

## Dancing at Two Weddings

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A classical Yiddish proverb tell us: “Mit ine tuchas, ken men nit tantzen oyf tzvai chasones: If you only have one tuchas, you can’t dance at two weddings.” In other words, you can’t be in two places at once. You can’t work for competing businesses. You can’t be married to two spouses at the same time. For our Jewish community in America, the question that is now being raised is whether it is possible, any more, to have dual loyalties to two national entities, that is, both to America and to Israel.

The question of dual loyalty, is, I think, what has been underneath the emotions that have been deeply expressed within our American Jewish community over the deal with Iran. Yes, everyone has been divided about the deal: Republicans vs. Democrats, Hawks vs. Doves, Obama vs. Congress, Israeli generals vs. Israeli politicians. But never before, it seems, has the American Jewish community been so bitterly divided; never has our animosity toward one another been so virulent as in these past few months over the proposed treaty.

Jerrold Nadler, for example, a Democratic New York Representative, who is for the deal, has been called by fellow Jews, a kapo, a Nazi collaborator. Another Jewish New York Democratic, Nita Lowey, who is against the deal, has been accused by Jews of treason to the U.S. The Jewish press has run weekly articles from various pundits, both pro and con, who predict either the end of Israel or a nuclear Holocaust should the deal go through.

And just as the earthquakes that shake our windows and rattle our walls are caused by tectonic plates deep under the earth that push against one another, I want, this morning, to suggest that the current rumblings and rifts within our American Jewish community are about something far deeper than the Iranian deal but rather are caused by the pushing of two, deep, historic “identity plates” against one another. I want to suggest that while the presenting problem of the Iranian deal is a serious one, the deeper issue that is pushing our buttons is the issue of dual loyalty, a problem that has faced us Jews since our loss of a homeland two thousand years ago, and that now, again, has reared its head for we Jews who live in America.

Ever since we were first expelled from our land by the Babylonians (586 BCE) and then by the Romans (70 and 135 CE), we have mostly dwelt in the Diaspora, that is, in lands outside of Israel. For almost two thousand years, we were an oppressed minority in lands that were not our own. We had special taxes levied upon us. We were excluded from cities and when we were allowed in, were put into ghettos. We were hated and feared, forcibly converted, drafted for decades, exiled, or killed. No matter the land in which we lived, in the end, we remained the perpetual outsider, the other.

And when, as a result of the Enlightenment in the late 1700s, we were finally allowed to become citizens of these countries, the whispers and suspicions continued to boil beneath the surface about us. We were suspected of dual loyalty, that is, loyalty to the country in which we lived and loyalty to the Jewish People. That didn’t mean equal loyalty; it meant divided loyalty. It was like adultery. It was treason.

Charges of dual loyalty would be raised against us in Germany in the 1840s, and then, again in the 1940s. In France, Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain in the French army, was accused in 1894 of selling secrets to the Germans, and this became an opportunity for many in France to declare that all Jews had dual loyalty. In Russia, the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion was produced in 1902, a forgery that purported to show that the Jews were secretly plotting throughout the lands in which they lived, to take over the world.

But America was different, a nation of immigrants. Here, no one could say to us: "Who are you? We have been here for centuries!" for all were newcomers. Here, the Church, long the proclaimer of Jewish difference and otherness, no longer held power. Here, was a nation where the principles of the Enlightenment - that all were equal citizens - was truly in force. And so, we Jews came to America but we weren't really sure that we fit in. When the Eastern European Jews began arriving in the 1880s, the German Jews, who had arrived forty years earlier, worried about what Americans would think of the unwashed hordes coming off the boat, and they did all in their power to help Eastern European Jews quickly learn English and dress like regular Yankees. In later years, we worried about being labeled as Communist sympathizers, and when our own Dreyfus Trial emerged - the spy trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg - we kept a low profile.

We also discovered that the immigrants from other lands brought with them their historic memory both from the Church and from their culture, that we were the Other, that we were different. We discovered that we were locked out of universities and country clubs. Yet, we were grateful that there were no public attacks upon us by the Church or by the governmental authorities. Perhaps we weren't 100% equal but we were safe in America. So quietly, we created our own country clubs, and a university. We were careful to dress like our neighbors, talk like our neighbors, worship like our neighbors, eat like our fellow Americans. We were Jewish but not too Jewish. Things were good here; better not to call too much attention to ourselves.

But all the efforts of American Jewry to "fly under the radar", to support Israel but not too publicly, came to an end in the 1960s, when the Six Day War burst upon American consciousness. We could, now, no longer cover up Israel's existence. Now the issue of dual loyalty was thrust upon us. Yet, we discovered that, miraculously, the issue of dual loyalty had been transformed. For the '60s was also the beginning of ethnic pride in America: the T-shirts that read: "Kiss me, I'm Italian"; the rise of the Black Power movement. It was now possible to declare that one could be a loyal American and have an affinity for one's unique, special group. We could dance at two weddings at the same time! We could be Jews and we could be Americans. We could be Jews who supported our ethnic homeland and support America, our country of birth and residence.

