

**PESACH MESSAGE 5786**

"A kippah and a Kiddush cup."

This was Keith Siegel's request when he emerged from 484 days of unimaginable torture at the hands of Hamas in Gaza.

His daughter, Shir, had gently asked him what he would like for his first Friday night at home. Despite not having a religious background, his instinct was to make Kiddush. He chose to celebrate his freedom with a timeless expression of his Jewish identity.

His request carries a remarkable echo of our exodus from Egypt.

As the Israelites miraculously crossed the Red Sea, they burst into song: "Zeh Keili v'anveihu – This is my God and I will glorify Him."

The Talmud teaches that we glorify Hashem by beautifying our mitzvot – by wearing tefillin with pride, lighting Shabbat candles with care or by embracing our Jewish practice as a privilege to be cherished and enjoyed.

Other commentators including Onkelos, Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Ramban note that the word 'V'anveihu' comes from the root 'naveh' which means a home. Therefore, v'anveihu means: "I will build Him a home." From the very birth of our nation, we have built places where the Divine presence could dwell – the Sanctuary, the Temple, and now our Shuls.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch takes it one step further with the literal translation: "I will become a home for Hashem." It's not only buildings, but people. Not only institutions, but identities. Our very lives are to be living testimonies to Hashem's presence.

That was Keith Siegel's instinct. When liberated, he chose to become a home for Hashem. His quiet request contains a powerful message for us all.

Recent years have tested us profoundly. We have faced hatred on our streets, fear in our communities and deep concern for the future of Israel. And yet, alongside the pain, we have witnessed extraordinary moments of salvation and resilience. Against all odds, every single hostage has returned home. Israel has not only endured, but in many ways has grown stronger. Despite unspeakable targeted acts of terror and the continued scourge of anti-Jewish hatred, Jewish life in the Diaspora continues to flourish. These are astonishing modern-day miracles.

So how should we respond to them?

Let us not be tempted by anger nor retreat into fear. Both responses are understandable, but corrosive. If we allow hatred to shape us, then our enemies still control us. If we define ourselves only through suffering, we surrender the joy and purpose at the heart of Judaism.

The Torah's answer is: Don't curse your enemies, nor hide who you are. The most powerful and effective answer to those who seek to intimidate and attack us is to wear our identity with yet greater pride. To walk taller and sing louder. To strengthen Jewish homes, Shuls and schools. To enhance our commitment to Jewish life. That was the quiet heroism of Keith Siegel. And that must be our heroism too.

Valerie and I wish you all a chag kasher v'sameach,



**Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE**

