

I'll bet most of you have heard the adage, "you don't have to have a truck, you just have to have a friend with a truck." If you needed to haul something down to the recycling center on the South Side, I bet many of you can think of someone you could ask because they have a truck. It speaks to both the power and importance of social cooperation but also hints at the potentially corruptible part of our relationships. We try to convince ourselves that we don't do this but, if we're being honest, we all keep some people in our lives because of what they can do for us. It's human nature. Do you know someone who gets you discounts on new cars with their Friends and Family pricing because they work for a dealership? Is there a family member with a business that you find convenient for its help and savings? Ulterior motives are a part of being human – understanding them and living with our eyes open is part of our ascent towards Divinity. It's why the classic rabbis were so serious about *Chesed Shel Emet*. Literally "Actual Loving Kindness," it refers to the responsibilities of a community to bury its dead. Since they can't bury *themselves*, it is up to us, the living, who do it purely altruistically – because, obviously there are no favors the dead can still do for us. That altruism is special because it's such a rare thing. Instead, gestures that feel too good to be true often (though not always) are. This morning, I'm bringing you an example of this that I've found to be a challenge.

To begin with, I'll acknowledge that it is common in individual relationships to sacrifice elements of our own needs in order to get something greater out of it. I can ask my neighbor to give me a hand moving a heavy log and I do not need to worry about whether the two of us are in alignment on Gun Laws. It happens in geo-political relationships, too. The USA forms close relationships with regimes with whom we are disgusted in order to achieve strategic goals or to gain access to oil or to position ourselves to negatively impact other, bigger foes. Our current diplomatic relationship with Russia, despite their tampering, the poisoning of political critics and the illegal landgrab of the Crimean Peninsula is only one of endless examples. The pluses outweigh the challenges and so we selectively ignore our own disgust. But there is a relationship that is of interest to us as a Jewish community that I'd like to look more deeply at

today with you because it truly leaves me struggling. That is the Christian Zionists' support for Israel.

It really is a sort of remarkable phenomenon. For centuries, the most fundamentalist corners of the Christian world have given the Jewish community plenty of reason to be on our guard. But as early as the 17th century, a group of evangelical voices has emerged as our stalwart defenders.¹ What explains this group's interest in Israel? It is complicated but I'll do a quick rundown. Biblical verses, both Jewish and Christian, point to prophecies that suggest that the Jews will suffer a long exile from the land promised to them by God. And then, when the correct time approaches, according to Jeremiah 16, "Assuredly, a time is coming—declares Adonai —when... I will bring them back to their land, which I gave to their fathers."² And the gospel of Matthew continues with "immediately after the suffering of those days...the sign of the Son of Man will appear...and they will gather his elect from...one end of heaven to the other."³ In other words, when God decides the time has come, evangelical eschatology – or the teachings about the End of Days – says that the Christ will return to the earth and messianic prophecies will be fulfilled. The establishment of the Modern State of Israel 71 years ago created an excitement that, perhaps, the fulfillment of the prophecy was underway. That means that Israel must be ready for the ingathering of the exiles – that is us. And obviously the borders of the land, as described in the Torah, belong to the Jews. In the meantime, they state that they uphold the promise of God to Abraham in Genesis when it reads, "I will bless those who bless you."⁴ They want to be on the side of those who continue to bless the Jews today. They take the words of the Bible so seriously that I think they believe in the Jews as the "Chosen People" even more than we do ourselves!

But it's a complicated relationship so, having made my own list in preparation, I'm going to present the pros and cons to maintaining a relationship with this community, because there

¹ Goldman, Sam. [It's Christian politics, not AIPAC money, that explains American support for Israel.](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2019/02/12/its-christian-politics-not-aipac-money-that-explains-american-support-for-israel/) NYTimes.com, 2/12/2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2019/02/12/its-christian-politics-not-aipac-money-that-explains-american-support-for-israel/>

² Jeremiah 16:14-15.

³ Matthew 24:29-31.

