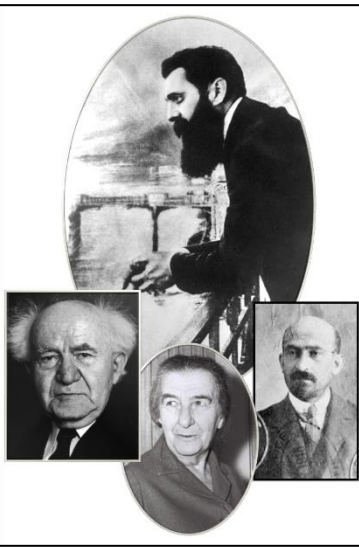


Shanah tovah.

I want to **begin** this evening with a **plea**, to **raise awareness** on the **plight** of a **People** *desperately* in need of our support and attention: We as Jewish community have **not done enough** to **advocate** for this community of people within our society... It's a **people** who for **too long** have had **no right** to **determine** their own fate... who have faced **ethnic cleansing**, **exile**, been driven from homes, **living at the whim** of other world leaders and communities much more powerful than they... **We have not done enough**. We are **negligent** in our **attentions**, **misguided** in our **intentions**. [*Motion as "Al Chet"*].... Would you **not agree** with me that a **basic human right** – is a **people's self-determination** of its **own destiny**, that *every* people should have **enough power** to have a **voice**, to ensure its own safety?... Then **we**, as a world community, and as **Jews**, must do something. **We must do more**.

I take you back to 1897, 125 years ago this coming year – I call to order the First World Zionist Congress.

[Turn Herzl Poster around]



The year before, 1896 – evidence had come out that Alfred **Dreyfus**, a decorated Captain in the French military had been wrongly accused of treason. We knew this – but we were stunned when **Dreyfus** was nonetheless **re-convicted** on clearly **anti-Semitic pretexts**... calling into question whether one can be a **loyal French citizen and a Jew**. A **Viennese secular Jewish journalist** named Theodore **Herzl** was covering the Dreyfus Affair – and he came to a **conclusion**: *Maybe* the world **COULDN'T** and **SHOULDN'T** have to **ensure** our safety. Maybe the **ONLY solution** was to take **Jewish self-determination** *out* of the *world's* hands, by creating a **seat of Jewish power and societal strength** – a **Jewish State**.

And so, **125 years ago this coming year** – Herzl convened the **first World Zionist Congress**. That year, and in subsequent Congresses, Herzl brought together a diverse gathering of modern Jewish thinkers to plan a future for the Jewish People. After that first Congress, Herzl reflected, “In Basel, I have **founded the Jewish State**. If I said this **out loud** today I would be greeted by **universal laughter**. In **five** years perhaps, and certainly in **fifty** years, everyone will recognize it.” He **wasn't crazy**: **Fifty** years later, seventy-five years ago this November, the UN

voted to create the **first Jewish State** in almost two millennia.

(How many of us know this story – of Herzl and the Zionist Congress? In how many of us does it instill pride?)

Now, you are thinking: **But rabbi, it's NOT 1897**. Now we are **powerful**. And I come here tonight to tell you – **remind** you – of an **uncomfortable truth**: The **only reason** we can claim to be so **self-assured**... is because **Herzl was right**. We needed a **Jewish State** back *then* – and it is **ONLY** because of **Israel's success** since then, that we can **claim such power**.

And it is a **fragile power**, I must say: Earlier this year, I read an article entitled “**The Necessity of Jewish Power**.” The article describes the **perennial Jewish discomfort** with our **own power**... that we are taken by “an **allure to powerlessness**,” that we as Jews are so **wary**, so **sheepish**, about power that we are reluctant to speak out against the rising acts of anti-Semitism. We have **SO internalized** the axiom that “**absolute power corrupts absolutely**” – that we have **mistakenly accepted** the **WRONG** and **IMMORAL converse** belief that “**powerlessness ennobles** us, and **absolute powerlessness is saintly**.”

