

Do you know the Australian photographer Anne Geddes?

She’s famous for taking adorable pictures of babies dressed up as flowers, sitting in flower pots, and other cute settings.

Well, I used to be a big fan of her photos, having a number of them framed and utilizing her photo calendar every year.

The pictures were beyond sweet.

But there was one that was my favorite, and it wasn’t as famous as most of her others.

The photo, called “Crocodile Tears,” pictures a 13-month-old named Sarah, who was startled by the camera flashes so much that we can clearly see her eyes welling up and a giant tear flowing forth.

Simultaneously, she’s smiling— a tiny, precious, uncertain, smile.

For me, this photo was the best one.

A lot of babies look cute dressed up as flowers and teddy bears, but something about Sarah always moved me.

The combination of the tears **and** the smile - spoke to me, as a reminder that

sometimes we are hopeful and sad simultaneously.

Yes, Kohelet says there is a time for everything, a time for joy, and a time for tears - but sometimes these moments come together.

And when they do, when we smile through our tears, find connection amidst our sadness,

and hope during heartbreak -
these are the most beautiful and profound moments of life.

And we see one such moment in our Torah portion this week.
As the story of Joseph reaches its climactic moment,
our forefather stands in front of the brothers who previously sold him into slavery and
lied about his death,
finally able to tell them the truth about who he is
and to rejoice in their reconnecting.
Two powerful facts were shared about this moment.
Firstly, the Torah tells us Joseph cries out,
so loud that all can hear even from a different room.
And then, the Torah also tells us -
he lets his brothers completely off the hook.
He tells them he is not upset,
that he believes his path all along was from God
so that he could be in the position of power, he was now in.
And during the tearful embraces that follow, we realize
that while Joseph has come to good terms with his past,
that he says he is completely okay,
his cries remind us that inside,
somewhere,
he is still a little broken.

The potential for finding a way to keep moving forward,
despite our pain,
to forgive, and to focus on love;
is one of the most powerful lessons I believe we get
in all of the Torah.

Forgiveness, acceptance, and hopefulness can help us continue - but it doesn't take the pain away.

And that's okay.

We can cry out and forgive simultaneously.

Possibly the most beautiful example of this lesson occurred this past week, in Israel. When I heard the words of Iris Haim, the mother of Yotam Haim, one of the Israelis taken hostage by Hamas on October 7th - who was tragically shot and killed by IDF fire in Gaza, she wrote and spoke a message directly to the soldiers who were involved in killing her son. She said:

Hello to the 7828th Bislamach Brigade
in the 17th battalion.

This is Iris Haim.

I am Yotam's mother.

I wanted to tell you that I love you very much
and I am hugging you from afar.

I know that everything that happened
is **not** your fault at all.

It is no one's fault aside from Hamas-
may their name and memory be obliterated.

I want you to take care of yourselves
and remember always that you are doing the best, most important thing
in the world,

that could help us, the people of Israel.

We all need you healthy.

We need you safe and sound.

So don't hesitate for even a minute if you see a terrorist.
Don't think that you killed a hostage intentionally.
You have to protect yourselves because
that's the only way you will be able to defend us.
As soon as you are able,
you are invited to come to visit us,
anyone who is interested.
We want to look into your eyes,
and we want to hug you
and tell you that you did the right thing,
as painful as it is to say that.
What you did was probably
the best thing at the moment.
None of us is judging you or mad at you,
not me, not my husband,
not my kids,
not Yotam.
We love you very much.
That is all.

This message both broke and healed my heart.
Since October 7th,
Jewish hearts have been broken and fragile.
Our sadness and grief
over the gruesome attacks of Hamas on Israel
and the resulting times of war
are in everything we do.

As we join together to welcome Shabbat,
The people of Israel still mourn,
still run to seek Shelter,
and are still called on, to defend Jewish existence.
And while our hearts break for those who have been lost,
those living in constant fear,
and especially those still being held hostage,
we in world Jewry can respond with the fervor of our Israeli brothers and sisters
and the resilience of Jewish people throughout history.

We bring comfort to one another.
We forgive each other.
We find ways to keep looking forward
and to help others do the same.
That doesn't mean we are not heartbroken.
What it means, is that our pain,
no matter how great,
doesn't negate our resilience.

And this is the message I want to leave you with tonight.

Iris Haim embodies the best of Jewish values.
Like Joseph before her,
she brings comfort to those who have caused her pain.
Even though her heart is broken,
like little Sarah in the photo,
her tears continue to flow,

and yet she manages to make a kind and brave face to the world.

All of them, this Shabbat,

remind us that in life

we don't have to choose between being brave and broken.

We can, and often are, both simultaneously.

And this doesn't negate our strength.

On the contrary,

our sadness makes our kindness that much sweeter.

Our brokenness makes our bravery, that much more impressive.

This Shabbat,

may we all have the inner strength

of both the biblical Joseph

and the modern Israeli mother.

So that even when tears flow,

we can find something in us that helps us

be brave and kind to others.

Shabbat Shalom.