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Sydney spoke to us beautifully today about not giving up, not despairing. Her words come at a critical time in the life of the Jewish people. As we know, Israel is at war and Jews around the world are feeling vulnerable, alone, but not giving up. We read the news. We try to make sense of it. We try to figure out how to have conversations with the people we love about this often divisive and difficult issue.

It is particularly ironic and disturbing to contemplate that we are at war at this point in the Jewish year. We approach the most tragic day in our calendar: the destruction of the first and second temples: Tisha B'Av, a collective day of mourning for the Jewish people. We fast, we mute our prayers. We sit on the floor as if we were in mourning, plaintively chanting from the biblical book of Lamentations which describes the scene of utter horror and despair.

But this year, Tisha B'Av is fraught with reality for us. Amid the loss of life on both sides, we face the reality of rockets flying in Israel, tunnels invading our land and our very existence being challenged once again. We ask ourselves: Will we be able to survive again? Will the destruction that our ancestors endured become our lot too? You know in Israel, they think this question, but they don't ask it out loud. They feel it inside. We all know what despair feels like inside.

Sydney's story reminds me of a time in my life when I was struggling and wanted to give up.

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I had just completed my first year of rabbinical school. My husband Jeff came home - I jokingly said to him, "Still have a job?" He said, "Actually I don't.

After months of dreaming and planning, we despaired that everything was coming undone. It was a very difficult time for our family, so hard to not give up hope.

And then out of nowhere, Rabbi Malkus offered me a job: Religious School Principal. I took it. Rabbi Malkus encouraged me to take rabbinical school classes and after four years, I finished, Jeff found a job and the kids thrived. We didn't give up and to this day, Rabbi Malkus is my hero. He believed in me. He inspired me not to give up.

Another story of inspiration from my recent trip to Israel: In the mystical town of Tzfat, the birthplace of Jewish mysticism, nestled high about the Sea of Galilee, only a 45 minute drive from the War zone of the Syrian border, Dr. Tal Solomon, a surgeon at Ziv Medical Center treats wounded Syrians, performing vascular bypass surgeries on children allowing them to avoid amputation.

We met a 3 year old Syrian boy who was there with his father. The boy had been shot in the foot and the foot had been set incorrectly in Syria - he could barely walk. At Ziv, the boys' foot was being reset properly. An Arab Israeli social worker translated for us so that we could talk with the father and the son. We had so many questions: How did you know to bring him to the border? Do you

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want to go home? Will it be safe to go home? Will you ever tell your son that Israelis treated him? Will it be clear that he was treated in Israel and will he be discriminated against?

Yes, he does want to go home. No, it will not be safe. He may tell his son the entire story someday if it is politically safe. And No, people will not really know where he got the treatment.

Dr. Solomon is one of my heroes. He does not give up in the face of war, in the face of a world ignorant of his inspiring work. He gives selflessly to his patients, regardless of their nationality, their religion, the politics. As he looks into the faces of those who come from a war zone, he does no cool calculations about the possible survival of his healed patients. He saves life after life. He does the right thing. If he does not give up, how can I? How can we?

Since the war in Israel began, it has been difficult for me to see my own struggles as anything but insignificant. I even hesitated to share my personal story about making it through rabbinical school as it pales in comparison with what Israel is facing now. Everything is on the table. The potential for loss is so great. When you are in Israel, you are viscerally aware of how great life is and how precious it is. There is something about being so close to the edge of survival, that makes you especially aware of and grateful for life and blessings. You feel a part of something bigger.

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This is a time for us to gather our strength, to come together and to be strong as individuals. In fact, right after the spiritual low point of Tisha B'Av, we begin our spiritual ascent toward Rosh Hashanah. We do not wallow in this low place, but we are encouraged to muster our strength and begin the ascent: the ascent toward joy, toward reflection, toward community and toward unity. It is the beginning of the Holy Days. A time when we ask: Who will inspire us during this time? Who will we turn to for hope, for encouragement?

Everyone in this room can be inspired by others. Do you have a Rabbi Malkus in your life - someone blessed you and kept you from despairing? And encouraged you to grow? Do you have a Dr. Solomon in your life? Someone you met once who impacted you and you said to yourself, "I can't give up now." In the weeks ahead, we must attune ourselves to these those role models in our lives: See them, grasp the opportunity to be shaped by them now.

Even Moses despaired. In the beginning, he said, "I am not a man of words." The midrash tells us Moses had a lisp – he was terrified to speak and told God to look to Aaron to be a spokesperson for the Israelites. Look how far Moses came. Today we began reading a book entitled, Devarim, words – it is a lengthy address of his words. Moses became of man of many words. He did not give up and neither should we. Shabbat Shalom.