

“May There Be Heard in the Cities of Judah and the Streets of Jerusalem...”

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One of the central features of the Jewish wedding ceremony is the sheva brachot, the seven blessings. It corresponds to the seven days of creation and the fact that a new entity and world is created through the sanctification of the union of the new couple standing under the chuppah.

The last of the seven blessings praises God as the creator of joy and happiness, the bride and the groom, and as the eternal source of mirth, song, delight and rejoicing, love and harmony, peace and companionship: *gilah, rinah, ditzah, v'hedvah, ahavah, v'ahachvah, shalom v'reyoot*. And then it expresses the vision, “*Od yishamah, b'arei Yehudah: May there yet be heard again in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem festive voices of the bride and groom...of young people feasting and singing.*”

I confess to you today that when I have officiated at weddings this past year I have a lump in my throat and a swelling in my heart when I recite those words first proclaimed by the prophet Jeremiah. I have been in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem and have seen young people feasting and singing, but I have also seen stores and restaurants closed, vacant hotels and lives irreparably damaged as a result of the campaign of terror waged against the people of Israel.

The wedding ceremony concludes with the breaking of a glass, to signify, among other things, our link to the tragic destruction of the Temple 2,000 years ago. The broken glass is a metaphor for the sorrow we feel for our unwhole world, a world still waiting for redemption.

Thinking of how much glass has been shattered this past year in Israel, I wanted to touch glass that was pure and holy. So when I was in Jerusalem this summer I went to the corner of King George Street and Jaffa Road, to the Sbarro's Pizzeria, where just last year, a suicide murderer blew himself up in order to maim and kill as many Israelis as possible. The reopening of the restaurant represented the ongoing effort to put life back together as the response to attempts to destroy life. It was a means of showing the terrorists that they cannot defeat this people. Having just eaten lunch, I wasn't hungry. I bought a slice of pizza anyway. I looked at the families taking their kids out for a meal, with their strollers and children, at the young people who worked there. All people wanting to live a normal life, wanting just to live -- and certainly not people who deserve to be killed.

I went outside and touched the smooth curved glass of the window. It was so smooth and clear, not at all like the shattered shards which just a few months earlier had been dangerous projectiles. I thought of how much it contrasted with the touch of the rough stones of the Western Wall. I felt I was touching holy glass.

Can any of us imagine what it is like to live with the knowledge that a father or mother going off to work might not return, or to send a child to a mall not certain what awaits him there. Almost every day this summer I read of potentially disastrous attacks which were thwarted by alert and vigilant Israeli security forces. Just the day before Rosh Hashana, a car with over 1300 pounds of explosives which would have killed hundreds of people was discovered. For every bombing we hear about, Israel prevents tens, if not hundreds of attacks.

I would be disingenuous if I were to tell you that life in Israel is not difficult. Yet remarkably, somehow, people cope with the situation and are determined not to give their enemies the satisfaction of stopping living.

The first thing I looked at after my arrival this summer, on the road out of Ben Gurion Airport are the roads and the traffic. I look for signs of life, and was relieved when I saw that they were filled with the normal traffic jams of cars containing people going about their business.

Life goes on.

A cell phone went off, during one of the lectures, and everyone had that uncomfortable feeling of how rude it is when that happens. (Kind of the way someone would feel if say, for example, their cell phone were to go off during services.) The lecturer, made us feel at ease when he said, "There is a new etiquette in Israel now. Because of hamatzav, the situation, its ok to answer your cell phone when it rings."

Some people have quoted an analogy used by a colleague that Israel is sick and that as a result we should perform the mitzvah of bikur holim, visiting the sick. I am here to say Israel is not sick. Despite what I have just told you, it is vibrant and vital. The coffeehouses that are still in operation are full. Guards are ubiquitous. They are posted at the entrances to restaurants, theaters, malls, everywhere. Yet , culture is alive, and the people are defiantly resisting the attempt to push them out of the land. As Rabbi David Hartman said, "The Palestinians need to realize, we are home, and we aren't going anywhere." Just last week thousands of people poured into the streets of downtown Jerusalem for a street festival. Just a few weeks ago 200,000 people turned out for an end of summer festival on the beach in Tel Aviv. What other people, facing the daily threats, which are real and not just perceived, would come out in such numbers. And that is the reason you should go to Israel. See for yourself the energy and determination of this people, of your people. Yes, it is hurting, and it may be wounded. The people feel isolated and alone, but they are not sick.

