnat Eldar. It opens with a quote from Song of Songs 1:4, "The king has brought me to his chambers. When I come into your chambers, will you receive me? I'll be walking awkwardly and won't worry about dropping my candlesticks on the way. You already broke the protect commandment. I am left with the remember. On which are heaped the memories of that Shabbat when you sealed your chambers so you wouldn't see, so you wouldn't hear, so you wouldn't know. For weeks I have been walking, an exile in my land and a stranger in my home. Shabbat candles continue to cast light like a shameful customary habit. Between the revealed and the hidden, my soul flickers, signaling to me that there is still an opening, inviting me to unite the fragments of the protect, to light the remember, to welcome the Shabbat as a need, an expectation, to make sure that tears do not extinguish the candles."

And the protect and remember are reference to the two versions of how the Shabbat commandment is expressed in the Torah. Shamor, protect it, and Zachor, remember it.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah. And I want to point out that there's a discrepancy, an evolution in the translation. So the original translation that I gave you is the first stage where Shamor is translated as keep, which is the traditional way of translate, keep the Sabbath, Shamor Shabbat. And it's about being vigilant about not breaking any of the don'ts. Do not turn on a light, whatever you do for, don't drive a car, whatever you do on Shabbat, right? But here, in the translation in Shiva, it's protect. And that's where she feels betrayed. I want to think about that protect, how that gets ruptured in the poem, how protect is not that you have to protect, but you don't feel protected anymore by the keeping of Shabbat, right? And the other is Zachor. Her memory is also ruptured by the 7th of Shabbat. So I want to think about what we're always working with on any Shabbat with the way that keeping and remembering, protecting and remembering, Shamor, Zachor are, yeah, disrupted or called into question or undermined in some way. And who is the you here that she's addressing? You already broke the command to keep. But I thought it was us that have to keep Shamor, that have to keep the Shabbat. So why is she accusing God of you have broken the keep or protect Shamor? And how is remembering compensation for that breach of trust? Those are my questions.

Deborah: I'll start with the lines that struck me most. This, "For weeks I have been walking an exile in my land and a stranger in my home," and the Shabbos candles become this shameful habit. Like she's continuing to try to, it evokes for me the Psalm, [אֵיךְ נָשִׁיר אֶת־שִׁיר־יְהוָה עַל אַדְמַת נֵכָר

0:26:09.2] How can we sing the song of God in a foreign land? But for her, she's not exiled from her land. It's as though she is an exile when she is in her home. And the brokenness of a covenant. I experience her saying, God, you broke this promise to keep us safe. Meaning, we are only able to observe you when we're alive. And you allowed for in the destruction of the temples, the Babylonians, God's hand is guiding the enemy to allow us to be destroyed. In parts of the books of Kings, we see allusions to that idea. And here, she doesn't say it quite as explicitly, but she is grappling with whether it's appropriate to do this as a need, not as an obligation anymore. To at least to the divine. It's something to stabilize her and hopefully rekindle that relationship.

Rachel: What do you make of the image of the chamber? Right? The epithet from Song of Songs. The king has brought me into his chamber and you God, you sealed your chambers and you wouldn't let me see. So you wouldn't hear and you wouldn't know. So you wouldn't see. You sealed your chamber so you wouldn't see. And then it moves from you God wouldn't see to you God wouldn't hear. So what is the, is she in the chamber? Is she outside of the chamber? And has God sealed her into that chamber? I wonder.

Matthew: The chamber in Song of Songs is a rendezvous site for God and Israel, and it's a place of intimacy and connection. And now it's become a place of alienation, a place where God can shut himself up after sort of having issued the decree going to his chamber so that he doesn't have to look at the outcome of it or wouldn't have to know.

Rachel: The word for sealed is interesting. In Hebrew, it's Shabbat Atamta. So we talk about the Cheder Atum, right, the sealed room. But instead of the Israelites, the Jews in their sealed rooms, their quote unquote safe rooms, they're unsafe safe rooms. It's God that's in the sealed room. So I think there's a little irony and an edge to that. Yeah. And I love this image of the tears. Again, the tears do not extinguish the candles. So to bring in the Shabbat as a need and expectation that the tears not extinguish the candles.

Deborah: We keep hearing this tentative hope that the flickering soul hasn't completely closed off that there is maybe a possibility for this relationship to be redeemed that God can be held accountable. I don't see anger. I see deep despair with an attempt at allowing, like candles flicker, allowing something to be reborn through this act even when she doesn't believe in it, even when it's a little foolish.

Rachel: Deborah, do you want to take it in Hebrew?

Deborah: [Read poem in Hebrew. 0:29:51.4]

Rachel: Excellent. Okay, so what we picked up with reading the Hebrew is the Zohar, the allusion. So between the revealed and the concealed,

there's a glimmering of my soul that signifies that there's another source of light. The Zohar is the window to the ark, or some say it's a hapax legomenon. Some say it's a chandelier, a lamp that illuminates inside the ark. So that's a beautiful allusion there.

