

Vision From Israel: Holding On to Hope in the New Year

One of the many miracles of Israel is that here, the words of the Bible come to life, in the Holy Land where they took place. And, as Israel continues to fight against Hamas terror in the wake of the attacks of Oct. 7, it is God's Word—written here in the Holy Land—in which we can all find hope.

In Psalm 63, written in “the desert of Judah,” King David says to God, “I cling to you; your right hand upholds me” (v. 8, NIV). It's a beautiful scene to envision: God's people holding tightly to Him as He lifts us up in His loving grasp.

It's a vision—and a promise—that Jews have held on to through thousands of years of difficult exile, and one which we now are praying over, stronger than ever, in the days since Oct. 7.

It's this visualization, of reaching out to God and having Him hold me in the palm of His hand, which gave me so much hope and comfort, on a recent visit I made to southern Israel. It was exactly the divine strength I needed as I stood just a half-mile from the Gaza border, in a kibbutz which was destroyed on the black Sabbath of Oct. 7, with 10% of their population being killed or kidnapped.

With shaking legs, I went inside what was once the beautiful home of a family with two small children. Yet all I saw was destruction.

On Oct. 7, when the parents heard Hamas terrorists had entered their town, they took their children immediately to the bomb shelter. After throwing grenades into the home, terrorists tried to force their way into the shelter to murder the family.

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The father wrestled with the terrorists—holding the bomb shelter door closed as the attackers tried to open it. For five long minutes, they fought like this. Then a terrorist threw a grenade at the door, thinking it would blow wide open.

Instead, thank Hashem, the grenade blew off the outside handle and slammed the bomb shelter door shut! Because of this miracle, the terrorist suddenly had no way to get the door open. He left the home (and sadly, went on to murder and terrorize other innocent Jews next door).

Visiting the shrapnel-riddled home, I could clearly see the footprint on the outside of the bomb shelter door, as well as the damage left from the grenade's blast. And I could see the inside handle, which this loving father had held onto, just as he held on to hope that God would miraculously save his family, which God did.

During the same visit, I went to another house that had come under attack, this one completely destroyed. The charred remains had once been the home of an elderly couple, both of them artists. He had built the house from wood with his own hands. She had a pottery studio where she made beautiful art from the clay of the Holy Land. And then the terrorists came and set fire to this couple's wooden dream home. They did this to lure first responders, sent to put out the fire, whom they then planned to kill. But the kibbutz's first responders realized the trap and didn't respond.

As I looked at the ashes left of this home, I was told that the couple were burned so badly that authorities haven't yet been able to identify the wife's remains, while all that was left of her husband was one and a half ribs.

Nothing survived but ashes. Nothing was left but dust—and some

of her pottery. I took a small pottery flower back to my home so that her spirit and memory will continue to live in my heart. I will always hold onto it, to remember to hold onto hope.

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Just as King David clung to God during the hardest time of his life, so too God's people continue cling to Him for hope and help during the hardest moments.

I saw an amazing interview with a freed hostage recently—a mother who had been held in captivity in Gaza with her own two little kids. For two months, the family was held hostage. For two months, the family did not see the light of day. But for two months, the family held on to hope.

Each day, when her 3-year-old daughter would be starving and ask for pancakes, the mother would lovingly answer, "We will have pancakes at home very soon, my sweetest."

When her daughter would ask to go to the park, as they sat in the dark and cold terror tunnels of Gaza, this heroic mother answered that "Very soon we will be playing on the slides in Israel."

Despite not knowing if or when they would ever find freedom, this godly mother held on to hope and didn't let her children lose hope, either.

Holding on to hope in life, especially in the hard times, is the biblical recipe not just to survive, but to thrive.

So while we all enter the new year in an unpredictable state, riddled with fear for the future, let's pledge to actively remember that there is one source of hope, which is accessible to us all. As people of faith, let's vow to never forget that no matter how hopeless our situation might seem, if we hold on to our hope in God, He will hold on to us. {eo}

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