**Angela Buchdahl:** I'll share that on Rosh Hashanah I was pushing my community to stay deeply engaged with Israel while it was in this existential crisis of the protest movement, and basically practically a civil war inside. And I use the story from the Talmud about conjoined twins, two heads/one body, and the way that you can tell if it's one or two people is you pour hot water on one head, and if the other head screams, then you'll know if it's one body. And it is a very strange analogy, but I guess there was something that even the ancient rabbis understood that sometimes when things are going well, you don't feel like you need the other, you can ignore the other. But…you're really…the true test is if that other head is crying out in pain, do you really not feel anything? And I guess what we learned is we do.

**Shlomo Nisanov:** I look in Israel as one before October 7th, then one after. The Israel I saw before October 7th, it was divided. It was to a point where the brothers were not talking to each other; sisters were not talking to each other: families were divided. But now what I saw we are one we are one big *mishpacha* (family),we are one big family. *Yachad nenatzeach*, together we will win this. But I'm also saddened because why do we need such a tragic event to bring us together, to make us realize…guys, you know, we have a common enemy and the common enemy doesn't care who you are, what color you are, what gender you are—*hiloni,* Farsi, Buchari, Ashkenazi—doesn't make a difference because whoever hates us hates us the same.

**Angela Buchdahl:** I'm Rabbi Angela Buchdahl from Central synagogue in New York.

**Shlomo Nisanov:** My name is Rabbi Shlomo Nisanov.I am the founding rabbi of Kehilat Sepahrdim of Ahavat Achim, Buchanan Jewish Center of Kew Garden Hills, from Queens, New York.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey listeners, it's Mishy. So as you know, during these incredibly difficult days we're trying to bring you voices we're hearing among and around us. These aren't stories, they're just quick conversations, or postcards really, that try to capture slivers of life right now.

Normally we bring you local perspectives. Our episode today, however, is a bit different. And in other ways, it isn't different at all. See, the nature of the attacks on October 7th, together with certain subsequent reactions around the world, have blurred the lines between Jews in Israel and Jews in the diaspora. Last week, the UJA Federation of New York brought over a delegation of 28 Jewish leaders—mainly rabbis and educators. On a jam packed 48-hour-long whirlwind of a trip to Israel.

We sat down with two very different members of the delegation—Reform Rabbi Angela Buchdahl,and Orthodox Rabbi Shlomo Nisanov—to hear what it feels like to visit Israel in the middle of a war. Ali Moller helped produce this piece.

**Mishy Harman:** Can you tell me a little bit about this delegation and this mission that you're on?

**Shlomo Nisanov:** So UJA Federation made a solidarity mission to show support for our brothers and sisters in Israel.

**Angela Buchdahl:** We've met with survivors of October 7th, with families of hostages, with other Israeli rabbis who are caring for their communities. We've seen and been gutted by so many of these devastating stories, and also been so inspired by, truly like, the unbelievable generosity of spirit that we've seen, and coordination, and organization of Israelis. We went to the hamal in Jerusalem that is, like, bustling with volunteers, and just the energy of people who have such a sense of purpose right now in this moment and have organized on their own. They really did this like from day one. And, it's also beautiful to see many different segments of Israeli society together, not just like, you know, *dati* and *hiloni* and people from different neighborhoods. But, you know, I saw a world renowned professor in his 70s, of Jewish history, sitting next to a 28-year-old doing the same job: basically trying to coordinate rides for people who needed rides, or goods that needed to get, and it didn't matter that he was a world renowned scholar. He was doing that work sitting at the table. So it's been

in some ways cracking open our hearts, and breaking us more, and in other ways deeply healing to just be here.

**Mishy Harman:** Tell me what's a moment…I mean, this has been a very intense two day trip for you, but what's a moment that's going to stay with you?

**Shlomo Nisanov:**The greatest moment is when you hear a father and mother talking about not knowing what is…what's happening with their child.

After this happened on October 7th, I came home, I gave a hug to my kids, I hug them, I held him as much as I could. The moment to realize that things could change in five, six hours. The world that we thought we were safe…the greatest army, the greatest everything came to shambles. How could such a thing happen? And that thing was a rude awakening for us that we shouldn't take things for granted, things could change.