Deborah: And it also suggests that this world without a Zachor and a Shamor is flood-like. Like there is no saving the destruction of the world and the order that she knew. She is trying to maintain despite the destruction that is around her. And it feels to me like this is a bakasha. Like it's a request to be able to come back to allowing the nerot of Shabbat to evoke both Zachor and Shamor and a relationship that's currently severed with God.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Deborah: Or at least deeply tentative.

Rachel: Right, deeply tentative. Right. So the keeping and the remembering is also a way of preserving our own source of light, like the Zohar, like the source of light for the ark. So I want to move to Miriam's prophecy. Nevuatah shel Miriam by Osnat Eldar. And I think I'll read it in English first. Does that make sense? And then we'll turn to the Hebrew and just ask questions.

It seems her faith was complete, as if she'd heard the promise of the covenant before it was given. If not, she wouldn't have cast into the river's waters a wicker basket with a future leader inside and the life story of a people in the making. And I, walking among the shards of my fractured faith, as though on pebbles on the banks of the great river, pray that she is standing far off, knowing what will befall me. There's a lightness to this. I'll read it in Hebrew and then we'll talk about some of the really beautiful resonances.

[Reads in Hebrew 0:33:35.3].

Okay, I want to pause and I want to think about where is Miriam in relationship to the poet? Where is she standing here? And where is the

poet standing? And what is the parallel between their postures and what is the difference between their postures?

Matthew: Miriam is, she hopes, standing far off from her and watching. It's not quite that she's the Moses, but if in terms of stage directions, that's the placement.

Rachel: Yeah.

Matthew: As in the Moses story, Miriam is the onlooker who watches with knowledge and faith.

Rachel: Yeah. Deborah? Maybe you can bring in the Midrash that is footnoted there in the in the.

Deborah: Yeah. There's these two women. Just before I bring in the Midrash, there's the woman who is walking, believing that the future will be somehow okay. Her dream was that the Moshiach, that the Redeemer would come from this child. There is a future and she is safeguarding that. But the speaker of the poem wishes. She's also walking along the banks, but she doesn't have the resolve of Miriam. She is looking for a Miriam-like figure also by that water to try to soothe her, to help her believe that something redemptive can come from this experience. So she feels like an ancestor whose presence could embody that same space, but she herself, the speaker of the poet, doesn't yet feel that sense of hope.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah. So there's an allusion to a Midrash in the poem based on the verse in Exodus chapter 2 verse 4. I'll just read it in the Hebrew, [וַתִּתְיַצַּב אֲחֹתוֹ מֵרָחֹק לְדַעָה מַה־יֵּעָשֶׂה לוֹ

0:36:25.4]. And his sister stood afar to know what would become of him. And the Midrash plays on this ambiguity of lo, right, what would become of him? And says, what would become of him? No. What would become of her prophecy? That what prompts her ability to throw the basket, it's actually really called a *tevah*, which is an ark, a little ark. What prompts her to cast the little ark into the river and watch over it is a prophecy that she has even before Moses is born that he would be the redeemer. So that's in

the Talmud Sotah, Masechet Sotah, and also in Shemot Rabbah. And when Moses was born, his mother saw that he was great and the whole world was full with light.

And they knew, oh, this is a sign that your prophecy will be fulfilled. But when she's forced to throw, quote unquote throw, cast, send the baby away in the basket, she doesn't know. So I want to bring in that moment of doubt and faith that when she's standing tentatively on the brink of the Nile River, and here it's Hanahar Hagadol, she's quoting from Isaiah. When she stands on the banks of that great river, it's because she doesn't know. And yet, she positions herself to act on that not knowing. And despite that, to say to Bat Paro when she comes, right, the daughter of Pharaoh to come along, when she comes along and says, "Oh, I have a nursemaid for you. She's perfect." And she gets actually the biological mother of Moses to nurse him for the next two or three years and prompts the adoption plan, right? Let's get Moses raised in the palace by a. Yeah. So I just want to say that moment is much more tentative. And yet Osnat is playing with the tentative nature of nevuah, of prophecy, that it's something that you act on in hope. It's not something that comes just from on high. Yeah.

Deborah: And I had this image probably for the first time, that at the end of the first chapter in the Book of Exodus, the edict is [reads Hebrew 0:39:15.3], the expectation from Pharaoh is every baby needs to be thrown into the Nile because the midwives were not successfully killing the baby boys when they had been born first.

The reason I’m naming this is that I’m imagining people following Pharaoh’s decree and bringing babies to be drowned, but Miriam, looking like she’s about to do the same thing, she’s bringing a baby to that river, protects him from a sese of knowing that this story will be different. And maybe faith and doubt often look really similar, that there is a different casing or a different something that we – I don’t have the right noun, but something that we need to safeguard in order for something new to be born. But sometimes, doubt and faith, the speaker is walking along that same proverbial waters that Miriam walked. And sometimes the difference between doubt and faith is an act, like she does, by putting the baby in the basket.

Rachel: And I don’t think they’re in opposition. I don’t think faith and doubt are in opposition. I think they’re I tension, but they’re not in opposition. I think the opposite of faith and doubt is despair and apathy. And that’s what her poetry pushes against. Yeah, resists that.