I have shared with you Nathan Englander's short story, “**How We Avenged the Blums**.” Englander writes of a bunch of Jewish kids who find their friend, Zvi Blum, **beaten bloody** by an **anti-Semitic bully** after school– and they vow **revenge**. They organize themselves into a little **Jewish army**, they train, and they prepare themselves for the day when, knowing that the anti-Semite was going to wait for them, instead, they **skip shul**, lie in wait for him first, and **beat him senseless**. And then Englander, as narrator, writes the **words that trouble me**, given our **mistaken assumption** that **power is corrupting** and **victimhood is saintly**: He writes, “As I watched [“the Anti-

Semite, bloodied and now writhing before us,”] I knew I’d always feel that **to be broken was better than to break.**” To be **broken** was **better** than to **break**, he writes – and then he adds a gloss, a comment: “**To be broken was better than to break – [this was] MY FAILING.**”

It is **no virtue** to be **powerless**. The article I read this summer reminds us, “That the State of Israel was **born**, **raised**, and **remains under fire** isn’t a sign of the **failure** of **Zionism**. It’s a reminder of its **necessity**.” The **irony** of our Jewish community’s **sheepish, backward creeping** away from a **once-proud Zionism** is that the **recent rise in anti-Semitism** (up some 70% this past year) – AND our **reluctance** to rail against these **open, brazen attacks** against visibly-Jewish people – the **irony** is that these **attacks**, once again in our day, **prove Herzl’s original point** after the Dreyfus Affair – they **prove the NEED** for a **Jewish state**.

And for **those** of us who think, “Oh, we are **powerful now**, and sure it’s bad again in Eastern Europe or in Arab lands, but here in the **United States**, that **power** could **never go away**”: We should be **students** of our **own history**, where in **1930s Germany**... in **late-15th century Spain**... in **post-Joseph Egypt** in Biblical times... ALL of those Jewish communities felt **self-assured**. All thought they had the **power** to be **immune** to the **lessons of history**.

And **like** those **historical** cases, here in the United States nowadays, we as Jews **don’t** have **real POWER**. We have **STATUS**: A **status** **reliant** on a **non-Jewish majority** that **only sometimes** likes us. **Status** is **different** than **power**: **Status** can be **revoked**; it is “a sandcastle built at the water’s edge.” Yes, this is **uncomfortable** to hear – how **fragile** we are, with **status and privilege**, but **not power**. **Power** *only* comes from the **ability** to **chart our own destiny**, to determine our fate. And there is **only one place** where that **self-determination** happens for a Jewish People: It happens in Israel, the **only Jewish State**. **THAT** was Herzl’s vision.

I am a **proud American**. The **status** we have here in the United States is **almost unprecedented** in Jewish history. But we should **not take it for granted**. We have **seen** over the past few months, increasingly, **how fragile** our **status** is: During the war from Gaza, where Hamas launched over **4000** rockets at civilian targets, **Israel was vilified**. And **Jews**, regardless of our politics, were **victimized**.

And yet, as this was going on, **where was our outrage**, when the **media** used such false, **slandorous language** like “ethnic cleansing?” When **Orthodox rabbis** were attacked because they “**look Jewish?**” When **LA restaurant** diners whose Israel politics were unknown were attacked because they **seemed Jewish?** When (as we heard from our own Shuli Weinstein first-hand on Rosh Hashanah) **OUR high-school and college kids and young adults** were being **pummeled** on **social media** and on **campus**, **not knowing** what to do – because we, their parents and grandparents, were **wringing our hands**, **avoiding public outcry**, **not speaking out** because we did *not* want to “**rock the boat**” of our well-earned “**status**” as **Americans** who are **Jewish**... or **not speaking out** because **WE** are **not informed enough** or **convinced enough ourselves** of the **justness** of our cause, our **human right** to exist without fear? Where were we, when our kids were **confused, intimidated?** **Must we** keep our **heads down**, like 1930s and 1940s American Jews, who **KNEW** – *yes, we knew* about the Holocaust – and **didn’t want to rock the boat** with President Roosevelt? And **why?** Because we had **STATUS** as Jews that we did **not want to endanger**. But we **did not** – and **DO** not – have **POWER**, as Jews, outside of Israel. Let us **not live like that again**... like 15th century Spanish Jews, like ... the 19th century Berlin and Kiev Jews, who did **not use their status** or influence to **stand up** for the *shtetls* that were destroyed by pogroms, over and over again.

That’s the **bitter irony** of this moment as American Jews: We are **witnessing** and **shrugging helplessly, retreating** from the **VERY REASON Herzl** came to the conclusion that a **strong Jewish state** was needed. Because *even if* we don’t LIVE in that Jewish State, that Jewish State is **THE ONLY bulwark** against the **world’s oldest hatred**... it is the **ONLY** thing that **allows** us the **human dignity**, the **human right**, of **self-determination**. And we as Jews have not **stood up** for that **inalienable human right**.

