

Israel Is Complicated

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I've said before that rabbis have maybe three sermons they give over and over with different words sewn together each time. Three messages they find ways to share week after week, year after year. I'm going to be honest - I think I have one sermon: it is our duty in life to change the world one relationship at a time by being kind, listening to others, spreading love. This is my one sermon. One wish. One prayer. This is the message I try to give each week - through my words, and through my actions.

Most weeks I stand here it's easy to spread that message. Because I believe it. I believe that we can change the world one person at a time through our small acts - holding the door for someone, leaving a larger tip than expected, listening to a friend cry, holding a child who's skinned their knee. I believe that what I say matters, that what I do matters. I believe that in each life is an entire world so if I can reach one person, help one person, I have succeeded in fulfilling the mitzvah of tikkun olam - repairing the world. I spread this one message because I believe it.

But today I'm tired. Today I want to reach more people, change more lives, have more worlds repaired. Today I want the WHOLE world repaired. I want peace, I want love, I want to believe that my words are reaching farther, deeper. I want to believe the ripple effect is working. Not because I'm so important and my message needs to be heard - but because this message is so important. It is not just my message. It is our message. Peace, love, patience, understanding. I'm not the first person who's prayed for these things, preached these things. I won't be the last. Because every day I'm reminded of how much repair is still needed. How deeply broken our world still is. How much hate, violence, distrust, misunderstanding, darkness there is.

We are supposed to be a light unto the nations, or l'goyim. My one sermon. My one prayer - to be a light to others, or l'acherim. Sometimes my light is dimmed. Sometimes the darkness slips through. Sometimes I'm not sure how to hold my message up. My sermon of hope, and peace, and light. Sometimes the world pushes this message down.

This week has been hard. My prayer - of hope, light, love - has been muted, shoved aside, buried as messages of hate, darkness, ring loud. People shouting over others, closing their ears, eyes, hearts to pain, nuance, history, truth.

Nothing is simple. Maybe things seem simple on paper, or from a distance, or when actual other people aren't involved. But really, nothing is simple. Because people are complicated. Issues are complicated. Life is complicated. And there's no way around that. There's no way to ignore it. Deny it. There is no way to simplify life, reduce conflict to slogans and hashtags.

I'm about as liberal as they come. I'm also a patriot. And I am a Zionist. It's possible to be all these things. I stand for equality, equity, understanding, access. I stand against racism, hatred, violence, bigotry. I proudly stand as an ally and work to use my voice and privilege when I can. I also try to know when to step back, listen, support from the sidelines. And every day I try to live my sermon - working to make the world a better place, one person, one interaction at a time. I do this as a proud Jew, proud American, and proud human. It is good for the Jews for me to represent the best I can. It is good for America for me to do my part to build a strong, safe, healthy country. And it is good for the world even if it's a tiny drop in the bucket.

It is incredibly difficult to be a liberal and a Zionist today. I already know that by using the word Zionist I have already lost people. But that's the problem. Being a Zionist isn't simple and isn't a matter of black and white, good and bad, oppressors and oppressed. Being a Zionist means I believe Israel should exist. I don't love everything about it, everything about how it is managed or run. But I don't love everything about how our government here is run and

that doesn't make me any less a patriot. Being a Zionist for me means fighting for safety, security, and peace in Israel. Being a Zionist means working for a lasting peace, a TWO STATE SOLUTION, with Palestinians and with all the Arab countries in the region. Being a Zionist means understanding none of this is simple.

Israelis have a right to live without fear. Palestinians have a right to live without fear. It sounds so simple. But it isn't. None of it is.

What is happening in Israel and Gaza and the West Bank is complicated, tragic, devastating, painful. What is happening here is terrifying. The amount of oversimplification, the ability for people to omit inconvenient truths to smash the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into their pre-conceived notions of right and wrong, bully and victim. The ease with which people slide from protesting Israel to threatening Jews. It is terrifying to me. It is not simple. I can be a Zionist and deeply wish for peace. I can be a Zionist and care about the plight of the Palestinians. But I refuse to try to simplify this conflict, try to reduce it to sound bytes and hashtags. There is a rich and complicated history at play and there are powers that work with all their might to fight against progress and peace.

If you are struggling with what is happening in Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, please reach out - reach out to me, reach out to Rabbi Stein, we are here, in this together. I definitely don't have all the answers - maybe I don't even have some of the answers. But I am working through this like we all are. As a Jew, as an American, as a Zionist. I am speaking with people who disagree with me to trying to build understanding. I am supporting groups on the ground working together towards peace and co-existence. And I am hoping, praying, for change.

This is not a zero sum game where one side is bad and one side is good, one side is innocent and one side is guilty, one side is strong and the other is weak, one side wants peace and the other wants war. It isn't. Life is not a zero sum game. It can't be.

Rav Kook taught that the righteous do not complain of the dark, but work to increase the light. Perhaps today is the most important day for my prayer to reach out through the darkness. Our prayer - for love and understanding. For hope and light. For reaching out, helping one person, holding one person. Because if we can all do that, if we can reach one person, repair one small world, we may just have a chance at repairing the whole world.