

Once, while on vacation, I joined a tour that explored a cave and natural tunnel system in southern Missouri that felt like it was shrinking smaller and tighter and growing darker with each step (because it was). Just when I was ready to turn around and walk back toward where we entered, I saw a glimmer of daylight ahead. That light energized me to endure the darkness and constriction. It, indeed, was the experience of a light at the end of the tunnel. I was grateful for that little light; I needed it most when searching the tunnel's dark space.

A light at the end of the tunnel is one of the most fitting descriptions of this week's Torah portion, Parashat Vayeshev, which details almost the entirety of Joseph's narrative from boyhood in his father's home to adulthood in Egypt. One of the most complicated parts of Joseph's story for us, the readers, is that we are familiar with how it ends. The Torah portion begins with tremendous pain when his jealous brothers throw Joseph into the pit. Then, thirteen chapters later, the narrative ends with Joseph ascending to the highest office imaginable in Egypt.

Just in this Torah Portion alone, we read the following narratives:

Jacob favors Joseph, and this angers Joseph's brothers.

Joseph has dreams in which he predicts reigning over his brothers, provoking them further. They decide to sell Joseph into slavery in Egypt.

In Egypt, the wife of Joseph's owner tries to seduce Joseph, and when he rejects her, she has him sent to prison.

Pharaoh's baker and butler have dreams in prison, and Joseph interprets them correctly.

Next week, we will see Joseph's extraordinary ascent.

This biblical literary journey highlights one of the most challenging aspects of existence: how difficult it is to live without knowing how everything will play out.

In the book of Genesis, we can empathize with Joseph's adventures, walking the tumultuous path with our biblical ancestor. Each time he faces an obstacle—whether his brothers throw him into the pit or sell him to the Ishmaelites, whether he is jailed or chastised—we know how it all ends with his success. This narrative mirrors our journey as a community, facing our own set of challenges and uncertainties.

As Jews, we have found ourselves on a tumultuous path since October 7th. Living in a world of conflict, war, antisemitism, hatred, malice, and violence directed toward the Jewish people. Throughout this, we never had the luxury of knowing how it would conclude if it ever would. It is not as if we could open the history book and skip to the end like we can with Joseph's story.

I wanted to call our attention to this feeling of wrestling with the unknown because we have reached another precipice. It is a moment of not knowing how it will conclude, but there is a sense of hope that now is the time it will.

According to certain media outlets, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with top security officials this week to iron out details for a ceasefire that could begin during Hanukkah. The CIA Director, William Burns, arrived in Qatar to negotiate.

Since October 7th, we have petitioned, prayed, marched, and lobbied, seeking the release of the hostages held in Gaza by the Hamas terrorists. We are incredibly grateful throughout the past year, a number of cherished hostages have safely returned home to their families either through release or rescue. However, there are still approximately 100 hostages being held in Gaza as we speak.

Throughout the week, I have spoken with community members who, like me, anxiously await the news of the outcome of these negotiations for a ceasefire that will hopefully end this conflict. Living in this transitional space is challenging.

Living with the unknown is difficult. Uncertainty is not easy. Yet, this is where we find ourselves. How we respond communicates much about who we are and what we hold dear.

The phrase 'light at the end of the tunnel' has been used to describe the current moment. It conveys two powerful messages. The first is that since October 7th, darkness has been pervasive, and we have fervently prayed and hoped for its end, striving to bring as much light as possible at every opportunity, both personally and communally. The second is the heartwrenching realization that many of the hostages may have been held in the tunnels under Gaza, not having seen or felt the sensation of daylight for hundreds of days. We collectively envision them finally seeing daylight for the first time and feeling the embrace of their loved ones, a vision so powerful it is almost overwhelming.

When I was in the middle of that tunnel in Missouri all those years ago, I remember thinking how powerful the darkness was. Yet, I knew that the light was there, just beyond my reach. Once you have left behind the light of the entrance, you look forward to seeing that same light again, just in a different location: the light ahead. As a local and international community, we hope to see the actualization of the light ahead. We pray for the safe return of the hostages and a lasting peace, speedily in our days.