

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## UT-HI L'RATZON TAMID...

May the service of Your people Israel always find favor with You.

During this aftermath year of October 7th, I discovered many things I hadn't known before. One thing that surprised me was the reaction of those people directly involved: families and friends of those murdered, released hostages and their families. What was new to me - in my FFB ignorance - was the spirituality, the religious ties these "secular" people had.

Most of the people directly affected by the events of October 7th, those living in the area and those visiting were not what you would call "religious". And yet, what I discovered was that the word "secular" doesn't necessarily mean without religion. We've all heard and read of people who started baking challah hoping it would be for a z'chut for someone missing. The idea that baking challah can be effective in this way is a practice well-known to the religious community. And yet, somehow, this became a vehicle of belief and hope for these people. We've also heard of people who took upon themselves the laws of kashrut;

or to keep Shabbat; or to daven with the hope that these things would turn the tide. The return to the comfort and hope of Judaism somehow pulled them. I watched as clearly non-religious people approached the memorials set up at Nova and proceeded to recite a chapter of T'hilim. Released hostages have reported having "kept Shabbat" in some way while in captivity: refusing to cook for their captives; learning to say Shalom Aleichem in Arabic; reciting kiddush even over water - just to keep the connection to the fact that they were Jews. One captive refused to eat on Yom Kippur; another one - with his arms covered in tattoos - said the bracha over Tefillin every day, even though he didn't have any.

Do I have that intensive kavana?  
Would I sacrifice like that?

How does this happen? Why do we automatically assume that if one isn't SHOMER TORAH U'MITZVOT, that he keeps nothing and doesn't care about it? We must be wrong.

In light of this new understanding, I found a more sincere way to connect with this part of klal Yisrael, contained in our T'fila. At the beginning of the last three blessings of the Amida, we ask Gd to receive our current t'fila and, hopefully, the future t'fila that will accompany our sacrifices, willingly. The last few

words came to mean something additional to me: UT-HI L'RATZON TAMID AVODAT YISRAEL AMECHA: may the AVODA, the service of Your nation Israel always be desirable (and, thus, acceptable) to You. I started to understand these words to refer, not only to our established avoda, the technical t'fila, but avoda - service - in general. What do I mean? That the avoda that Jews do when they don't know any better, even if it isn't in the technically prescribed form, be accepted by You; for it is really LISH'MA. In whatever way the people relate to You, in their incomplete knowledge of Torah, may it always be desired.

This form of avoda, the heartfelt reaching out to You in their own way, may it always be desirable and accepted - with love. It is, indeed, precious. 🌸