We must **not mistake** our **status** for **power**. We must **not forget** those lessons of 125 years ago. I’m **not** talking about the **WORLD forgetting** these lessons of history – I’m saying that **WE don’t know** these lessons, **WE** are **not giving** them more than a **shrug**, a **sheepish retreat**, a “yes, but.”

I hear, “Rabbi, sure we deserve such self-determination, **yes – but** what about the Palestinians?” Let me be clear: I believe **Palestinians deserve self-determination, too**. I heard one of *our* members speak convincingly years ago (before she made Aliyah) about how she could be **pro-Palestinian without** retreating from our **own aims and rights as Jews**. That’s where I am, as **centrist thinker Yossi Klein HaLevi** teaches, that we **must make peace**, when there is a **partner** for peace who will **recognize OUR right** to lasting peace and self-determination as **something more than just one step** along a **plotted path** to **Israel’s destruction**. Peace cannot come at the **expense of our own lives and security and agency**.

I hear, “Rabbi, I want an Israel, **yes, but** I disagree with a policy of this government.” SO DO I, sometimes! I **have spoken** about my disagreements with Israeli policy. So do **Israelis disagree!** They are **not shy** about **criticizing their own government**. And somehow, **Israel** is the **only nation** for whom a **disagreement** calls into **question the right** of that state to **securely exist** among the community of nations. No one says that about **China**, or **Egypt**, or the **United States**, *let alone Iran or Afghanistan or Syria!* Israel is the **ONLY** state for whom **existence is a question** on the table, yearly, at the United Nations. That is a **double standard** – and given that Israel is the only Jewish State... and given the **other rhetoric** we hear – that **double-standard sure feels like anti-Semitism**.

I hear “**Yes, but**” – I know, as Jews, back to the Talmud, we’re **very good at nuanced** views, at **arguing both sides....** Saying “**Yes, but....**” *Every once in a while*, like when Israeli civilians – Jews and Arabs – were under rocket attack last spring, I’d **like to hear** words of **unapologetic, unabashed** support for Israel. The “**yes,**” **without the “but.”**

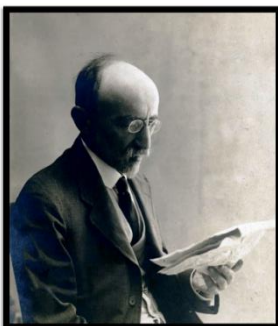
It’s a **wishy-washiness**, a **self-defeatism** that perplexes other nations. **They don’t get us**. At a meeting of African nations discussing Israel, they said, OF COURSE we as **Zionists** should **advocate for our own tribe**, our own side over the other side. **Why** would we **advocate MORE** for the **other side** – especially a side that **unapologetically plans** for our **destruction?!**

BELIEVE ME – *before* you get **upset** about all the things about Israel that I am **NOT saying** in this sermon – I have spoken and written about those things. Tonight, in shul – **[Al chet] forgive me!** - I’m talking about the **particularistic Jewish concerns** and **particularistic Jewish lessons** that caused **Herzl**, a **century and a quarter** ago, to see the **need** for a Jewish state – **lessons** that we are in danger of forgetting, today, that are **still festering, today**.

It does **not mean** that we **have to AGREE** with how to get there. Have you followed the **Knesset** over the past three years?! **Four elections** – four peaceful elections, culminating in the **most diverse cabinet** in Israeli history! **Jews disagree**. We are **professional disagree-ers** (*you know the joke - 2 Jews, 3 opinions*)...

125 years ago, these **Zionists disagreed**, too – about so much! **[SHOW each poster]** You had **Herzl’s Political Zionism**, but *also* **Ahad Ha-Am’s Cultural Zionists**, who wanted to amass Jewish wisdom, all those Nobel Prizes we were destined to get, and create a national culture... **Rav Kook’s Religious Zionists**, who were inspired by the story of facing Zion for every prayer, the centrality of Israel going back to the time of Abraham in the Bible ... and the more militant **Revisionists** like **Jabotinsky**, or **Max Nordau** who wrote a pamphlet about “Tough Jews” – that Jews needed to leave the **study halls** and bulk up for the **coming fight** for **Jewish Peoplehood** (*Drop the Talmud, get a Peloton?...).* (*Yes, for some of you Jabotinsky makes you cringe today – but*

from the nineteenth-century perspective of shtetls and pogroms... the truth is, his Zionism is part of even the left-most parties in Israel today – because he taught that Jewish surviving and thriving, against threats of annihilation – that Jewish strength and self-determination was a moral imperative.)



