

There I was.

25 years ago, and some 25 pounds lighter

A young combat soldier in an airborne rescue battalion.

For those of you who don't know me. My name is Dov Ben-Shimon and I'm the CEO of our Jewish Federation. The Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest.

I've spent my life in service to the Jewish People. I was a soldier, and a diplomat and a Jewish communal professional.

And I've come here tonight to tell you how grateful I am.

To you, to our people, for our community, for our work together. For supporting Israel.

Nothing is more important for a strong and secure Jewish community here in Greater MetroWest than a strong and secure Israel. And Yom Hazikaron is that reminder.

It's a reminder of the price we've had to pay to build our own State.

It's a terrible price. So many take for granted how easy it is to live at peace in their homes. But not us. We still have hope. But it's not something we take for granted.

Yom Hazikaron is a different price. It's not a "Memorial Day."

We don't go shopping. We don't have sales. It's not an abstract concept of 'the dead' and 'the fallen.' It's not about someone you don't know.

On Yom Hazikaron, everyone has a direct connection to someone who was killed. We remember those we miss.

We go to graves and see what was lost.

What was taken from us.

But we still have hope.

And that hope is the essence of Yom Hazikaron and the difficult transition to Yom Haatzmaut.

It's our responsibility to earn the life enabled by such a heavy price.

When we turn to Yom Haatzmaut, we turn with a deep sense of responsibility.

It's not that Yom Hazikaron gives a different meaning to Yom Haatzmaut. It's more than that.

It's a reminder.

It's a reminder of the price we paid, and the responsibility we have to protect and preserve what we've built.

President Rivlin spoke yesterday about that price. 23,320 that were killed. He called on Israelis – on us here, too, I would say – to honor their memory by fighting for the “essence and idea for which the State of Israel was established.”

“The deaths of those who died defending our home,” he said, “force us to deepen our commitment to building that home as a more just home, a more compassionate home, a home where not only those who have fallen, but all those within it are equal,”

There has been so much pain and loss.

67 soldiers who were killed in last summer’s Gaza war.

So many others who were killed defending what we love. What President Rivlin called “The geography of pain,” which stretched the length and breadth of Israel but did not divide it. Death struck at the door of many,

regardless of their religious beliefs. No camp was left untouched by death,”

A few months ago I represented our community and our federation at an awful, tragic, moving bereavement ceremony.

I stood in the Druze village of Yanuch, up in the North.

Yanuch was the home of a hero. Zidan Saif, a 30-year old traffic policeman stationed in Jerusalem. Zidan sprang into action to defend the worshippers at the Har Nof synagogue.

He took a bullet as he fought the terrorists and was fatally wounded, dying a few hours later.

I went with the mayor of the town and local Druze dignitaries to visit the family. And I spoke on our behalf to the mourners.

I had heard so much about the values and bravery of Zidan.

From the media, from talking with his friends, from my conversation with the mayor.

But surrounded by hundreds of mourners I saw not just bravery and values. I saw not just the deep connection of the Jewish People to the Druze people in Israel.

I also saw the hope and the promise.

As a representative from our Jewish community of Greater MetroWest, I came to show love, honor and respect to the memory of Zidan, his family, and the Druze people, for that price.

As I left the Druze mourning hall, the father of Zidan clutched my hand and said, in Hebrew *Shelo neda od tza'ar*, “may we know no more sorrow.”

May we know no more sorrow.

Intertwined and interconnected as we are.

Because we are a community, a family, that mourns together as we move to celebrate our freedom and our independence.

There is a terrible price that we pay for that freedom and independence. It defines us. We have to be worthy of that price. We have to embrace life and our community.

That's our task. It's difficult.

It's a constant reminder that there is sorrow and loss behind celebration and life.

But it is true.

And because we are a community, a family, we find our meaning in the loss and the life.

Shelo neda od tza'ar. May we know no more sorrow.

And may we learn to love life and celebrate.  
Thank you very much.