Matthew: I really hear something. I feel like the these two poems that we just read are very connected in the longing for a narrative. And by putting it in touch with the Haggadah, you're saying I'm longing for a narrative of how the past becomes the present. And by putting it in touch with this story, you're saying I'm longing for a narrative of how the present becomes the future. And it just is making me realize that part of what is so destabilizing about October 7th as an event is that it changes both the way we look at the past and the future. It throws both of those narratives in both directions into a sort of confusion. And I think that while she doesn't offer tidy answers, like what you're saying, Rachel, that the faith and the doubt are together and they're not collapsing into despair, just the choice to create poetry that is in touch with these biblical stories and these references to the Haggadah, while it doesn't create a new narrative that solves the distress in the poem, it leaves that open. It still just gives a little touch of something that resists despair. This is still somehow, we don't have a story, but we're in dialogue with story. And maybe for this tentative moment, that's enough of a life raft to hold on to.

Rachel: That's gorgeous, Matt.

Deborah: Yeah, really gorgeous.

Rachel: I want to close this conversation with a hint of the words we did not have a chance to record. When we finished our study of Osnat Eldar's poems, closing out with a poem about mothers, that is what the mother's experience of October 7th and bereavement and sleeplessness and concern over those whose children are in captivity as hostages or in serving as soldiers in the IDF. That poem is an exquisite poem. I really encourage you to buy the book. It's a phenomenal book.

So we studied that poem together, and then I turned to Deborah and Matt, and I asked them the question as to whether their experience on October 7th, they were both in Israel on October 7th, whether that had impacted their choices about the way they wanted to serve as rabbis. As it turns out, both of them independently chose to move back to Israel and to make Israel their home. Matt will be serving as a rabbi in Haifa, and Deborah is going to be an educator and rabbi for the Pardes Institute.

So I asked Deborah, and Deborah very poignantly said that October 7th, having been through that trauma and experienced that collective response to trauma with Am Yisrael, and she describes it very vividly where she was on October 7th, that experience of collective grieving decidedly, decisively turned her towards saying, "I belong to Am Yisrael. I belong to the land of Israel. I want to be part of that experience. That's where my heart is." And decided to move back. It's a place that I definitely call home, that many of us do call home. And whether we live there or we don't live there, our hearts are in the east. And I wish Deborah and Matt all the love and strength on their paths forward in Israel as rabbis. I think they're going to be awesome.

Jessica: Before we close out this episode, let's hear Michael Bonen read one more poem for us.

Michael: This poem is called Prayer. I'll discuss what the prayer is, and I'll just read it in English. And by the way, this poem, it's interesting too because you're not sure what it's about until you get about midway into the poem and then one word kind of reminds you what it's about.

When you return, we'll sit, just the two of us in the shower. You and the gentle water, I facing you, will gently wash your hair, erase all your memories. We'll sing to you the song of the hyacinth and of the rain tickling the window. I'll carefully clean from between your toes every trace of the tunnels. I will tell you about the moon that shone so many nights when you weren't here. I'll wipe the tears off your face. The gentle water will wash them away. I will braid your hair, dress you in pajamas, just the two of us in

bed, and a caring hug, hope, love, fear, and a prayer that there will never be a next time.

This is a poem of presumably a mother with a child who's being held hostage. And that the mother is saying, not if you'll return, but when you'll return, this is what we're going to do. And it's a poem about cleansing and caring and gentle, loving care. And as I said, you're not sure what it's about. The memories have to be erased, but as soon as you get to that word tunnels, you know where this child was. The reference to the Song of the Hyacinth is a Leah Goldberg lullaby.

I recently taught this poem to a group and there were two women who grew up in Israel and said, "Oh yeah, we know that poem," and they sang it. So I don't know if anybody here knows the song, but it's a lullaby and it and you have rain tickling the window and you have the moon and that's what the mother is going to sing to the child. And again, this is, at least when you first read this, I think you think of a small child, but this could be a child who's an adult. And the poem is addressed to a female, but could be any child and could be any age.

But what I hesitated about there was there's a line here, "I'll wipe the tears off your face." Actually, that's I will wipe my tears off your face if you look at the Hebrew. I don't know how that got lost here, but because that was, that's not what it was supposed to be. And what I talked about before about saying this is a prayer, the prayer at the very end you see is a prayer that there will never be a next time. So you can almost say, well, technically the prayer is not that the child will come back. There was, yes, you will return. I know you'll return. What I'm praying for is that there'll never be a next time.

Jessica: Thank you for joining us for this episode of Speaking Torah. We want to thank Emily Holey for our logo and Hebrew College Rabbinical graduate and composer, Rabbi Jackson Mercer, for our theme music, Esa Einai. To learn more about Hebrew College, please visit hebrewcollege.edu/podcast. And remember to subscribe, like, and rate Speaking Torah wherever you listen to podcasts. I'm your host, Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal. Thank you for joining us on Speaking Torah.