ALL IN THE FAMILY
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Temple Sholom – Vancouver BC
February 24, 2023

So, the question comes up, what to do about Israel?

For those that remember the early sitcom "Leave it to Beaver", that question, "what to do about Israel?" has the same tone as when June would turns to her husband and say with grave concern, "Ward I am worried about the Beaver."

June raising the alarm about The Beaver, is different than our concern over Global Warning, the war in Ukraine, even the housing crisis here in Vancouver – all distressing and worrisome issues, but, "Ward I am worried about the Beaver", that's more personal, that's a family thing. That's like when you see someone in your family in crisis and your heart breaks, your sleep is interrupted, your thoughts in all the moments in between are consumed by thoughts of only them.

I am well aware that not all of us in this room or watching online relate to Israel as part of our family. The reasons for that are generational, sociological, moral and political. I've talked before about the growing chasm between diaspora and Israeli Jewry, even more so among young and progressive North American Jews.

But I am going to call this a 23 & Me Moment for the Jewish Family. You know 23 & Me, the DNA company that helps you uncover long distant and never before known relatives. Some of those connections, as tenuous as they are held together at first by only slight strands of DNA still make a claim on us. When we discover we have a cousin we never knew about the thread of connection is not only DNA but often heartstrings as well.

Before 23 & Me the best example of this were the letters our grandparent's generation got from desperate extended family in Europe seeking some connection, some sponsor in the safety of the west to get out of Europe before the gates of the ghetto and concentration camps shut them off from family and life forever. Many families in our community are here because in a moment of despair a grandparent reached out to a distant relative and, "please help save us, we are family."

So, whether it's a connection to Israel like that of a close family member, or that of a distant relative you never met but now learn is in desperate need – Israel, its land and its people are family – and "Ward I am worried about the Beaver".

First a bit of history:

The current state of Israel is only the third time there has been a Jewish sovereign state in the land of Israel.

We had one 3,000 years ago, it went on for hundreds of years, but it was only united as a nation for 80 years, one day, after 80 years of growing internal discord and division, after the time of King David and King Solomon, Israel divided into Judea and Samaria. Samaria was comprised of the 10 tribes of Israel and was ultimately wiped out in largely civil wars amongst the successive kings of Israel; that by the way is why parts of the Haftarah and later parts of the Hebrew Bible are so bloody and uncomfortable to read. We are literally killing each other in every generation.

In the end of that first sovereign reign 80% of the Jewish people were wiped out because we fought internally. All of us, all the Jews that remain in the world, whether Sephardic, Ashkenazic, Mizrahi or Ethiopian Jews, are descendants of Judea. That's why we're called Jews by the way.

Ok, 1,000 years forward, during the Second Temple, we had a nation a state for 75 years the Maccabees Hashemites - Hanukkah, dreidel, dreidel, dreidel, miracle of oil, those guys.

They founded a Jewish state in the land of Israel after kicking the Seleucids (sometimes knows as the Assyrian-Greeks) out of Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom. The sovereign reign of the Maccabees went on for 75 years, and in year 76, they fought with each other, once again Jews on Jews violence and civil war. The Romans come in, some say invited and conquer Judea, and we lost our state.

So, 80 years and 75 years, and now, the modern state of Israel, for only the third time in the long history of the Jewish people we once again have a sovereign state. You know how old Israel is right now? 75

Jewish sovereignty has never passed our eighth decade as a united and sovereign nation. And why? Because of us, we did this to ourselves each and every time.

The Romans laid siege on Jerusalem, but between the two warring factions of Jews they had enough grain stored within the walled city to last 22 years. But you know what happened, with the Roman’s camped outside the walls, the Jews inside, we burnt each other's store houses literally, this is history. Starving from our own self inficted famine the Romans came in and kicked us out.

And then we had 2000 years of a mess, including the worst things that humanity has seen, all this happened to us, because of us, because we could not get along.

And here we are again 75 years into the third act and from my perspective we are doing it again. With the strongest army in the region, a robust and creative economy, innovation like the world has never seen, a home and safe haven to Jews from every corner of the globe, 50,000 immigrants, mostly women and children from Russia and Ukraine, who came just last year and 150,000 immigrants from Ethiopia with others still coming. Israel has an Iron Dome

that protects its citizens from terrorist rocket attacks and what is our undoing, what is our greatest threat, it is us.

