



A Modern Orthodox Congregation

Why I go to AIPAC

Leaving the warmth of Florida for the blustery north is rarely appealing. However, joining the AIPAC policy conference and hearing collective voices in support of Israel warms my soul. It's also exciting to hear bipartisanship amongst politicians and to be inspired by the Israeli innovation on display. Last year I was even introduced to *Fauda* (a Netflix production) by its director and lead actor and spent part of my summer vacation watching the first season. I'm also proud to see the large contingent from Anshei Emuna supporting this most worthwhile ideal. (Photo to come)

Unfortunately, the anti-Israel lobby is getting stronger by the day and the BDS movement is capturing the hearts and minds of vulnerable campus youth. Last week Omar Barghouti, a Palestinian leader of the BDS movement, spoke to the European Parliament. Their presentation was nothing less than a skewed and blatantly negative overview of the situation in Israel. The BDS movement is like a wolf in sheep's clothing, often fooling the naive and catching them in their spider's web of deceit. They claim publicly to be Israel's advocates but work tirelessly for the delegitimization of Israel. David Friedman, the United States ambassador to Israel called their mantra of being 'pro-Israel, pro peace' blasphemous. BDS would be more genuine if they were honest in their platform. Better yet, they should admit that the BDS acronym actually means '**Biased Double Standards**'. They openly critique and criticize Israel while ignoring terror emanating from the Palestinians and other Arab and Middle East countries. AIPAC confronts this lopsided understanding and builds relationships needed to foster bipartisan support for a pro-Israel agenda in Washington.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lauded the tremendous relationship with the USA and how thankful he is to President Trump for proclaiming Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. He also shared that Israel recycles 86% percent of their waste water compared to Spain, the nation that comes in second but only recycles 17% of their waste water. He spoke of the population of Israel being only 1/10 of 1% of the global population but innovation in technology makes them a superpower. The biggest applause was certainly for Nikki Haley, the US ambassador to the UN. It felt as if the building was shaking while her multiple standing ovations lasted for a few minutes. She truly impressed the crowd by saying although she will always show respect towards her adversaries she will never let them bully her country or the State of Israel. She also spoke about how proud she

was to veto a UN resolution against Israel. Guatemala's prime minister also received a huge reception after mentioning his country will be joining the United States and moving their embassy to Jerusalem.

I don't agree with all of AIPAC's agendas and policies. I even find some invited speakers disingenuous and their ideas are contrary to mine. But that is exactly why we need AIPAC and must support it. They create pro-Israel supporters amongst those I would have given up on. If Israel would rely only on politicians who share my politics, then it would have only a small minority of actual supporters. I might momentarily feel elated that I stood firm with conviction, but ultimately Israel would suffer immeasurable harm with few friends to back them in difficult times.

I may have a personal view that Israel is the land of Jews and not a single inch should ever be ceded. I can quote biblical verses proving that God promised the land to children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I could pontificate that we must continue the fight regardless of world opinion and the potential danger to our soldiers. I may even be correct. However, other than pompously providing a boost to my ego and pride, the results would be a dismal failure. I heard from a 27-year-old Israeli who shared an idea that resonated with me. He said, "I don't have the solution, but I know the status quo can't continue." I too, don't have solutions; all I have is unrealistic hopes that the aspirations in my heart will yield a desired result. Yet, in my brain I acknowledge the futility of those dreams. Israel certainly has succeeded beyond anyone's imagination but even in prosperity, peace and security are no closer to reality. Terrorist activities continuously wreak havoc on innocent women and children and even the greatest army in the world can't protect all its citizens.

I would rather live in a world where AIPAC is not needed, where Israel is judged with the same measuring stick by which all other countries are measured. I would rather live in a world where there aren't Muslim blocks or left-wing fringe groups sworn to the destruction of Israel. I would rather live in a world where nations won't be condemned for complimenting Israel and acknowledging the amazing strides in health, science and technology and its immeasurable benefits for humanity. I really would love to live in world where AIPAC would be superfluous and unnecessary. And indeed, we Jews recite exactly that prayer: Ani Ma'amin; a prayer that states that I believe that the messiah will come very soon. And as soon as he arrives, I will cancel my AIPAC membership. But until then, we have no better options.

Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Jack Engel