⁴ Genesis 12

are a lot of both. Let's begin with the up sides: First, they have been financially *very* generous to the State of Israel and the Jews who live there. It is a difficult number to pin down because the church groups who send money are extraordinarily secretive about their finances, but estimates suggest that money from Christian Zionists flowing into Israel exceeds \$200 million each year. Just for comparison, the Jewish Federations in North America sent \$150 million.⁵ The Christian's donations go to support a wide variety of programs in Israel including, among other things, helping bring Jewish immigrants to Israel from places like the Former Soviet Union (which is wonderful!) and supporting the ideological settler movement as they develop their outposts in the disputed territories (which is more complicated). I have wondered, how would Israel respond to the Christian's fervent engagement if their money was not a part of the equation. Would Israel be quite so ready to accept the relationship?

Beyond that, the Christian Zionists are an exceedingly powerful voice in Washington – voting in huge unified blocs and being given credit for making or breaking presidential campaigns. Candidates who promise Israel policies in line with evangelical beliefs enjoy a near-unanimous vote of almost 62 million American adults – that is about 25.4% of the US population.⁶

Reform Rabbi Barry Block makes another point. He says, “[Some] claim that American support for Israel is the result of the allegedly improper, outsized influence of American Jews, as though we hold Congress and the president in our pockets. The [Christian Zionists’] voice will remind all Americans that support for Israel runs deep in this country.”⁷ AIPAC is a powerful lobby but not as powerful as theirs! Plus, their visibility and their volume may be persuasive to other, less-ideological Christian Americans who might assume the religious right knows what they're talking about when it comes to prophetic matters about Israel. Beyond that, other

⁵ Maltz, Judy. Evangelical Aid Was Once Taboo in Israel. Now It's on the Rise. Why? Haaretz Online, 8/16/2016. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-once-taboo-in-israel-evangelical-aid-is-on-the-rise-why-1.5424590>

⁶ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/01/5-facts-about-u-s-evangelical-protestants/>

⁷ Block, Barry. When Friends Aren't Really Friends: Be Wary of Evangelical Support for Israel. 7/10/2006. <http://www.jta.org/2006/07/10/archive/when-friends-arent-really-friends-be-wary-of-evangelical-support-for-israel?fbclid=IwAR1IFxdwyh4-JoOY4u4B5RRB0qabdoVx8Zky8vYUZpGgXnSWPqGDGQubYEA>

mainline churches have taken liberal but unbalanced stances against Israel in recent years and the Christian Zionists provide a counter-narrative within the Christian world.⁸

Let's turn our attention, for a while now to the potential risks we take and the sacrifices we make to align ourselves with and accept the support of Christian Zionists. First is the question of their motives. This is hard to pin down because, just like a group of Reform Jews, there is not one set of beliefs that define their ideology. But, looking at the leaders of the largest groups of Christian Zionists and their comments could provide a clue about what the masses hold onto as core teachings. As I mentioned, they believe that the prophecy says that the Jews need to return to Israel so that the Christ can return. But we should note that there is more to that story. They understand that this will lead to a cataclysmic conflict in the region which will hasten an Armageddon-like end-of-days calamity. However, they are not concerned about this because of a doctrine known as "Pre-Millennial Dispensationalism." It teaches that Evangelicals, that is Christians who have accepted the salvation of Jesus in very specific ways, will be removed from the chaos just ahead of the final conflict in what is known as the Rapture. To be clear, Pastor Robert Jeffress, reminds the world that "Salvation is in Christ alone." And that the rest of us will burn in the fiery pits of hell for ever.⁹ That means that everyone else, good and evil alike, will suffer eternal damnation.

For many evangelical Christians, one of the key preconditions for the Rapture is the gathering of the world's Jews to an Israel defined by biblical borders. These extend, obviously into the contested territories of the West Bank but also parts of Lebanon and Jordan. These are lands that are tenuously divided between many peoples. That means that, with a Secretary of State who is a fundamentalist evangelical, this belief has very real consequences for US foreign policy.¹⁰ Pompeo has stated repeatedly that he sees the modern state of Israel and the

⁸ Van Zile, Dexter. Mainline American Christian "Peacemakers" against Israel. Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 9/5/2009. <http://jcpa.org/article/mainline-american-christian-peacemakers-against-israel/>

⁹ Tibon, Amir and Landau, Noa. Trump Faith Adviser Who Said Jews Go to Hell to Speak at Jerusalem U.S. Embassy Opening. Haaretz Online, 5/14/2018. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-trump-faith-adviser-who-said-all-jews-go-to-hell-to-speak-at-embassy-1.6078561>

¹⁰ Borger, Julian. 'Brought to Jesus': the evangelical grip on the Trump administration. The Guardian Online, 1/11/2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/11/trump-administration-evangelical-influence-support>

ascendency of President Trump as signs from God that messianic activities are underway. Then there is the issue of these Christians trying to convert the Jews to the Gospel of Jesus.

