

Rosh HaShanah 5775 (2014)- Day 1 Sermon-Temple Beth Ahm
ISRAEL IS FAMILY
By Rabbi Lisa S. Malik, Ph.D.

(Count in Hebrew: 15 seconds)

15 seconds. a long time when you're impatient or eagerly awaiting the rabbi to begin her sermon on the High Holidays.

15 seconds just the right amount of time to recite a blessing and dip an apple in honey on Rosh HaShanah.

But 15 seconds: enough time to run to a shelter in some parts of Israel after hearing a siren announcing the approach of a rocket or missile?!

15 seconds. That's how long teenagers on USY Israel Pilgrimage had on 4 occasions this summer. And on one occasion, they had no time at all when a mortar exploded in close proximity of their hotel in Eilat at 2:00 AM.

How are we, as Jews, supposed to respond to the attacks on Israel, which have been both physical and verbal? Is there anything that we can do?

To hear the USY teenagers describe it, the explosion of the missile in Eilat was a **multi-sensory experience**, striking fear into the hearts of all who were there at that moment.

With their EARS, they heard the siren.

With their FEET, they ran to shelter.

With their EYES, they saw smoke.

With their NOSES, they smelled burning shrapnel.

With their HANDS, they reached out to each other for support.

And in their HEARTS, they FELT fear and anxiety that remained with them for the rest of the month as they continued their journey.

Just as the explosion was a multi-sensory experience, so too should our response to anti-Israel prejudice & worldwide anti-Semitism be multi-sensory:

- With your FEET, go to solidarity rallies and memorial services to show your support for Israel and your opposition to anti-Zionism and other forms of anti-Semitism.

With your FEET, if you are able, get on a plane and travel to Israel.

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- With your HANDS, write your **elected officials**, urging them to understand and appreciate the reality of the ongoing terrorist threat to Israel, and **thanking them for the United States’ financial support of the Iron Dome project**, which saved thousands of lives in Israel this summer by intercepting oncoming rockets and missiles.

- With your HANDS, support the Israeli economy by purchasing **Israeli bonds** instead of writing personal checks as gifts for weddings, Bnai Mitzvah, and other simchas. These bonds represent an investment in Israel.

- With your HANDS, purchase goods that were made in the West Bank, doing your part to counteract the European Union’s ban of these products & the BDS movement’s boycotts.

- With your HANDS, give tzedakah to the **Jewish Federation’s Israel Emergency Campaign** and other charitable causes that provide financial assistance to help rebuild communities that were hardest hit by the rocket attacks.

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- With your EARS & our EYES, try to **listen to & read up on current events in Israel** and around the world, and not just accept the viewpoint of the mainstream media at face value. Read the news & listen to it with a critical EYE and EAR. Download the Jerusalem Post app on your smart phone & read other news sources that are more supportive of Israel, such as ynetnews.com & algemeiner.com.

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- With your NOSE, try to **sniff out anti-Semitism in all of its insidious forms**, from anti-Israel rhetoric in the media, to the BDS movement, to rallies, riots, and destruction of Jewish property in Europe.

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•With your MOUTH, **speak up and verbally defend Israel** & defend the Jewish people when others attack us verbally or physically.

In a Facebook post on August 31, my daughter, Eva, wrote:

“Despite the war that was going on, despite the constant shudder every time we heard an ambulance (not sure if it was a red alert or not), and despite the hard times that each and every person residing in Israel felt, I came home with even more pride for Israel.

Now that I have been home for a few weeks I have made every effort to serve as an **ambassador for Israel**.

The reason for my **persistence in making my story known** is because I feel as though it is my duty, and it is all of yours too. I truly believe that there is just as much to do as an American supporter of Israel as there is in making aliyah.For those who are reading this, I truly ask of you to do your part. The way that the news portrays Israel is not always in a positive light, and that is really an understatement. Israel is not winning the social media war. If you are reading this, you are on Facebook, and that means that you can make a difference right now. Start spreading the word about Israel in a good light. Advocating does not just start on college campuses; it starts now. I hope that you take these words to heart. Israel needs our help and our support.... Am Yisrael Chai.”