How can they help but feel isolated? Not only because tourists have stopped coming. Have you ever stopped to look at the pantheon of rogue nations which surround Israel, declared enemies, who have yet to accept the existence of Israel, who use their oil wealth to pay proxies to fight for them, and who sponsor boycotts of any who dare to treat Israel as normal. I just read an article the other day that Iran alone spends \$50 million a year just to train Lebanese and Palestinian terrorists in Beirut to carry out underwater suicide

operations. (There must be some kind of Yiddish curse we can come up with about drowning that would be appropriate.)

Then there is Iraq which has tons of chemical weapons as well as a mass arsenal they are anxious to unleash against Israel, and which gives \$ 25,000 to the family of each suicide bomber as a reward for their child's heroic act.

Speaking of rewards, did you hear about the suicide bomber who got to heaven, and was surprised to meet George Washington, who attacked him for having killed innocent people. Next Thomas Jefferson started beating him up and cursing him for depriving children of their liberty and freedom. The next thing he knew, James Monroe and James Madison started to take out their anger at him. Confused and exasperated, the suicide bomber turned to God and asked for what was going on. The Holy One said to him, "Remember. I promised you there would be 70 Virginians waiting for you in heaven."

Not to be outdone, there is Syria which recently was honored with the rotating Presidency of the Security Council. Incidentally, Israel is the only nation which is not allowed to sit on the Security Council. Just five days after Syria assumed the title, the head of Palestinian Islamic Jihad ordered the June 5 suicide bombing in Meggido from his safe headquarters in Damascus. The Foreign Minister of Syria regularly quotes from and distributes to guests, including His Holiness, the Pope, anti-semitic vitriolic literature, such as the notorious forgery, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

And then there are our so-called allies, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

You may recall last year I reported to you that the number one hit song was, "I hate Israel." I guess now they just play it on the golden oldies station.

In March an article in the official Saudi newspaper described how Jews ritually slaughter Christian and Moslem children to use their blood in holiday foods. Embarrassed that 19 of the hijackers who attacked America were Saudis, and by the fact that the Saudi support and funding of international terror has been unmasked, and that people see how repressive the Saudi regime is, instead of changing their ways, they hired a new p.r. firm.

And these are just the major nations engaged in the conflict. There are other countries, such as Libya, and the other members of the Arab League, as well as the other Moslem nations around the world who are hostile to Israel.

In addition to the countries so obsessed and consumed with their hatred of Israel, there are also a number of terrorist organizations who compete for the title of most likely to do the most damage to the state of Israel.

Hizbullah, the so-called party of God, which occupies Southern Lebanon to launch its attacks against the northern parts of Israel. They are matched by the extremist Moslem fundamentalist groups Islamic Jihad and Hamas, which operate in Palestinian areas and

whose contribution to bettering the world is the introduction of suicide bombers and other means of mass murder and destruction.

Of extreme concern is the deeply troubling recently discovered development that Israeli Arabs are aiding and participating in these groups, including being responsible for the planning and execution of the Hebrew University bombing. Not to mention, the Moslem clerics who feed their people a steady diet in their weekly sermons variations on their favorite message, why Jews are evil and need to be annihilated.

And finally, there is our “partner”, the signatory to the Oslo Peace Accords, the Palestinian Authority which contrary to the accords, does nothing to impede any of these groups from operating with impunity, and which in fact has established the Tanzim, Force 17, Al Aksa Brigade, and other armed forces to strike at Israel, imports weapons and spends millions on munitions factories. All of which takes place in refugee camps which are under the supervision and watchful eye of United Nations forces who turn a blind eye to all of this.

In fact, keep in mind that the information coming out of the disputed territories is strongly filtered and censored. Just last week, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate declared that journalists are no longer permitted to photograph Palestinian children carrying weapons, since they now realize this image is not going over too well in the West.

The problem with the current Palestinian leadership is that its actions have shown that they are not interested in peace. This corrupt leadership squanders away the money sent to it by the nations of the world in private Swiss bank accounts. Rather than build infrastructures, roads, or schools, which would create jobs and hope, they use the \$ 60 million they are sent monthly by the nations of the world to build up their own private reserves. Arafat sends \$5 million a month to his wife in Paris. Not only do they steal from their own people, what little is spent on Palestinians is used to promote hatred, rather than tolerance or acceptance. How sad that nothing is being done to prepare the people for eventual peace or accommodation with Israel. Not one of the Palestinian textbooks recently surveyed by an international monitoring group referred to Israel or the peace process, in contrast to Israeli school books.

