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## 5780 – The Death of Two Dreams

Shana Tova.

For those of you who don't already know this about me. You know that on a day off I like to take off my "Rabbi" kippah and go to the movies. In particular for the last 11 years, I've waited anxiously for each new Marvel movie. I loved the first Iron Man and each subsequent installment in the franchise, as they've built this mega, overarching story line across 22 separate movies. And the finale, Endgame, which came out this year, was outstanding. I loved every second of it. There is one moment, though, that seems to pull that Rabbi kippah back on my head. It has stuck there, Thor, the Asgardian Norse God of Thunder, has lost his way.

He no longer knows if he is a hero. He's supposed to take over for his dad as king of the Asgardian people. He is supposed to be their perfect savior and at the moment he has failed. He hasn't led them he hasn't saved the universe, and he has turned his back on his noble birth. He does what all lost boys do. He goes to ask his mother for advice. She says these amazing wise words that have stuck with me. She says, **"everyone fails at who they are supposed to be, the measure of a hero is how well they succeed at being who they are."** Real heroes are people who learn to be who they are. You can't spend your life being who you're supposed to be, rather, you have to accept who you are.

I think this is exactly the idea we need for Israel. This morning I want to share with you how the dreams of who Israel is "supposed" to be have been shattered and regrown. I want to show how God tried to teach Abraham this lesson, I want to share with you the hope I found in three 18-year olds, and finally I want to tell you what I think we can do.

### Religious Zionism

And it's that lens that I want to try and understand a little of what's going on in Israel right now. As of this morning the country has finished its second election in 6 months and there is no clear plan to form a new government. Every news outlet is reporting the increasing likelihood of a third set of elections in a year. In order to understand this conundrum, I'm going to tell you the story of the state of Israel twice from two entirely different perspectives. The first is the story of the Bible. God says this is our promised land, and through the prophets, God tells us that we will be expelled, but one day, with enough faith, there will be a miraculous return and we will be in the land of Israel.

And the great Rav Kook, the first chief Rabbi of Israel, led a movement to call the era pushing towards the founding of the state of Israel as *Reshit Smichat G'ulateinu* the dawning of our redemption, the beginning of the Messianic Age. He imagined the Jewish people walking in the steps of the Bible. In Shilo, Shechem, Hebron, and even the old city of Jerusalem. It was an amazing dream. And in 1948, when



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the state of Israel was founded, his followers were devastated. Because yes, there was a state of Israel, but by all accounts, it moved in next door. The land that the new, modern state of Israel was going to occupy, contained almost none of those biblical places. The major city of Tel Aviv was brand new and had no religious significance. The old city was behind an impenetrable barrier. The Jews were completely off limits.

Yes, they were happy for a safe place to be, but their ideology was broken, their dreams shattered. And in that shattering, they were able to work together to build the best possible result they could. The dream was broken, but it was in that breaking that Ben Gurion forged a modern state. That an actual place, not a dream, became the safe haven for the Jewish people. From 1948 until 1967 it wasn't the dream that led but practicality. In 1967, the dream was reawakened. In 1967, the Six-Day War happened and the land of Israel more than doubled. And suddenly, those Religious Zionists, those people who are moving back to God's promised land, they could go live in Shilo, Shechem, and Hebron. They could go move to old city of Jerusalem and pray at the Kotel Ham'aravi.

In 1967 this messianic dream is re-awakened and experiences a resurgence. Finally, the prophetic religious reawakening of God's holy land. Until 1993 it seems like it will capture more and more Israeli youth. In 1993 the dream is destroyed again. Oslo happens. The Israeli government adopts a position of land for peace. And suddenly the messianic victory of the Jewish people is thwarted again. The Jews won't be ruling biblical Israel. But we'll be next door again. That takes until about the year 2000. The second intifada comes again and, in its aftermath, those religious Zionists that move into the West Bank believe once again that perhaps it can be a Jewish homeland in biblical Israel. That's not the only dream about who or what Israel is supposed to be.

### **Political Zionism**

Theodore Herzl watches how Anti-Semitism infuses the Dreyfus trial and an innocent man is convicted only because he is Jewish. It fuels him to travel Europe and the world, demanding a safe haven for the State of Israel with this dream in mind. Not just a place for Jews to be safe, but he believed that with a modern State of Israel, Jews all over the world would be safe because finally the Jews would be equal. A nation among nations. They would be accepted as a partner, friend, and ally. Instead of ousted as other and pushed out and, demonized.

