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Israel and Emotional Ambivalence

Have you ever had the experience, where, on one hand you feel very positive about a subject, and at the same time, you feel very negative? You may attempt to talk yourself out of one side so that you can stand fully present on the other. If you've felt this way, you're not alone. Research calls this, Emotional Ambivalence; characterized by tension, in some cases psychological paralysis when conflicting feelings collide.

While we may have Emotional Ambivalence in a variety of places in our lives over time regarding relationships, politics, religion or personal identity, this evening we will shine a light on the dissonant feelings we have as American Jews toward our spiritual homeland, Israel.

As Diaspora Jews, we see so much that is miraculous about the State of Israel and its role in human history, its role as a Jewish homeland, its role as a safe harbor for Jews fleeing anti-Semitism. It is a tiny country surrounded by those who don't really welcome her existence. So, she does all she can to protect her citizens and continue to thrive in the 21st century.

Israel's innovations, medical research, art, music, dance, theatre, technology and environmental innovations baffle the mind. When there is a world emergency, Israel is of the first to arrive to offer help.

If you have had the pleasure of traveling to Israel, you know the feeling of deep Jewish home, the language, the faces, the street signs with names of famous rabbis not to mention the rugalach and falafel. Our star of David lives on the flag.

At the same time, we also see much that is troubling for Diaspora Jews, troubling for many Israelis who live in Israel. The world sees it. We see that the world sees it. People have grown beyond weary with the long occupation of the West Bank and Gaza that appears to have no resolution in sight, human right inequities and violations imposed upon non-Jewish citizens and refugees.

There is the Ultra-Orthodox hegemony that frustrates the growth of Reform, Conservative and even modern Orthodox and attacks their rabbis and institutions, leaving most Israelis with a choice of Ultra-Orthodoxy or secularism. There are Reform and Conservative synagogues, there are Israeli Reform Rabbis and women who service Reform Communities, but not on the same status as Ultra-Orthodox.

Israel is the only country in the Democratic world that discriminates against Jews and legally denies them the right to observe Judaism according to their conscience.

In late July of this year, Rabbi Hayoun, a prominent conservative rabbi was awakened at his home by the police in Haifa and taken to a station for questioning. What was his alleged crime? He performed a non-Orthodox Jewish wedding in Israel. Technically this makes him a criminal. Under section seven of Israel's Marriage and Divorce Ordinance, any marriage or divorce that isn't registered with the Orthodox rabbinate is illegal and the potential punishment is two years in prison.

This is not the vision of Israel's Declaration of Independence, which states Israel "will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisioned by the prophets of Israel. It will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants, irrespective of religion, race or gender.

Because of the Rabbinate's stranglehold on more than 425,000 immigrants to Israel, primarily from the former Soviet Union where Judaism was outlawed for decades are listed in the population registry as "no religion" because no one has

yet to help clarify their Jewish status. The recently passed Nation State Law diminishes the rights of Israel's non-Jewish citizens.

The list of Israeli policies set into place conflict with core values of inclusivity, our pride and spiritual dedication in conflict with the nagging wisdom that the 'us versus them mentality' has not advanced, nor achieved the lofty goal of 'light unto the nations.' The Judaism of Israeli Ultra-Orthodoxy is an entirely different being that the Judaism, that we, who are seated in this Sanctuary observe.

When things are baffling and seemingly impossible to heal, we turn back in the pages of our history, all the way to the 10th century to the wisdom of King Solomon, the wisest of all kings and how he might have understood the Emotional Ambivalence, this duality of our conflicted minds.

The early account of profound ambivalence dealt with an inheritance case. It concerned the division of property of seven sons, children of the deceased. It is written how seven young men filed into the royal court to discuss their father's will. In they came, one after the other, however one of the seven, named Pilpul, had two heads. For ease, we can call him Paul.

Paul's two heads argued with one another, they argued with the other brothers. They would fix the other's hair and sometimes turn away and speak sarcastically about the other. It was bizarre to witness. While this was an oddity, it was a legal conflict for Paul and his brothers.

Being born with two heads, Paul argued that they were two people, they had two brains, so the inherited property of their father should be divided among eight brothers, rather than seven.

King Solomon was fascinated by the case and after telling them he needed a week, he researched the family. It seems that the family came from the ancient Canaanites, the progeny of Cain, child of Adam and Eve, who had murdered his sibling Abel in a fit of jealousy. As a result, the offspring of Cain were sent to live off the grid in an underground land, where they eked out a meagre living, and for reasons unknown, developed the genes for two heads.

According to records, one of these two headed people, a man named Gilgal escaped to the land of one headed people and made a life for himself. He married a one headed woman, and they had seven sons, six looked like Mom, and the seventh, who we are calling Paul, looked like Dad.

“The issue before us” said Solomon, “is simple. Is Paul here one person or two. Each of the heads seems to have a mind of its own, or at least, a degree of independence. But, does that make him two distinct persons?”

The King came up with a litmus test to determine how many were present in Paul. If one head was aware of what was done to the other head, then they were to be viewed as a single person. On the other hand, if one head is unaware of what is done to the other, they were two separate people.

One week later, the brothers re-entered the Palace courtroom. King Solomon asked that Paul’s eyes, that would be four, be blindfolded and then once securely covered, he snuck up with a bucket of ice cold water and poured it upon one of the heads. Immediately both heads shrieked, yelled and said worlds, only a true Cannanite would have understood. Immediately the decision was rendered, while of two heads, Paul was one person. End of story.

We love Israel. We don’t love some of Israel’s politics. Those who hold opposing view than we might, also love Israel and don’t love the changes some deem essential.

While both heads may wish frequently, that the other did not exist at all, it cannot be. We are left with *accepting* this historical tension rather than belabor the very fact that we struggle. That part is not new.

According to the Solomon parable, the king told Paul that he was one person and therefore would inherit one parcel of land. This settled the inheritance case. But what did he tell Paul, the fellow with two minds, how to handle the rest of his life?

With respect to King Solomon, permit me to sketch what I imagine could have happened in this ancient case after Solomon said, "case closed."

Solomon stepped away from his throne and walked near to the frustrated two minded man, with all his four eyes weeping.

"Paul you may think that you are cursed, having lost this property case, but your life, while difficult, is a blessing. You are more prosperous than you know.

Sometimes it takes ice water to bring clarity.

Paul, like our patriarch Jacob, you struggle, you wrestle for truth. That was Jacob's story and his name was changed to Yisrael, one who struggles with G-d. That became the name of our entire people. To wrestle to find truth is noble, and to stand as one while you do so is our eternal message.

So, I ask you, speak respectfully with your two minds. Underneath even your greatest difference, you are one.” And those words King Solomon blessed Paul.

The Hebrew term *Pilpul*, Paul’s real name, lives into the present. Pilpul is a highly respected method of studying the Talmud through careful textual analysis, in attempt to explain differences between various halakhic rulings. The goal of Pilpul study is to reconcile contradictions for the sake of understanding.

Can we too come to accept, even bless the dignity of our struggle with ambivalence between the real and the ideal of Israel? And may we, one day, celebrate our unified and divergent striving for truth.

Ken y’hi ratson – May this be G-d’s will.