

Reflection from Rabbi Jacqueline Ninio OAM

The world changed for Jewish people on October 7th and the world changed for me a little over a week before, when, the day before Yom Kippur, my father died. We had a few hours of shiva before Kol Nidrei and the shloshim ended a few days later, with the beginning of Sukkot. I was reeling from Dad's sudden death and that the usual mourning periods were cut short by the festival calendar. I felt that I had not had the chance to grieve and take time to mourn before Simchat Torah arrived. I attended services but stepped outside for the dancing, it was too overwhelming to be in a space of such celebration as I was mired in grief. As I waited alone, separated from the community, I heard the first whispers of something happening in Israel. At that moment, I had no idea of the magnitude, the horror of what was unfolding; I only knew that there was something happening on the Gaza border. I said a silent prayer while the music and dancing wafted through, not knowing that it was the last time for over a year, our community would dance without the darkness of the events ignited with the terror of that day, casting its shadow on everything. I think back to those moments of quiet, the holding of breath as we waited for news, in blissful ignorance of what was to come.

As the days, weeks and months have unfolded, our Jewish community has grieved alongside me. I often think of the loss of my Dad one person, as I look at the numbers of lives lost, hostages stolen, each one of them, a life, a world. We have walked the path of mourning together, as we have experienced the world changing around us. We have felt the once steady ground beneath our feet moving and shaking and all that we thought we knew, shifting forever.

But amidst the sadness and loss, the grief and the struggle, we have found comfort in each other's arms. We have turned to community and felt the power of knowing we are not alone, that we walk hand in hand with one another. Just as we sit with mourners, we comfort, we listen, we remember and we try to walk into life forever changed, to find the steady ground once more, we have done so for one another. We have found light and inspiration in stories of heroism, selflessness and love. Israelis and Jews around the world leapt into action, doing everything we can, each one in our own way, to contribute and bring healing and through our hands and our hearts we have found hope, comfort and strength.

Now, as I come to the end of the time of saying kaddish for my Dad, as my year of mourning draws to its conclusion, I can't believe that the hostages are still captive, the war continues and the pain and trauma of the ongoing losses is still being inflicted. The mourning for our people is ongoing and is not coming to a

close. I hope and pray that this Rosh Hashana sees peace, everyone home in the arms of those they love and we can begin to heal together.