Many have claimed, that the missionizing concern is rubbish¹¹ but Mike Evans – founder and director of the Christian Zionist organization, Friends of Zion – a was blasted in the past by the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York. One of his previous evangelical startups specifically and explicitly aimed at converting Jews.¹² He has been called, “a shock jock for Armageddon, a cheerleader for the apocalypse.”

Let’s take a look at what it means to be in relationship with the others’ set of values. Yes, both the Jewish community and the community of Christian Zionists are focused on Israel but there are a lot of other qualities that define us. At the core of our teachings are messages to our children about love and the acceptance of differences. Evangelist *Pastor* Robert Jeffress, the shepherd of a 13,000 member flock of followers in Dallas,¹³ has said, ““the dark dirty secret of Islam” is that “it is a religion that promotes pedophilia,” and that Islam is “a heresy from the pit of hell.” He has repeatedly hurled the detestable trope that “homosexuality is a perversion,” saying gay people engage in “the most detestable acts you can imagine.¹⁴ These are not the messages I seek to transmit to my children and have a hard time even being around. This past week, Daniel Gordis, the Israeli author and columnist for the NYTimes wrote about the values of Universal Human Rights found in the American Jewish Community as though they are a bad thing and will prevent us from staying in relationship with the Israeli Jewish community who privilege values that are less idealistic.¹⁵ I hope he’s wrong and that Israelis are not ready to sacrifice what, to my mind, are the core values of love and concern in the Torah. Evangelist,

¹¹ Magarik, Raphael. [Why Everything You Think You Know About Christian Zionism Is Wrong](https://forward.com/culture/430251/why-everything-you-think-you-know-about-christian-zionism-is-wrong/). The Forward Online, 8/28/2019. <https://forward.com/culture/430251/why-everything-you-think-you-know-about-christian-zionism-is-wrong/>

¹² Maltz, Judy. [Who's Behind the Dozens of pro-Trump Billboards Around Jerusalem?](https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-who-s-behind-the-pro-trump-billboards-around-jerusalem-1.5474959?=&ts=1569338292606) Haaretz.com, 5/22/2017. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-who-s-behind-the-pro-trump-billboards-around-jerusalem-1.5474959?=&ts=1569338292606>

¹³ Wikipedia entry: Robert Jeffress, Pastor. Viewed 9/26/2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Jeffress

¹⁴ Tibon, Amir. [Trump Faith Adviser Who Said Jews Go to Hell to Speak at Jerusalem U.S. Embassy Opening](https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-trump-faith-adviser-who-said-all-jews-go-to-hell-to-speak-at-embassy-1.6078561). Haaretz.com, 5/14/2018. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-trump-faith-adviser-who-said-all-jews-go-to-hell-to-speak-at-embassy-1.6078561>

¹⁵ Gordis, Daniel. [Benny Gantz Can't Heal the Rift Between U.S. Jews and Israel](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/23/opinion/international-world/benny-gantz-jews-israel.html). The New York Times Online, 9/23/2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/23/opinion/international-world/benny-gantz-jews-israel.html>

Mark Tooley claims that there is nothing sinister behind the Christians' efforts beyond the first goal which is, "That Jews need and deserve a homeland in Israel. Not to displace others, but to accept and develop what the family of nations—the U.N.—gave them in 1948."¹⁶ His claim sounds innocent enough and I would very much like to take him at his word but, it is difficult to reconcile with Mike Pompeo's elimination of the American Consulate in East Jerusalem earlier this year – a clear swipe at that, specifically Arab, half of the city.¹⁷ Israel is at the core of my values - Can I cooperate with others who boldly further other messages so much to the contrary? And, does accepting their money muddy that relationship?