The capture by Israel of the Karine A, a ship loaded with 50 tons of smuggled weapons at a cost of \$100 million, commandeered by the head of the Palestinian navy, was authorized by Arafat. Despite being caught red-handed, he then denied involvement, exposing the true nature of the Palestinian Authority, and revealing more than any lies recited on CNN by Hanan Ashrawi or Saeb Erekat ever could. How can Israel trust such an individual or organization?

They have proven through their actions and lies that they are untrustworthy. Any lawyer who makes a deal on behalf of his client will first do “due dilligence” to ascertain that the other side can be trusted to uphold its side of the deal. How can Israel be expected to negotiate in good faith with a side which says one thing to the west and the opposite to its

own people, which denounces terrorism at the same time it plans terrorist attacks. How can Israel be expected to negotiate with a side which has shown by its actions its true intent, which is the destruction of the state of Israel.

As my son Ezra said to me the other day, everywhere else in the world, terrorists are arrested, thrown in jail, or killed. Of all the countries facing such perpetrators of violence, only Israel is told to negotiate with them.

And believe it or not, despite concessions Israel has made and the sacrifices it is willing to make for peace, and even though it is surrounded by 300 million hostile Moslems and an Arab world 50 times the size of Israel, an amalgamation of animosity and antagonism, there are those who say that Israel is the source of the problem, the suffering, and the instability in the region. Worst of all, some who make this claim are well-meaning, but misguided and naïve Israelis and American rabbis.

It reminds me of the story about the three Jews about to face a firing squad. They are each asked if they have a final request before they are about to die. The first two politely decline, but their companion speaks up and says, he would like a cigarette and a cup of coffee. At which point the first two, get angry with him and scold him, "Quiet, don't be a troublemaker. You'll just get them mad at us."

While Israel is certainly not perfect, we should not be so narcissistic as to attribute the brunt of the conflict upon the side that really does want peace, and which has shown a willingness to make tough decisions and hard sacrifices.

People seem to forget that the enemies that Israel is fighting use ambulances to transport suicide bombers. They pack their explosives with nails and rat poison, so if someone survives, the damage will be even greater. They target families sitting down to celebrate a Passover seder, (and to think that some thought America should refrain from fighting during Ramadan?!) A young girl's bat mitzvah celebration in Hadera was transformed, in her own words, from the happiest day of her life, to the saddest day, as her grandparents were killed by the suicide intruder. They praise those who murder by naming streets and plazas after them, and plastering their pictures on public walls and on elementary school bulletin boards. After a bombing in July which killed 11 people, 4,000 Palestinians celebrated by passing out sweets and dancing in the streets to celebrate deaths of Israelis. Mothers praise Allah for the nachas they get from their children who perform these acts.

Yet despite all this, it goes out of its way to try to avoid taking the lives of non-combatants. Soldiers take courses as part of their training to emphasize the obligation to preserve life and limit casualties on both sides. When Israel makes a mistake, it investigates, admits if it is wrong, and tries to make amends. It takes no joy in these acts, and it is most definitely not the policy of the government of Israel to target civilians.

Just two weeks ago, the cover story of Newsweek magazine told of atrocities committed by our allies in Afghanistan against members of the Taliban in the presence of American

troops. Apparently, hundreds of people were locked into trains by members of the Northern Army and suffocated. How many of you were aware of this? I tracked the story, and could find only one story and one editorial in the Washington Post about it. The United Nations has said that it cannot investigate the matter. Can you just imagine what if Israel would have played the role of America? In fact, in 1982 after the Christian Phalangists allied with Israel in Lebanon killed Palestinians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatilla, it was the lead story for several nights on the national evening news, in America, leading to countless international condemnations. Israel conducted a thorough investigation and even though no Israeli forces participated in what happened, took full responsibility for the fact that they should have done more to prevent what occurred.

Israel is the only country held accountable for such actions. The double standard is unfair. No nation could live up to the kind of scrutiny that Israel is forced to endure.

If anything, the thing which constantly amazes me is how little hatred or vengeance there is in Israel for Arabs. Despite all that surrounds them, and the loss of over 600 Israeli lives, along with severe injuries to thousands of others, vigilante and extremist groups are almost non-existent, and if they are discovered, are arrested. Even hateful speech about Arabs is a crime which is prosecuted and not tolerated. Bumper stickers with anti-Arab slogans are prohibited.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniye was right when he told a Washington Post reporter earlier this year, "Jews love life more than any other people, and they prefer not to die." He was explaining why he thinks the suicide bombing tactics would be so successful against Israel. His testimony also accurately characterizes the principles which guide the Israeli army in its tactics.