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On the surface, by focusing on Israel advocacy, it seems that Eva is just focusing on what we can do with our MOUTHS to support Israel. But there is something else that is implicit in Eva’s Facebook post. Underlying her call for action, there is **a FEELING in her HEART that motivates her activism..... a feeling of CONNECTION to Israel** that many of you already have & that I am hoping to stir up in others.

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Rabbi Alan Lucas of Roslyn, NY, shared the following story:

One of his congregants approached him, challenging him with the question, "Is the death of an Israeli soldier worth more than the death of a Palestinian child?"

To this question, Rabbi Lucas answered, "No..... and....Yes"

"No: Both deaths are tragic."

"But, Yes: I feel the pain of the death of the Israeli soldier so much more because he is my son."

To which the congregant responded, "But none of the Israeli soldiers who died are your sons! None of them are even related to you."

To which Rabbi Lucas responded, "That is where we disagree. To me, every Israeli soldier is a member of my family."



I expressed a like-minded sentiment at the **community-wide memorial service for Eyal Yifrach, Gilad Shaer, & Naftali Frankel** this past July. Why did we cry for these 3 Israeli teenagers even though none of us knew them personally?

One of the reasons we cried was that we considered these boys to be 'our boys' because of our **connection to the Land & People of Israel**. As the Talmud teaches, "*Kol Yisrael arevim zeh ba-zeh.*" "All Jews are connected to each other" by a shared history, religion, and culture.



This past summer, I wanted to send my daughter a present for her 17th birthday. But I knew that if I shipped a package from the States, it would have to go through customs, and it was unlikely that any birthday present would get to her in time. So, I searched online for a jeweler in Israel, so that I could buy a necklace that could be shipped to Eva directly from another location in the country. the following morning I received a message:

“For some reason I cannot process the card.
Don't worry; I will go ahead and mail out the necklace to your daughter tomorrow morning so she gets it on time for her birthday and you can just mail me a check to the following address..... Love, Idit (Edith)”

Could you believe she would ship this necklace to a total stranger without receiving any payment in advance!

A similar thing happened to a Temple Beth Ahm congregant who traveled to Israel this summer for the first time. There was a gorgeous necklace that she was considering buying, but she was a bit ambivalent about the purchase because it was quite expensive. So, the salesperson in the jewelry store turned to her and said, “I’ll tell you what. Why don’t you take the necklace with you, wear it around, and see if you like the way it feels and looks? If you decide that you want to keep it, then great, come back and pay for it. If you decide not to purchase it, then just bring it back to me tomorrow.”

Where else would that happen but in Israel?!

Another TBA congregant who was in Israel was amazed when a young Israeli mother was on her way to the ladies’ room turned to her saying, “Can you watch my baby for a few minutes while I use the restroom?”

Only in Israel!

Can you imagine a total stranger asking you to watch his/her child in any other country? The reason that this woman trusted our congregant with her baby is that she didn’t consider her to be a stranger; she considered her to be family.

Last year (2013), **Rabbi David Nesenoff**, the rabbi who had interviewed Helen Thomas, spoke at a Solomon Schechter Day School event where Wendy Cooperman was honored as outgoing president:

He said,

"Would you still consider someone to be your friend if you didn't see him/her for a few years?" "After 2 years, would you still consider that person to be your friend?" "After 5 years?" "After 10 years?"

"After 50 years?" PROBABLY NOT.

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"But, would you still consider someone to be your child even if, God forbid, you didn't see him/her for a few years?"

"If, due to some unimaginable circumstance, *chas v'chalilah*, you didn't see or speak to your son for 50 years, would you still consider him to be your son?"

"If, you were, Heaven forbid, estranged from him for 50 years, would you still consider him to be your son?"

OF COURSE YOU WOULD!

"Because it's your son.

And when someone is your son, he is always your son."

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The same should be true of our relationship with the land of Israel.

Even if we've never been to Israel, or if we haven't been there for 5 or 10 or 50 years,

even if we have felt 'estranged' from the land of Israel from time to time, We should still feel a connection to her.

Because ***we are Bnai Yisrael, which literally means, the Children of Israel.***

We are not the "Friends of Israel" or the "Acquaintances of Israel;" we are the "Children of Israel."

We are related to each other. We are members of the same family.

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In the Talmud (Masechet **Menachot 37a**), a man posed a question to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi regarding the Pidyon HaBen (redemption of the first born) of his **two-headed baby boy**. The crux of the halachic issue was whether his newborn son **should be considered one person or two people** for purposes of the redemption ritual.