Allow me a moment to turn our attention to the new United States Embassy which is finally in Jerusalem where it belongs. The city is clearly the capital of the country and it feels right that the US acknowledges that. We can have a conversation offline about the process of moving there and how else we might have done so without creating such damage but let's think about the role of the Christians in getting it done. A little over 16 months ago, the world watched the opening ceremony of the facility on May 14th. From the outset, the ceremony was fraught with difficult details. The date chosen was incendiary to Israeli Arabs, the conflict with Gaza was boiling over and then, of course, there was the guest list. That day, who was in attendance at that event? Of the 800 people in attendance at the invite-only, closed ceremony, not one Modern Orthodox, Conservative or Reform leader was included. Not a single democratic congressperson was present – of course, that was *their* choice...*they* received an invitation to decline. But the evangelicals were there in force and I'll focus on the voices who opened and closed the event with words of prayer.

Keep in mind, this is Jerusalem with Netanyahu, the ultraorthodox rabbinate and Pompeo in attendance. Selected to make the opening benediction, the same Pastor Jeffress from earlier, "thanked God for "our great president, Donald Trump," lauded how Israel "has blessed this world by pointing us to you, the one true God, through the message of her

¹⁶ Tooley, Mark. [The 21st century case for Christian Zionism](https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/the-21st-century-case-for-christian-zionism). The Fox News Channel Online, 5/6/2015.

¹⁷ Wong, Edward. [The Rapture and the Real World: Mike Pompeo Blends Beliefs and Policy](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/us/politics/pompeo-christian-policy.html?auth=login-email&login=email). The New York Times Online, 3/ 30/2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/us/politics/pompeo-christian-policy.html?auth=login-email&login=email>

prophets, her scriptures, and the Messiah,” and praying for Jerusalem “in the name of the spirit of the Prince of Peace, Jesus our lord.”¹⁸ This is the same man who teaches: God sends good people to Hell if they’ve not accepted Jesus the way he has. Not only do religions like Mormonism, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism lead people away from God,” he teaches, “they lead people to an eternity of separation from God in Hell...You know Jesus was very clear: Hell is not only going to be populated by murderers, drug dealers, and child dealers; Hell is going to be filled with good religious people who have rejected the truth of Christ”¹⁹ Then, at the end of the embassy ceremony, Reverend John Hagee consecrated the ground upon which this administrative and bureaucratic building sits as if it were the Third Temple and positioned it as a symbol against religious opponents around the world and proof of the Christian prophesy. What message does that send about the underlying meaning of this embassy move? Lest you think these two leaders are marginalized, John Hagee Ministries occupies a 50,000 square-foot production center that houses both radio and television studios, 100 telephone prayer partners and a vast distribution center. Currently, Hagee broadcasts on eight major networks, 162 independent television stations and 51 radio stations in more than 190 nations across the globe.²⁰

It’s so hard to know what to believe. In this sermon, I have quoted the New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Fox News, The Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, The Guardian, CNN, The Pew Research Forum, The Jewish Council for Public Affairs and Mother Jones, for good measure. I’ve cited 24 unique sources which you can find on our website and I encourage you to read them for yourself. Even after examining more than I would have thought I could tolerate about the presentation of and the backstory to the Christian Zionist organizations, I am still not sure I am any closer to knowing how I feel about them.

¹⁸ Kaplan Sommer, Alison. ‘Ashamed to Be Jewish’: As Trump Base Celebrates Embassy Move, Horrified U.S. Jews Mourn Gaza Deaths. Haaretz Online, 5/17/2018 <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-trump-base-celebrates-jerusalem-embassy-move-u-s-jews-mourn-gaza-deaths-1.6092560>

¹⁹ <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/10/watch-perry-endorser-jeffress-calls-judaism-catholicism-path-hell/>

²⁰ Hoffman, Gil. Hagee’s Juggernaut. The Jerusalem Post Online, 5/24/2019. <https://www.jpost.com/Magazine/John-Hagees-Juggernaut-590372>

