

Mayor, Council Members,

My name is Rabbi Irwin Keller. I am and have been for the past fifteen years, the rabbi at Congregation Ner Shalom, located on the plaza here in Cotati.

I am here today speaking on my own behalf, and not that of Ner Shalom itself. In our congregation of 140 households, there are a range of viewpoints. And we, like most Jews right now, are still experiencing shock from October 7th, and some of us land in different places as a result of that trauma.

However, the membership of Ner Shalom knows that I am here today to speak in support of the resolution for ceasefire. I have received 30 emails from congregants, 29 of which expressed gratitude and relief for my taking this stance.

I want you to know that my own connection to the State of Israel is deep and lifelong. I first visited at age 16 and have been there more times than I can count. I spent a year of my college education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. My husband is an Israeli citizen and served in the IDF. My elderly mother- and father-in-law live there still. My husband's family lost two cousins on October 7th, murdered at Kibbutz Be'eri.

I remain in a state of deep sadness, both from the events of October 7th and from the extremity of Israel's reprisal. A reprisal was foreseeable, but what we have seen in these three months goes far beyond anyone's imaginings.

American Jews are expected to defend Israel; there is a connection that we have, born of a shared history of suffering. It makes it difficult to break ranks.

But the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Shabbat 54b) instructs us that anyone who has the capacity to protest injustice that is being done by members of their household and does not do so – they are considered as if they too were committing that injustice.

The same, Talmud tells us, holds for those who can but do not protest injustice in their town. And those who can but do not protest injustice in the world. It is our Jewish obligation to speak out.

I know that a ceasefire is not peace. But a ceasefire is not nothing. It is the first step in any solution, in any future prospect of peace. Every additional day of this war makes the chances for peace slimmer. Every additional day of this war is simply unbearable.

Ceasefire cannot happen without world support, particularly without the push of the US government. And so, before one more Palestinian child is killed, and before one more Israeli soldier is killed, let us pass this resolution and ask our government to be peacemakers. Let hostages be returned. Let the bombs be still. Let everyone begin to mourn the terrible losses. And after a good, long breath, let us find the new way, the new idea, the new path that can come as a blessing.

Thank you.