



## Understanding the Situation in Israel and Gaza: Don't Keep it Simple.

*Written by Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu*

We often speak about keeping things simple. When life threatens to overwhelm, when worries build, and the temptation is to ruminate on the detail, we say: keep it simple. And it works, as it should.

Except. For this one thing.

As many in our community are aware, I came back from Israel recently. I went there to learn. With the opportunity to travel from the south to Haifa in the north. To walk on the pathways and into the ruins of Kibbutz Nir, on the border with Gaza. To see also the gardens attended by the shared society volunteers in Haifa by the sea. Where people learn together to nourish the soil.

To hear the righteous rage of citizens, at how their leaders have failed them. To spend time with families of hostages. To listen to political activists and rabbis.

Don't give into the temptation to keep it simple. It is not simple.

The story of the Akedah, the binding of Isaac, comes to its end only when Abraham, stretching out over his son Isaac with a knife in his hand, ready to sacrifice him, looks up and sees a ram caught up by its horns in a *bush*— in Hebrew, the word is *svach*. I love this word because it is the root of the word *mesubach*, the same three letter root of the tangled thornbush; *mesuvach* means 'complicated.' Israel is a complicated place. The coming months will see an inquiry and an election. Change is coming.

Like a tangled bush there is a lot more to unpick.

We should not allow ourselves to let UK antisemitism shut down our thinking; we should celebrate the incredible fact that Reform Jews activists and organisations are leading the process of openness, leadership, accountability, and ultimately, I hope, healing. My colleague, Rabbi Yael Vurgan, in the south of Israel is the sole community rabbi. Only she was prepared to serve this marginal southern region, the Sha'ar ha Negev. A region full of idealistic and committed, decent and hardy people.

The Reform movement has worked closely alongside the movement in Israel for democracy and they have succeeded in their judicial challenge.

Today they stand alongside activists on the street and in city squares alongside the families of the hostages. After Shabbat in Hostage Square, Reform rabbis will lead *havdalah* as they

have done every week since October 7. They refuse to believe in the dispensability of human life.

Some things are simple. Accountability. This is really quite simple. Trust. Knowing who is telling the truth. Simple values such as building a Jewish state for the good of all of its citizens. The simple truth that most human beings only want to live in peace. Most, but not all.

At a time when people all over Israel are grappling to understand, it is not appropriate to feel one knows all of the answers. The most appropriate messages are, grasp complexity, don't get injured by its thorns. Hold on to the simple and straightforward values of accountability and truth.

Plant anemones, these beautiful flowers of the south, let's grow them in the spring. Don't give into despair, our sisters and brothers need us. The saving of life is tangled up in complexity, just like Isaac's life.