



## Marching to Save the Hostages

There is a National March for the Hostages this Sunday. Click here <https://forms.gle/38gAkUljwYrztce7> to register and be sent the start location. We gather from 2pm and march to Downing Street for a rally at 4pm.

The March is organised by the Board of Deputies and sponsored by all (non-Chareidi) religious denominations, including Masorti Judaism, as well as communal leadership organisations and the Hostages and Missing Families Forum. The awful photos that have emerged of starving hostages, in inhuman conditions, are appalling. We call for the immediate unconditional release of all hostages, alive and dead. This, of course, is uncontroversial.

Original publicity for the March also included a call to Prime Minister Starmer to condition the recognition of a Palestinian state on the release of hostages, stating that doing otherwise risks legitimising extremism. This, of course, is arguable, but not uncontroversial.

And the original publicity for March featured one sponsor with a clear Israeli political affiliation, Herut Anglia – associated with Israel's Likkud party. This, I would argue, was a mistake.

Subsequent publicity has refocussed solely on the question of release of the hostages. "We are united in one clear, urgent demand: the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. Regardless of our diverse political views, this is not a political issue - it is a human one. It transcends party lines, ideologies, and national borders.

Just as in British society, where differing views on government coexist, so too in Israel - a vibrant democracy where debate is a sign of strength, not weakness. The march on Sunday is a powerful testament to that democratic spirit, and to our community's unwavering commitment to the hostages and their families. Our collective voice is unwavering in calling for their safe return: Bring Them Home Now!

The time is now. The hostages don't have time to lose. We need everyone there!"

Herut's sponsoring logo has been removed. Arms have been twisted; communal politics at work. This, I argue, is good news.

I don't think this is a minor issue. Of course, it pales in comparison to the experience of 671 days of capture and now starvation. But we are watching the British Jewish Community work out the relationship between love of Israel in its totality, and support of its government. I'm often pulled into these arm-twisting encounters. I think they are healthy. The sad reality, of course, is that there is no such thing as 'simply' showing full support for Israel without expressing a position on the proper response to the invasion of 7<sup>th</sup> October, not even when it comes to the question of the hostages. While the responsibility for the capture and imprisonment of the hostages could not be clearer – Hamas and her allies deserve our utter approbation – the reason the hostages remain in captivity is more complex. The leadership provided by Prime Minister Netanyahu is political. The right-wing of his cabinet have been extremely political. So too are the campaigning efforts of more progressive voices. We shouldn't be shying away from politics. And we certainly shouldn't

shy from seeking to engage across lines of disagreement. I encourage all to attend the rally on Sunday.

Two weeks ago, I offered to speak with those who take a different position to me on the question of a public letter critiquing the Israeli government in its pursuit of this war. Several of you reached out, we've spoken. Thank you. We have had frank political disagreement. I have much to reflect upon. I've also been told that, publicly criticising the government of Israel is immoral, un-Jewish, or doing Hamas' work. I simply don't accept that. For the past three weeks we have read Jeremiah's critique of the first Israelite state. Trenchant doesn't come close. Just before that we read the verse that calls us to *Truly critique your fellow*. Judaism has never valued uniformity.

In this year of marking the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the end of the World War II, I've been reflecting on Winston Churchill's speech to parliament on VE Day, "The strength of the Parliamentary institution has been shown to enable it, at the same moment, to preserve all the title-deeds of democracy while waging war in the most stern and protracted form." War shouldn't stifle debate. We are not weaker when we disagree.

In this week of marking the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima, I, like many of us, I know, am struck by the still echoing uncertainty of the result of the dropping of that bomb; moral stain or necessary herald of an era of peace. These things are worth arguing about. Lives – and every life is sacred – are at stake.

May peace come. May the hostages be released,

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Jeremy

P.S. I will be taking some leave in the coming two weeks. All services will run as normal and pastoral needs will be met. I'm particularly grateful to those who will take the opportunity of a quieter time in the year to support our regular Minyanim.