The family is in turmoil, we are already so separated and isolated from each other, think of where I started and your own relationship with Israel, and Israelis. All Israelis, including the ones that don't accept your Judaism, your conversion, your children, your non-orthodox way of prayer and of doing/being Jewish. We are long past divorce, I don't mean this to be glib, but as relationships go, we are so dysfunctional we are approaching murder-suicide.

If all of this is news to you, I urge you to read the Israeli press, they have English language news sources and learn what you may not have fully known or appreciated. For the past two months, since the election of the new ultra-right-wing-nationalist government 100,000 Israelis have protested every Saturday night in Tel Aviv, tens of thousands more each week outside the Knesset in Jerusalem and around the country. The largest protests in the history of the country, the history of the Jewish people. Its 7am in Israel right now, in a few hours they will be out in the streets again demanding justice, equality and a truly representative democracy.

In the face of dangerous legislative initiatives whose goals are to weaken the legal system and to endanger the checks and balances of Israeli Democracy. The new government seeks to limit the rights of minorities in a way that will truly endanger the pluralistic nature of the Israeli state and even its existence as a liberal democracy that is the home of the entire Jewish people; and that as history has shown endangers the whole of the Jewish people.

We often joke that Jews rarely agree, two jews three opinions is funny because it's true, and families have disagreements all the time – there is nothing new here in that regard. What is new is that when you fight within your family you pull your punches, you hold back the deadliest, most hurtful blows and words, because deep down even in the midst of a raging argument you love each other. Families have a history and the assumption of a future together; and because if you don't stop yourself from saying and doing the most hurtful things you stop being family, you get a divorce, move out of the house, or cancel them in any of the myriad of ways we cancel each other nowadays.

We cannot cancel Israel, we cannot get a divorce, we cannot fight like this, like we did 3,000 years ago, like we did 2,000 years ago. We know how this ends, we have been here before.

אִם־אֶשְׁכָּחֵךְ ירושלים תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי׃
If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right-hand wither; (Psalm 137:5)

So, what do we do, what can we do from here in Vancouver, our Jewish family is already so spread out and divided.

We start with Torah, we are commanded not only to guard Justice, peace, and human rights, we are required to be actively concerned about the implementation of those rights. As it is

written, “Tzedek, Tzedek T’rdof / Justice, justice shall you pursue," "Seek Peace and pursue it". We have a moral duty to not let our family disintegrate before our eyes.

Pursuing Justice means that we have a duty to show up and contribute to our family, to participate in designing a just society, one that promotes the values of Liberty, Equality, and Peace. And when those values are in danger, when our family is in danger, even if the wounds are self-inflicted, we must not be silent, we are obligated to protest, in the words of Civil Rights leader and theologian Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, “to pray with our feet” and to work towards the repair of society, the healing of our family.

The next step on that journey is supporting Israelis in Israel who are marching in the streets, in the spirit of the verse: "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor." (Lev. 19:16) They are performing the mitzvah of protest. They need our moral and financial support there in Israel where the battle is raging. Not here from our Art Gallery steps or even the comfort of our social media feeds where we are only talking to people that generally already agree with us. No, we need to raise up the voices in Israel that stand on guard over the democratic frameworks that constitute the basis for a free and democratic society in Israel, in the Jewish Homeland, in the midst and epicenter of the dangerious polarization and division within the Jewish family.

Support the work of the Reform Movement in Israel, the Israel Religious Action Center, join with the Jewish Federations of North America, who for the first time in the history of that umbrella organization has taken a firm stand and position that these proposed Judicial and Civil reforms will endanger the Jewish people and the state.

And step three in all of this we must remind and emphasize that we are family, we have an obligation to each other that is stronger than any other bond. We must be a family that allows and encourages dialogue among diverse opinions, a truly pluralistic family and society in which it is possible, desirable, and important to live together, openly listening and honestly debating in a spirit of acceptance, dignity and Ahavat Yisrael the love of the Jewish people.

When a family member is in crisis, those that love them hold an intervention, they gather together and show the loved one through word and deed how much they care, how deeply they are troubled, how willing they are to work together to help them find a path to wholeness and healing, a path that keeps them in the family and brings them even closer.

As I imagine Ward said to June, “let’s get the family together, remind each other what we mean to each other and find a way to be a loving family again”. If we don’t, who will, and then, G-d forbid, what will become of the Beaver?”