I feel that Israel will not be the same. We are not the same. I am not the same; I am not the same person before October 7th, and I will not be the same person since, and I don't feel anybody should be.

**Mishy Harman:** How are you different?

**Shlomo Nisanov:** It made me realize that no matter how different we are from each other, we are the same. Coming from former Soviet Union, they hated my guts because I’m a Jew. It didn't matter to them. And I'm very proud, now more than ever, to be part of *Am Yisrael*; to be here at this moment just to listen to people. I think by us just being here speaks volumes. Action speaks louder than words. Seeing is believing.

**Angela Buchdahl:** I think every single one of us who came felt deeply that we needed to be here. And I mean, I think the message that we want to send is that we are one people—which I really feel in a deep way. I've never felt as connected to Israel and Israelis as I do right now. And I think that's part of the message that I both feel from Israelis and also want to share back, that I think that we not only share like a common text and some shared history, but there is some way in which our destiny is inextricably linked with each others. And I've heard from Israelis more than I've ever heard before: “We realize we also need America and American Jews, we understand that we're in his together.”

**Shlomo Nisanov:** Seeing people displaced; going to Yam Hamelach, meeting the people from Be’eri, how they are eating themselves and saying, why did I survive and my family member, my neighbor didn't survive.

When you hear 1400 people died, 240 people kidnapped, it just sounds like a number. When you sit down next to a person who his family member was killed, or to be in a funeral, just like we were, just we were before and got soaked. And to hear a grandmother eulogizing her grandson, it's like it's unheard of. It hurts.

**Angela Buchdahl:** I think in the midst of *shiva*, and a funeral, and hostage families stories that were so deep and intense and hard, there were also such moments…of even from them…resilience and light and hope, and the kind of goodness that was coming towards them, and their own sense of needing to express their gratitude for the strangers who've basically shown up and, you know, been in their situation room and help them and so I think that it hasn't been all darkness and grief. It's also been a reminder of some of the most beautiful parts of human nature when we are confronted with darkness.

I'm a rabbi. So I'm always thinking of how do I understand the meaning of this? And how do I tell this story in a sense that helps make sense of something that you actually can't make sense. When we went down to the Dead Sea, and we saw this like amazing city that's essentially popped up with 15,000 evacuees, and we visited the hotel where, like, Kibbutz Be’eri is located, I was struck by the fact that they said we were getting all the services we have psychiatrists: and we have social workers coming and we have therapists and we have shiatsu massage and acupuncture and yoga coming and…I was so glad that they had all these needs were being met. But there was not a rabbi to be seen. And not only that, what made me sadder is probably it would never have occurred to people at Kibbutz Be’ri, that they would want a rabbi for their spiritual healing. And I thought to myself, that is such a loss because I feel like the rabbis should be giving that sense of like, this is the narrative, this is how we put this into the context of like our own…our story and where God fits into this: our theology. I don't know why that's not a part of the conversation at all.

**Mishy Harman:** What do you think it will be like for you to go home?

**Angela Buchdahl:** Since October 7th, I think we have seen our American Jewish community unified in a way that I haven't seen before around Israel. The other thing that I think American Jews felt that we shared with Israelis, perhaps for the first time in a long time, is feeling targeted as Jews.

**Shlomo Nisanov:** To see antisemitism: people going around showing swastikas in pro Palestinian demonstrations, and saying Free Palestine. And to see this anti-Semitism in the academia. You know, it's one thing if you're some ignorant, barbaric, idiot: you don't know the difference. But to hear this on college campuses, they're supposed to be…you’re supposed to get a higher degree.

**Angela Buchdahl:** Of course, what's happening in America doesn't approach anything like what just happened on October 7th, and the kind of ongoing physical war that Israel is engaged in. But America is engaged in our own battleground right now. And it's happening, certainly on college campuses, but it's also happening in all kinds of arenas. And, you know, in people's workplaces and even sometimes within families that have different faiths that come together, or cultures that are coming together, and we don't really have an organized game plan yet, and I think that every one of us are still kind of in shock and disbelief about the kind of virulent anti-Semitism that has been exposed in the wake of October 7th in America. So I think there is a sense of *achdut* (unity) that I've never felt before, not just because we're also in pain, but a real sense that we're in this together and a kind of a raw, pure love that has been exposed.