This was also possible for us Jews since the narrative of The Six Day War - Israel cast as David against the Arab Goliath - caught the imagination of America. Israel was seen as a transplanted America, a source of democratic values in the midst of backward Arab tribalism. And dual loyalty was also possible since America and Israel shared strategic interests. Israel was viewed by our State Department as a bulwark against Russian expansionism in the Middle East. So we American Jews wore mezuzahs around our necks, and put Israeli flags in our sanctuaries. We could eat hotdogs and felafel, we could proudly support and visit the State of Israel.

As long as Israeli strategic interests matched U.S. strategic interests in the Middle East, Jewish dual loyalty was O.K. As long as the narratives of our shared values: settling the West, the plucky individual pushing ahead, fighting against overwhelming odds, celebrating

democracy...as long as the U.S. and Israel seemed to share common narratives and myths, dual loyalty was O.K. By the turn of this century, however, everything was turned upside down.

Today, for many Americans, the Palestinians are the underdogs, the victims. No matter how many rockets are fired into Israel from Gaza, no matter how Hamas uses civilians as shields, Israeli responses are seen as offensive maneuvers. The security wall that Israel has erected becomes not a defensive structure but seen as a symbol of apartheid. Israel's faults and real domestic difficulties are the focus in newspapers and on the Internet. Those whom Israel calls terrorists are seen by an increasing number of Americans as freedom fighters; Israel sees settlements as necessary defense positions while many Americans see them as colonial occupation.

Our strategic interests are also diverging. Israel sees Iran as an existential threat while America sees it as yet another Arab nation that needs to be contained. U.S. petroleum needs still necessitate that we support Saudi Arabia, the largest funder of terror operations and anti-Israel hatred in the Middle East. Israel saw Mubarak of Egypt as a great asset, keeping its southern border with Egypt at peace, while Americans have come to see him as an oppressive dictator. The frostiness between Netanyahu and Obama is an outward symbol of the deepening divisions between the U.S. and Israel; the Iran deal is the tip of other crises to come.

The more that the national narratives and strategic interests diverge between the U.S. and Israel, the greater is the possibility that American Jews are going to be put in a position of having to publicly choose between them. No longer something to celebrate, the dual loyalty of the Jews of America now threatens to become a liability. Already, some in our community answer the question of dual loyalty by jettisoning their connection to Israel. Weary of defending its policies and its compromises, they declare, in essence: "What have I to do with them?" Some put their support behind the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement against Israel. Others, with the rallying cry of, "Remember the Holocaust" and "Never again!" declare that our first and foremost obligation is to those of our people in the Land of Israel. Many others, perhaps the majority of American Jewry, adopt the strategy of the early 20th century: assert our loyalty to America and stay quiet about Israel.

But there is another solution. If the two wedding halls are brought close together, it is possible to dance at two weddings. For the future safety and protection of Israel and for the integrity and, perhaps, even the future safety of our American Jewish community, we need to act and speak up now to help keep America and Israel more closely aligned with one another.

We need to do what we can so that American interests and Israeli interests in the Middle East are brought closer together. The more that America can be freed from our needs on Arab countries to supply us with petroleum, the freer hand America has in the Middle East to support Israel. We need to do more to see that American politicians have more sophisticated knowledge of tribalism and how it operates. The last ten years, frankly, largely due to U.S. ignorance, has resulted in the U.S. often propping up or removing the wrong tribal leaders. We need to see to it that more of our elected officials are brought to visit Israel. We need to speak up against the Boycott movement and support the efforts of those who are fighting to overturn it. We can support our Hillels to combat hate propaganda against Israel on college campuses.

We also need to send a clear, unambiguous message to the current and future Prime Ministers of Israel that it is a terrible idea to come to America to support one political party over another or to publically declare support for a particular presidential candidate in an effort to influence US foreign policy.

We can bring Israel and the U.S. closer together by creating new narratives that highlight our shared values. There is the story of Israel as Silicon Valley. We need to let Americans know that the Waze application they use on their phones to get around town was invented in Israel, that the USB memory stick was an Israeli product. Brain imaging devices, solar batteries, water conservation...The list goes on and on. We need to share about the high level in Israel of education, health, and the arts. We need to share that Israel really is a haven for gays and lesbians at a time when Arab countries are executing people for their sexual preferences. We need to inform others that there is freedom of the press in Israel, while journalists are being jailed in other Middle Eastern countries. While ISIS is selling young girls into slavery we need to tout the status of Israeli women. In the midst of UNESCO historic sites being blown up and bulldozed, we should share the remarkable archaeological finds that are uncovered and preserved daily in Israel.

We also need to help bring the Israeli narrative closer to the American one. We need to insist that the American division between Church and State is good for Israel; that all attempts by the Messianic Orthodox to turn Israel into a theocracy, that all attempts to make women second class citizens, that all attempts to deny Jewish pluralism need to be combated. We need to let them know that the burning of churches and attacking of Arabs by Jewish settlers must be punished quickly and severely. Yes, we should insist, Israel must behave as a democracy.

We can do this, so that both of our centers - both Israel and our American Jewish community - can continue, side by side. We should not have to choose between them. Let us do all we can to keep these two worlds, these two hopes, closely bound together. Let us be Jews and let us be Americans. Let us support America and support Israel. Let us work together, so indeed, we can dance at two weddings to the music of Hatikvah and God Bless America.