When I'm asking my post-b'nei mitzvah students in the Schiff Tichon Sinai program to vote on a question in our class, I'll often tell them to close their eyes because I know that they'll look around before raising their hand to discern how outside-the-norm they would be – teens don't like to vote differently than their friends – but sometimes it *does* help to know what your friends think. So, who is embracing the support of the Christian Zionists and who is rejecting it? To begin with, this might be the first time for me to find myself in agreement with the Chief Rabbis of Israel – but, in their words, ““The mutual respect between religions must be kept in a way that one religion does not harm another, and in [the] case [of Christian Zionism], that balance is not met.”²¹ The newly appointed (again) Prime Minister Netanyahu seems very happy to accept their support. When addressing the Christians United conference in 2017, he said, ““We have no better friends on earth than you.”²² Progressive Jewish leaders are very wary. Reform Rabbi Barry Block, quoted earlier acknowledging the value of Christian Zionists' contribution to the public forum continued by saying, “Like all Americans, the extreme religious right has the privilege to lobby for its beliefs. Let them do so, as they wish, as Christians, without the involvement of the organized Jewish community. Let us keep far away, with our eyes open. For our own future as Jews in America. For our souls. For Israel.”²³ Needless to say, the President enthusiastically embraces the Zionism of the Christian community. But, Senator John McCain rejected it when he learned that John Hagee, one of his endorsers, said, Hitler was “the hunter” prophesied by Jeremiah and sent by God to hasten the Jews' return to Zion allowing for the return of Jesus and the Armageddon end of Times.²⁴

Beyond that, the coalition of mainstream Christian leaders led by the Patriarch in Jerusalem has condemned their participation in the Israeli system in a document they call “The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism” stating: They believe that God chose the Jews

²¹ Marissa, Newman. Chief rabbis oppose Jewish-Christian prayer service. The Times of Israel Online, 9/29/2014.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/chief-rabbis-oppose-jewish-christian-prayer-service/#ixzz3F09XPagR%C2%A0>

²² Netanyahu Says Israel Has No Better Friends Than US Christian Zionists. CUFI Website, viewed 9/25/2019.

<https://www.cufi.org/netanyahu-says-israel-has-no-better-friends-than-us-christian-zionists/>

²³ Block, Barry. When Friends Aren't Really Friends: Be Wary of Evangelical Support for Israel. 7/10/2006.

<http://www.jta.org/2006/07/10/archive/when-friends-arent-really-friends-be-wary-of-evangelical-support-for-israel?fbclid=IwAR1IFxdwyh4-JoOY4u4B5RRB0qabdoVx8Zky8vYUZpGgXnSWPqGDGQubYEA>

²⁴ Todd, Brian. McCain rejects minister's endorsement. CNN Online, viewed 9/25/2019.

<https://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/05/22/mccain.hagee/>

specifically and now the Jews have made a terrible mistake.²⁵ The teachings of Christian Zionism emphasize “perpetual war and racial exclusivity rather than the Gospel of Love.” It is an ideology that “privileges one people at the expense of others.”²⁶

So, to summarize: we all exist in complicated relationships and no partnership is a perfect overlay of values. Israel is in a bad neighborhood and benefits from help in any form. We have seen nearly uncountable millions of dollars arrive from the generosity of Christians, with or without strings is a matter of debate. We would have to explain to ourselves how we side up against those who hold dramatically different sets of values – does that equate to selling out for their cash?...[pregnant pause] One of the core exercises for an individual at this time of year is to look deeply at ourselves. What adds to our personal and spiritual growth and what weighs us down? We can and should do the same thing as a community which is why, after putting all the factors into the equation and weighing the pros and cons, my gut tells me that there are too many risks and too high a spiritual price to pay in a relationship with the Christian Zionists. I strive to always remain open to new information and to keep watching for changing conditions which might lead me to a different outcome – nothing wrong with changing one’s mind – but for now, I will conclude the matter with the Rabbi’s blessing to the Tzar from Fiddler on the Roof: May God Keep and Protect The Christian Zionists – Far away from us!²⁷

Gut Yontiv

²⁵ Sabbah, His Beatitude Patriarch Michel, et. al. THE JERUSALEM DECLARATION ON CHRISTIAN ZIONISM. <https://int.icej.org/media/jerusalem-declaration-christian-zionism>

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Aleichem, Sholom - Writer. Jewison, Norman – Director. The Fiddler on the Roof. The Mirisch Production Company, 1971.