**Midrash Kohelet (1:9)** presents another halachic case about a two-headed individual. When this man's father died, he approached King Solomon, demanding a double share of his father's inheritance. So, King Solomon covered one of the man's two heads & then proceeded to pour boiling hot water on the man's second head to see if both heads would feel the pain or if just one head would feel the pain. As it turned out, both heads cried out. From this, King Solomon determined that the two heads were genetically one being & should be judged as one for inheritance purposes.

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In a sense, the global Jewish community is like a two-headed baby: one head represents the diaspora country in which we reside; the other head represents the State of Israel.

If we feel closely connected to Israel, then we, as American Jews, should feel the pain whenever others try to harm or destroy Israel.

But do American Jews truly feel the pain of harm inflicted upon Israeli Jews? Some certainly do.

But far too many American Jews do not feel enough of a connection to Israel to feel her pain.

Far too many American Jews are **apathetic** when it comes to Israel.

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And I believe that it is **apathy** that poses the biggest challenge to the continuity of Jews and Judaism.

With all of the threat that Hamas and other terrorists pose to the State of Israel, they do not have the potential to destroy us if we don't allow it. The Jewish people themselves threaten Jewish continuity (in Israel and around the world) by failing to connect, by allowing themselves to feel nothing for Israel. **Each and every one of us has the power to destroy or to save Israel.**

This is not the first time in my life that I have felt this way. When I went to Israel with Adi and the children in the Summer of **2002**, during the Second Intifada, we visited the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv (*Beyt Ha-Tefutzot*). We were in the room that houses the Holocaust memorial and I started to read out loud the words on the wall:

"In the year 1936, Adolf Hitler began his campaign against the Jews of Europe... He exterminated 6,000,000 Jews, including 1 1/2 million children. And, as the Jews of Europe desparately fought for their lives, the rest of the world stood idly by in silence". (*"v'ha-olam amad mi-neged v'he-chereesh."*)

As we read the writing on the wall, Adi turned to me and said, "Do you know what the saddest thing is about this exhibit?" It was not the words on the wall or the mournful background music (*Ani Maamin*). ... It was the fact that the museum was virtually EMPTY, just like the rest of Israel- empty because tourists were nowhere to be seen or heard. You could palpably feel the absence of American tourists throughout Israel-in the streets, the restaurants, the shops, the hotels, religious sites, tourist attractions- all silent and empty.

As I stood in the silent, empty halls of the Diaspora Museum that day and as I reflected upon the silence and emptiness of Israel during the Second Intifada, an Aramaic rabbinic saying popped into my mind:

Shetikah k'hodaah damya.
("Silence resembles tacit acknowledgment and approval").

That same saying came to my mind repeatedly this summer, as well. Silence & inaction are acts of irresponsibility. By saying nothing, by doing nothing during the Shoah, many people were tacitly approving of what was going on in Eastern Europe by failing to do anything to stop it. The silence of bystanders during the Holocaust was eerily reflected in the silence of the Diaspora Museum in 2002. And, today, in 2014 when Diaspora Jews say nothing & do nothing about the situation in Israel, when we fail to support Israel by going to Israel, when we fail to support Israel and the Jewish people by speaking up when people make anti-Zionist or anti-Semitic comments, we too are being irresponsible.

By saying and doing nothing, we are neglecting our responsibilities as Jews to ensure the continued existence of the State of Israel and the Jewish people.

15 seconds. That's the amount of time that it takes in some parts of Israel to run to a shelter after a hearing a red alert siren, warning of an approaching missile.

15 seconds. That's how long it takes to recite the blessings before the shofar blowing on Rosh HaShanah.

15 seconds. That's the time I would now like to give you to consider how deeply you feel connected to Israel.

If you don't feel so connected, think about what you might do to foster a closer relationship, to turn your apathy into empathy.

If you do already feel that connection, consider the steps you might take (with your HEART, as well as with YOUR EYES, EARS, NOSE, HANDS & FEET) to encourage others to feel what you feel.

Israel needs your passion.

Israel needs your support.

Now more than ever

(Count: 15 seconds in Hebrew.)

Am Yisrael Chai & Shanah Tovah.