

# Rabbis: After the hostages' return, Chicago must lead with hope and resolve

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*Eleven-year-old Tamar cuts yellow ribbons from a tree during a release ceremony outside Skokie Valley Agudath Jacob Synagogue on Oct. 13, 2025, to honor those captured and held hostage by Hamas. (Armando L. Sanchez/Chicago Tribune)*

The release of the last living hostages held by Hamas marks a historic moment that may finally signal a turning point after two long years of war, tragedy and suffering. This breakthrough represents not just a victory for those hostages and their families; it also is a testament to the enduring power of hope. Now, this hope must guide us to shun the cycles of destruction that have plagued Israel and Gaza for far too long.

The Chicago Jewish community spent the last two years praying, advocating, marching and waiting for the hostages to come home. The Psalmist wrote, “When God returned the captives of Zion, we were like dreamers. Then our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues with joyous song.” No other piece of liturgy so eloquently captures the

emotions we felt as we stayed up late into the night to watch the hostages reunite with their families.

And yet this gratitude is tempered with caution. We pray that this ceasefire will hold, but the situation is fragile. Hamas has failed to return the bodies of all the murdered hostages, and political leaders have hinted that renewed conflict could still come. We know this is not yet the end of suffering — but perhaps, at last, the beginning of healing.

To avoid a recurrence of the devastation, we must acknowledge how we arrived here. The Hamas attacks on Oct. 7, 2023, that triggered this war were more than just an assault on Israel; they were an attempt to undermine the very idea of peace. The purpose of these strikes was to sabotage any prospective diplomatic breakthroughs, particularly the potential normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Hamas feared that peace between Israel and its neighbors would prevent its strategic goal of destroying the Jewish state.

For Israel, this war was not just about rescuing the hostages — it was about safeguarding the survival of its residents. Hamas officials have openly vowed that the rampage that left more than 1,200 dead and took more than 250 hostage was only the beginning — there would be more to come. The repeated wars initiated by Hamas since violently expelling its Palestinian rivals from Gaza in 2007, five wars in the 15 years between 2008 and 2023, underscore a painful truth: Hamas' rule ensures Gaza's recurring destruction.

We must break the cycle of perpetual war. While this ceasefire holds, we must focus on the possibility of reconciliation, peace and mutual understanding. Achieving these goals means giving up on the single most destructive ideology in the history of the conflict: the dream of eliminating Israel. This goal, often referred to as anti-Zionism, shuns collaboration, refuses compromise and demands ongoing conflict. It's time to end the forever-war against Israel's existence.

Here in Chicago, we must actualize this aim by rejecting the language of hate and division that echoes from our streets to our campuses. We must reject the idea of a world without Israel and instead embrace a future in which Israelis and Palestinians live side by side, in peace and security. The calls for the destruction of Israel, embodied in dangerous slogans such as "from the river to the sea" or "globalize the intifada," must be cast aside. These chants are calls for violence, and they undermine the possibility of peace. Supporters of Palestinian rights must confront the reality that a call for Israel's destruction is a demand to renew the war, prevent peace and prolong the suffering of Palestinians.

The Jewish community in Chicago is committed to a future in which violence is no longer a tool of politics, but a relic of the past. We invite all our neighbors, of every faith and background, to join us in building bridges of understanding, compassion and respect. Let us make our city a model for coexistence, where disagreement never turns into demonization, and where coexistence is the goal.

If we want to finally realize a long-term end to the bloodshed and suffering in Israel and in Gaza, all of our fellow Chicagoans must join us in shunning anti-Zionist extremism and start working toward a world where resolution is a reality.

The last two years of conflict must not define the future of the Middle East. Israelis and Gazans deserve a future built on safety and healing, not violence and destruction. It is time to turn the page, to build and to create. For the sake of the hostages who have returned home, and for those still suffering, it is time to take the next step.

The moment for peace is now. The hope that has already brought us so far must guide us toward a better tomorrow.

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