1948 came and at last, perhaps, that dream was going to be, it was the UN voted partition plan there would be a State of Israel and in that moment, the dream shattered again because every nation bordering the adjacent state attacked, joined forces to say this is unacceptable. And Israel became not an equal partner in the world but a besieged nation with no friends on any side. In 1967, again the dream was reawakened, because in 1967, suddenly, Israel had all this other land and for sure they could trade it away. They could trade the land away and then those other nations would look at Israel as a partner, they



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would accept its existence. The Jews would be safe in the world because they'd be a nation like every other. This dream held sway on the minds and zeitgeist of much of the Jewish Israeli population. Then the second intifada happened. We offered them land for peace, and we were still, no, then years and years of the UN condemning and condemning and resolution after resolution, and Israel is still no equal partner in the world. The dream was shattered again. Israel is stuck again, these two dreams are at war and there is no clear path to forming a government.

### **Thor's mom, Abraham**

And so, I go back to Thor's mom, the original source of Jewish wisdom if ever there was. She says, "everyone fails at who they are supposed to be, "the measure of a hero can't be who you're supposed to be. The measure of a hero is how well they succeed at being who they are." Today we read the story of the binding of Isaac. The Torah tells us that God "tests" Abraham. I know the simple read of this passage is that the test was to see if Abraham would sacrifice his son. Then Abraham passes the test by being willing to do just that. I've always read it a little differently. I think the test was to see if Abraham had gotten so focused on who he was supposed to be that he lost who he was. God told Abraham he was supposed to be the founder of God's chosen nation. The paragon of faith. In today's story Abraham forgets who he is, not just the father of a nation but the father of a son named Isaac. I think Abraham fails his test. That is why Abraham and Isaac never speak again after this incident. That is why Abraham's next task is to turn over leadership to his son. The Torah is teaching us that even given a Divine mission it is our job not to lose sight of the reality right in front of us.

### **Isaac's Dad**

#### **Three young Israelis**

When it comes to Israel, I have three young heroes who learned the lesson of Abraham and Thor. We partner with the Jewish agency, and the Sid Jacobson JCC in a program called the Shinshinim, where, they bring over young Israelis before they go to the army and they spend a year here in the states working with various Hebrew schools and Day schools. And I talked to three of them, it was right after and right before the election, and I said, "Oh my goodness, you're eighteen, did you vote?" and they said, "Yeah we had to vote absentee ballots" and they happily told me who they voted for, and here's what I noticed. For me, I've been agonizing, reading every article I can get my hands on. What is the future of the State of Israel? What will it look like? Which dream will win out? And all three of these people, when they answered the question, who did you vote for and why, they answered it like they were answering a math problem. I won't say there was no passion, but there was no angst. There was, I voted for this person because I think maybe it's time for a change. Bibi's been there for a while, or I voted for this person because we should stay, but there was no sense of existential threat. The country has had two elections in six months, because its leaders can't agree on who should lead the government and how. But these three 18 years old's, not for one second were they worried. In fact, they believe in their country so much



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that before going to their commitment to serve in the military, they're going to say, "We're going to spend an extra year in America teaching young Jews about the glory, wonder and joy that is the State of Israel." One of these young 18 year old's who said, "Yeah I voted, you know, I'm excited, I'm looking forward to this" who had the dispassionate function of imagining, not Israel's messianic future, not who Israel is supposed to be but who Israel is, and what needs to be in this moment. This young man grew up in Sderot.

Now, for some of you, your ears just perked up, but for some of you who don't know, Sderot is the focus of the conflict with Gaza. Sderot is a city that's been built almost entirely under shelters because they live so close to the, continuous and steady rocket fire that comes from Gaza. They had to go into shelters so often that they built playgrounds underground, and under shelters so that if a rocket hit, the kids would still be safe. A kid who grew up, he's 18, which means he grew up there, it's been going on since 2008. That means all of his teenage life, he has lived under threat of rocket fire from Gaza, and yet his understanding of Israel as is as the kind of place that you go to America to teach for a whole year before you serve in the Armed forces. The kind of places where your vote matters, and your ideology is important, but it is not all there is.

At the beginning I promised you things that I think we can do. While I'm pretty sure none of us can turn ourselves into 18-year-old Israelis I do have three thoughts.

1. Support organizations that support Israel. In fact, join me at AIPAC in March. There is a special discounted rate right now after the holiday. Flyers are on the table outside.
2. Go to Israel! Visit be a part of it. Better yet go to Israel with me! December 2020
3. Never give up dreaming about who Israel ought to be. But also, don't forget to let Israel be who she is, flaws and all.

Shanah Tovah.