

Thomas Friedman tells the story of the late Neil Armstrong, a devout Christian, who visited Israel after his trip to the moon and was taken on a tour of the Old City of Jerusalem by Israeli archeologist Meir Ben-Dov. When they got to the Hulda Gate, atop the stairs leading to the Temple Mount, Armstrong asked Ben-Dov whether Jesus had stepped anywhere near where they were now standing. "Jesus was a Jew," Ben-Dov replied. "And these are the steps leading to the Temple so he must have walked here many times." "So Jesus stepped right here?" Armstrong asked again. "That's right!" confirmed Ben-Dov. "I have to tell you," Armstrong told the archeologist. "I am more excited stepping on these stones than I was stepping on the moon."

Indeed, Friedman's story captures much of the intense love, passion, and connection that many of us feel for the State of Israel. Israel may not be as exotic as outer space – in fact, much of our sense of affinity comes from the fact that she rather feels quite intimate and familiar – but she inspires in us a sense of loyalty, of history, and of hope all the same. Israel is a good friend of the United States and the one bastion of democracy in a dangerous and complicated region. She is a technological pioneer and brain-trust, responsible for innovations that have influenced just about every conceivable aspect of modern life, and a global humanitarian leader lending support to nations around the world. Most importantly, Israel is our spiritual home and the home of our people. She is the place where our language, our traditions, our values, and our culture flourish and come to fullest expression!

And so we watch the events in our world with concern: as the Middle East roils with chaos, as terrorist groups bent on Israel's destruction continue to pursue their mission, as the threat of a nuclear Iran persists in posing significant danger to the State of Israel and the world at large. And we watch how Israel herself struggles to live up the highest hopes and ideals that we have for her – when it comes to issues of Jewish pluralism and making the Kotel accessible for all, when it comes to the plight of the Palestinian community, when it comes to the challenges of poverty, and income-inequality, and the other kinds of social issues that often beset successful nations. Finally, of course, we continue to hope and pray for a sustainable peace in this region, one that would ensure Israel's safety and security for decades to come while ending so many years of senseless fear and bloodshed. Ken y'hi ratzon- may this come soon and in our day!

We hope that you will join us on Sunday, May 7th from 2-6 PM for the greater Chicagoland's Israel solidarity day at Ravinia (<http://www.juf.org/isd/>) featuring a unity walk, children's activities, musical performances, and much more. Look for our BHCBE table at the park or plan on riding over on a bus leaving the synagogue at 1:30 PM (advance registration is required at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc0r3MXihP2EGphpEHUCtloRBi93u-Dyi64BktLyYhfKnboQ/viewform?c=0&w=1> or by calling the synagogue office at 847-256-1213). We look forward to celebrating together!

On this Shabbat before Yom HaAtzmaut, Israeli Independence Day, we wish Israel a very happy 69th birthday and many, many more to come.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Annie Tucker