Sure, **they ALL disagreed**: Herzl was their **host, their convener** – but when the world’s powers offered **Uganda** for a Jewish State, **Herzl was inclined to accept it**: It *wasn’t* our **ancestral homeland**, but it would **fulfill Herzl’s goal** of a Jewish State. *[TURN POSTERS facing toward/against one another to show agreement/disagreement]* The **Religious Zionists** joined the **Jewish Power, Defense, and Strength Factions** to mount a fight against Herzl and Chaim Weizmann and later Golda Meir and David Ben-Gurion, the **Political Zionists**... the **Cultural Zionists** thought they could build their academies and salons in Uganda, so they were **cool** with it... Then there was a **question** of how we’d **have to fight** for our ancestral homeland, who would fight? Ben Gurion was willing to **exempt the Religious Zionists** from the army, and the **Cultural Zionists** were more **lovers and thinkers than fighters**....

These folks **disagreed about EVERYTHING!** – They were **vehement** in how much they disagreed! But they **came together**, to ensure a Jewish future. For **that Jewish Future**, *nothing* could divide them.

There’s a **story** about **David Ben-Gurion** and **Chaim Weizmann** – they *hated* each other, **disagreed** about everything, but **recognizing the importance** of their **shared goals**, they **went together** on a goodwill tour to fledgling *kibbutzim* in the Negev Desert. At that time, *kibbutzim* didn’t have nice guest rooms – so the dignitaries had to **share the one spare room**. In the middle of the night, in the desert, **Weizmann got warm** – so he **opened the window**. Ben-Gurion **angrily got up**; he was **cold** – so he **slammed the window shut**. Weizmann got up, he grumbled, and he pointedly **opened the window**, **Ben-Gurion slammed it down**. That’s how it was – **all night long, open, shut, open, shut...** until they woke up at **sunrise...** to realize that in this **fledgling kibbutz**, the **windows had no glass** in them.

They **realized** that, when it came to a **threat** to Jewish survival, their **differences didn’t amount to much**. When the **room got hot**, or the **relationships chilled**, these **leaders recognized how important** it was, to get in a **room together** to discuss a **shared Jewish future**, our **moral right to self-determination** of our Jewish destiny. That was **Herzl’s miracle** – *just that*: That we could **sit together**, in the room where it happened.... And **make it happen**. Across the **political spectrum** – it was **just as difficult then** as it is **now**, to **come together** on behalf of **Jewish continuity, Jewish surviving and thriving**.

When we say the formal **incantation** the beginning of Kol Nidre, “*anu matirin l’hitpallel im ha-abaryanim*” – that we give ourselves **permission** to be in a **room of prayer** with people who have **far transgressed** what we deem **acceptable**, what we **agree with**... The **prayer isn’t so nice** – it’s *not just* about **disagreeing** with others, but calling them “*abaryanim*” – **transgressors, vilifying** the other. And *yet, even though* these words are centuries old, they **match the rhetoric** of today.

This IS the miracle that **Herzl accomplished**, that we accomplish tonight, and often, as a **community**. In this **room** are **many different people** – different **outlooks**, different **politics**, different ways of doing Judaism, different family structures, different financial realities.... In this room... are people who **disagree with me** (*even who have disagreed with me since I started this sermon!*) And yet, **you’re here; we’re here, together**. THAT is a **miracle**, in today’s world.

So **what** will **bring us** into the **same room** like that again? It *used* to be that a **rise in anti-Semitism, anywhere, united us**, in **solidarity** with our fellow Jews. Nowadays, *especially* when it comes to Israel – that **same anti-Semitism drives us apart!** We **can’t even agree** on a **definition** of anti-Semitism (though as Justice Potter Stewart said decades ago on a different topic, “**we know it when we see it.**”)

But this is an **enormous problem** for **Jewish Peoplehood**. Because the **last time** that **hatred and persecution against Jews divided** the Jewish people was a little over **1950 years ago** – and it **ended** with the **Roman destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem**. The last time **Jewish divisiveness** was *this bad*, it **condemned** us to almost **2000 years of exile, uncertainty, victimhood**, and 75 years ago, it **culminated** in the **worst crime** of human history.

