

It was the 32nd president of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who said in his inaugural address: The only thing we have to fear is...fear itself.”

I have long disagreed with this statement because there is much in life that warrants legitimate fear. Like many of you, I have experienced situations where a loss was on the horizon, and the greatest fear was that potential would be realized. That sounds like a scenario that produces real and legitimate fear.

There are times when physical safety is at risk. I am mindful of the Second Intifada, when getting on a bus in Israel, a daily necessity, was a petrifying experience because there was a chance you might not make it to your location.

Now, we face a terrifying time. Since the assassinations of the heads of terrorist and militaristic organizations, Iran and Hezbollah have vowed to attack the Jewish State with an all-out offensive. Some are predicting that there will be at least 1,000 rockets and drones launched toward Israel simultaneously. As a frame of reference, the last all-out attack against Israel from Iran and its proxies was comprised of 300 rockets and drones that were thankfully prevented by Israel and her allies from fulfilling their horrific potential. Iran and Hezbollah have long threatened the destruction of Israel, and this feels more possible than it has ever been.

As you can hear, there is much to be afraid of. So, how do we carry that fear?

The rabbis of the rabbinic tradition taught that miracles to the significant levels of the biblical period have come to an end, such as the splitting of the Sea of Reeds or the pillar of fire that protected the Israelites from the pursuing Egyptian army. Therefore, instead, we rely on the actions of human beings. Rabbi Harold Schulweis so brilliantly proposed that miracles can never happen if someone stands off to the side with their arms folded. So, of course, we pray; that is what we so often do, and we pray for the strength and abilities of the human beings who will face the most dangers as they pursue safety, security, and peace. We petition the divine for the strength they need to endure what is necessary. And we're not sure what is necessary, and that is fear-inducing, too.

When I work with our B-Mitzvah students to prepare their Shabbat reflections for their special days, they often discuss their anxieties as they look toward the celebration. How are they going to do? Will they be able to exhibit the skills that they've been practicing for months upon months—actually, for years with religious education?

“What if I get it wrong?” They asked me. “What if I forget the melodies, mispronounce the words, or freeze in the moment?” I respond: “Let's do an exercise. Tell me, what is the worst thing that could happen?” They will share that perhaps the worst thing that could happen to them is that they stand up at the pulpit, feeling unprepared to share with the community all they have learned, and they are met with silence. They answer the best thing that could happen is that they do such an amazing job that everyone stands up and applauds them. And the final

question I ask: “What is most likely to happen?” That’s by far the most important question because it bases their feelings on reality when they might otherwise spin out of control.

So, in the context of the vengeance and destruction vowed by Iran and these terrorist organizations, what are the worst, best, and most likely things to happen? I do not know if there is a most accurate answer to these questions, and that might be what is evoking the significant levels of fear during this time.

Author John Hagel III's recent book, *The Journey Beyond Fear*, explores the concept of fear primarily in a social and professional context. However, there is much to learn from his guidance about how we can react during this time.

He teaches that in times of realistic fear, the most effective tool we have as humans is to utilize our gift of communication. We can formulate our words to express our feelings, and our souls thirst for that opportunity.

In this week’s Torah portion, Parashat Matot, we explore the power of words, primarily within the context of vows and promises. The biblical text communicates so effectively that words have tremendous power and weight, so we should choose them well.

Hagel also proposes that fear is often a motivator to address different potential situations—not the best motivator, but one nonetheless. We can most effectively use fear by allowing it to turn us toward what is most important, namely community.

In a community, we find the all-important elements that can give us the strength to carry on when we may be consumed by fear. In a community, we find comfort and strength. How do we, as Jews know this to be true? We know this from some of those difficult times in our lives when we experience loss.

Our siblings in faith often share with me just how valuable they think our shiva period and process are to the sustenance of the mourners and their loved ones. Not all faith traditions have the practice of inviting people to the home of the bereaved for seven days to provide comfort and strength to the people who need it most. The words and actions, which are thoughtfully prescribed by our tradition, build an environment of strength that comes from community.

We have been in a long period of shiva - over 300 days since October 7th. And where have we found strength? I know personally that I have found tremendous strength within our BHBE community - and I hope you have as well.

Let us continue to turn toward one another during this time of legitimate fear. As we yearn for strength and comfort, we can find it in each other as we pray for a time when we only know peace and security for the Jewish world as a whole and the State of Israel.