An extraordinary article by Scott Anderson in the New York Times Magazine of May 12<sup>th</sup> followed an elite commando unit of reservists, which means they all have regular jobs 11 months of the year as lawyers, bankers, construction workers and farmers. They come from all parts of the political spectrum. The amazing thing about the article is that it accurately captures the humanity, decency and basic morality of Israel's fighting forces.

Forced to use the home of a Palestinian as a base of their operations, the soldiers are all uncomfortable in this role. They delicately roll up the carpets, and move them along with breakable objects out of the way. They are forbidden to touch or use anything belonging to the family, and the writer describes that one soldier is given the job of feeding and watering the chickens in the yard.

Throughout the whole operation, they seek to minimize loss of life, on both sides.

The reporter chronicles an incident in which a house is searched for terrorists. A man living comes out with his hands up, and is asked if there is anyone else inside. It is explained to him in clear Arabic that anyone still inside will be shot. I quote from the article, "The man nods. 'Everyone is out.'...With the Palestinian man leading the way,

the commander suddenly spots a figure moving in the dark. Shouting a warning to his comrades, he pushes up against the wall and raises his assault rifle to fire, but then hesitates for a fraction of a second, long enough for him to realize that the figure is not a gunman, but a young child...(Angrily, the commander says,) Three times I asked the father if everyone was out, and three times he forgets his own son.”

It is almost as if the Israeli soldier is more concerned with the life of the child than the child’s own father.

Anderson then describes a daring maneuver in which a potential suicide bomber who has come close to the troops is disarmed by being tackled and is not shot by the soldiers whose lives he is threatening. He writes, “Any other army in the world, faced with the very real threat of suicide bombers, would probably have simply shot the man in the street...and the boy in the house.”

If only the world knew. If only the world knew the truth about the decency and morality of Israel and its soldiers.

A few months ago Penina Eisenmann, buried her five year old daughter and 60 year old mother at a double funeral, after both of whom were killed by a terrorist bomber in French Hill. “They were the two most precious things to me, my mother and my daughter, (and now I lost them both.) I’m crying enough tears to fill an ocean.” She spoke to reporters because she said she wanted the world to know what is being done to us, and the pain and suffering we are experiencing.

It is difficult to be hopeful. Just last week, Israel and Jordan announced at a United Nations summit that they were going to work together to save the Dead Sea by building a canal from the Red Sea. What a wonderful, hopeful sign. It was greeted, however, by condemnation by Syria, Iraq, the Palestinians, and the good old moderates, Saudi Arabia. What does that tell us about them?

If it was about the occupation, independence or establishing a state, the conflict would have ended long ago.

Ephraim Inbar, director of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar Ilan University said, “there is nothing Israel can offer that will satisfy them.”

So what is the answer? The answer is perseverance. The Palestinians expected that Israelis would be complacent and not resist their attacks, or submit to the fear of terror. That it has resisted, led Rabbi Doniel Hartman to say this summer, “We have already won this war.” The fact that Israel has not picked up and left is a victory. Some believe the current wave of terror will wear itself out, and is being worn down by the unrelenting pursuit of the current government.

The way to break the cycle of violence is to call for the dismantling of the culture of anger, anti semitism and hatred which dominates and permeates Palestinian and Moslem

society. When Ronald Reagan stood in Berlin, he challenged the Russians, by saying, "Mr. Gorbachev, take down this wall." Instead of constantly telling Israelis to dismantle settlements, how about a novel idea expressed this summer by Rabbi David Hartman. He suggested that as a first step and sign of commitment to truly resolving and ending the hostilities, Palestinians should be told to dismantle the refugee camps. Its enough already. And the United Nations should lead the way.

What can we Americans do?

We must be vigilant against Moslem extremist hate groups which promote violence and filter money to terrorist organizations, and support our government's war against terror. We should think twice about what we can do to lessen our dependence on Arab oil. If you drive a gas guzzler, get rid of it. Visit Israel. You will be amazed by what you will find there. Get involved politically and support AIPAC, and candidates favorable to Israel, as well as our newly formed Israel Affairs Committee. Buy Israel bonds, as never before. Contribute to the Israel Emergency Fund of the UJC Federation.

Most of all, let us stand together, so that the vision expressed in today's haftarah will become a reality, "I will turn their mourning to joy. I will comfort and cheer them in their grief.

And we pray that promise of the wedding blessing be fulfilled. "May the streets of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah be filled with the sound of the bride and groom, of feasting and singing."

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