It **proved what Herzl knew**, the **lesson** that we, **sedated** by our Jewish status, are **now in danger of forgetting** and giving up: The **right to Jewish self-determination comes on the back of Jewish power**. It’s **not pleasant**,

but it's true. **[Point]** Chaim Weizmann said – the **Jewish nation** will **never** be **served** up to us on a **silver platter**. Those who are willing to **stand up**, to **defend** our right to self-determination – **WE**, who **claim our power**, **are** the **silver platter** on whose backs this pride will be served.

Powerlessness is not virtuous... but worse than that: **Powerlessness**, in the face of a history of persecution – powerlessness may be our **LEAST MORAL PATH**. **Powerlessness condemns our next generation** to an almost-certain fate of **standing by idly**, **huddling**, **waiting**, while *others* determine our fate. **Make no mistake**: 1948 was an **aberration**. Given the chance, the **world would not stand up for us again**, to vote an Israel into existence. In fact, one of the reasons that **Ben-Gurion** declared the State of Israel in May of 1948 was because the **world was ALREADY having second thoughts**, as seven armies were licking their chops to destroy us once again, three years after the Holocaust.)

Powerlessness is an abdication of our trusteeship: We are **entrusted** with the **promise** that our **children** should have **Jewish pride** – the same **Jewish pride** that, after **three generations** of Israel, **WE** have **begun to take for granted**... a **Jewish pride** that our **great-grandparents never knew**, before the State of Israel existed.

It's a **pride**, a **power**, that we have **taken for granted** – that we can **stand up, tall** – with the sense that **WE** **write our history**, *not* as **vassals** to someone else, who **may drop us**, when the **economy tanks** or we're **otherwise inconvenient**. To have the **pride** and **political clout** that we can **chart our own course**, as **Herzl** said. **[Point]** To have the **strength** that we can **determine our own fate**, as **Jabotinsky** said. To have the **culture** such that we do it in the **most highly-moral** and **high-minded** way possible, as **Ahad Ha-Am** said... To have the *yiddishkeit* to know that what we are doing is because we are **part of a People** who have **debated how** to do it for **thousands of years**, and have **searched for God and Peoplehood** and have **strived** to be a **light unto the nations** all along the way, as **Rav Kook** said.

To do it **as morally as possible**, yes.... To be our **own harshest critics**, *without* ever **abdicating** our **rights to security and self-determination**. **Jewish strength** has always been **beholden** to a **moral compass**: **King David** had the prophet **Nathan** who repeatedly took him to task! And *in response* to that moral critique, **King David** said what we will say later tonight – **[knock chest]** **Chatati!** He **acknowledged** his **shortcomings**, his mistakes. **King David never lost sight** of **Jewish Nationhood** and **Peoplehood**... but **while** insisting upon **Jewish Greatness**, he **never gave up on Jewish GOODness**.

Are we **there yet?** **No**. We have **work to do**, to **get to the ideal imagined** back then in **King David's** time, and in **Herzl's** time. Please – **disagree** with me, or with *them*, on how we get there. But **do not ignore history** and think that we have **evolved beyond** the **need for Jewish self-determination** that a **very secular Jew** named **Theodore Herzl** saw **125 years ago**, that caused him to **found modern Zionism**. **This year's rise in anti-Semitism** has **taught us the importance and relevance** of that lesson, that **need** for a Jewish State, *all over again*.

Every one of the people who **gathered** 125 years ago **disagreed** with one another. But they **agreed on one foundational right** – **[SING]** *l'hiyot am chofshi b'artzeinu*: To be a **people**, **free to chart and determine** our own **destiny**, **given unique power** (*not just wayfarer's status*), by our **national presence** in our **ancestral homeland**.

As your **Rabbi**, I have **committed my life to refusing** to let my **children and grandchildren**, **OUR children and grandchildren** and **great-grandchildren**, **miss out on that story**. I **invite you**, sure, to **see all sides** – but then to **do your part to make sure that story is written with pride** in **who we are**, **how far we have come**, **what we have taught** the world, and how we **still illumine** the world.

As much as **Abraham, Moses, and King David** – *these people* **[Posters]** are **part of our story**. How we manage to **get in one room to write the next chapter** of our story will **determine** the course of **Jewish history** – if we do it well, for **generations and centuries and millennia** to come. Let us **take the pen** from these great figures, as well as the **sword when necessary** – to **BE the next generation** of our **proud story**. *Keyn yehi ratzon*; so may it be God's will. And let us say: **AMEN**.