

Shabbat Message from the Chancellor

October 20, 2023

Dear Members of the JTS Community,

It has been hard to concentrate lately, as our hearts and minds remain focused on the impact of the horrible massacres of October 7 and the uncertainty about what may come next for the IDF soldiers defending Israel against terrorism. So many in the JTS family have acute fears for the lives of their family and friends in Israel; some are overcome with anguish at the unknown fate of loved ones held captive, and still others are grieving those who lost their lives. Some are worried about how this will impact the entire world. Our hearts go out to our co-workers, their loved ones, and to all those impacted. Sadly, we have also been reminded that there are pockets of hate here at home that require vigilance. At the same time, we feel genuine concern for how innocent souls in the land dominated by Hamas can somehow be protected as the evil is rooted out.

All of this creates a great deal of anxiety and stress. We can see the strain and the worry in the faces of those we see in the corridors, in meetings, and in classrooms. Let us use this moment to redouble our natural instincts to offer understanding and care to one another. I have noted how members of our community, and especially some of our students, have courageously spoken out and written to challenge shallow and uninformed arguments in the public arena, and have done so in voices that are both confident and morally sensitive. This gives us great pride and feelings of gratitude. At times, words still fail us, and that has its own authenticity amid these difficult days. So, I want to underscore how important it is for all of us to take care of one another and also ourselves. We need to do that for our sakes, and for the sakes of the many circles we come in contact with, at home, at work, and in Israel, who will need our strength. That self-care begins with the bonds of compassion for one another; we should make special efforts to reach out to those with whom we share our lives, letting them know that they are not alone. We can also signal that their concern for us is deeply appreciated as well.

As members of this community, we know that self-care also happens when we find sufficient calm to focus on study, teaching, and our work here. I know well that this does not come easily at times such as these, and I certainly am not advising that we ignore the events that are still unfolding, and what they call us to do. But we also have experienced the sustenance that comes from involvement in the study, teaching, and promotion of Torah, sustenance that then gives us the ability to act morally in a world that needs us. We understand the extra effort that this takes, especially for students, and we nevertheless hope that you see your studies as a life-sustaining gift.

I also reassure you that we, in conjunction with our Columbia/Barnard partners, and with the New York Police Department, continue to take all possible measures to ensure the physical safety of everyone at JTS.

Please remember that there are many sources of support available to you at JTS during this distressing time, including your deans, Student Life and Residence Life staff, and our Counseling Center (counseling@jtsa.edu). It is also important to keep to a routine, stay active, maintain relationships and socialize, eat and sleep well, and take breaks from social media and news outlets.

We pray, advocate, and act as much as we can, for Israel to be freed from the threat of terrorism, and for that to be accomplished without inflicting unnecessary harm on innocent human beings. May that come to be. *Ken Y'hi Ratzon*

I am wishing everyone a Shabbat of peace and tranquility.

Shabbat Shalom.

Chancellor Shuly Rubin Schwartz