They say it is Rosh Hashanah – a New Year…but it feels an awful lot like 1939. We wish each other "Shana Tova – a Good Year," but it might be more accurate to say, "Shana Kasha – a difficult year," both past and what may be our future.

Friends, when I tell you this is not the sermon I wish to give on Rosh Hashanah, I mean it sincerely. The last thing I want to do is bemoan the Jewish plight – rather I want to talk about spirituality, about Jewish ethics, about living in modern society according to Jewish values, but I have come to the conclusion that none of that will matter a bit, if Jews, Judaism, Israel don't exist.

It feels an awful lot like 1939. Anti-Semitism is on the rise everywhere, especially in Europe. The press is so out of touch with reality that their only interest is the selling of advertising and not reporting of facts and most certainly not in context. The American government is often a day late and a dollar short in the face of existential threats to its closest allies, not to mention its own citizens abroad. And, Russia's move to seize Ukrainian land has an eerily familiar feel to it. And of course, Israel's place on this earth is called into question day in and day out. It has been a very difficult year.

Let's turn back not just 75 years ago, but 4000 years ago. A scene in the Bible is laid out, that we read this morning, in which Abraham is told to sacrifice his son. With a machete in his hand, he is about to behead his own child – but God intervenes and says. "No! No more! We don't act this way anymore. Moral people, people with integrity and depth, people of faith – if, you say you believe Me, if you say you love Me, then sacrifice and

beheadings are not the way." Even the Koran, the Muslim Holy book, recounts this version, although it is Ishmael being offered up, not Isaac.[1]

Obviously, there are those who have not gotten the message. They are living in a society and with a world view that is so twisted and deranged that reason, negotiation and diplomacy don't work. In my book, there is no moral difference between beheading men like ISIS does and using children as human shields like Hamas does. Evil is evil and I am depressed to say that it exists in full force in the world in which we live. And this is not happening beyond us…it is happening to us. The journalist, Steven Sotloff, who was murdered by ISIS in August – he is us. His aunt and uncle belong to our temple. And today, his sister, Lauren is with us in our sanctuary with her aunt and uncle, the Pulwers…Lauren, we send you our condolences and I dedicate this talk to your brother. May his memory be a blessing.

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My friends, there is, I would suggest to you, one major difference between 4000 years ago and 75 years ago as opposed to today. Today, Israel exists, thrives, adds innovation and goodness to the world – but even more Israel also has a force to defend our homeland, our tradition and our people. The threat is real, which I will detail in a moment and as I do, imagine for a moment, just for one moment, if Israel did not exist as I recite these facts. We, American Jews, would not know the freedom we know today if Israel was not a reality. Israel's existence is deeply connected to our freedom. And we have a collective responsibility, as Jews, Jewish families and a Jewish community to ensure Israel's survival for us and for the good of the world.

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[1] Hayatu 'L-Qulub (Merrick edition, p. 28)

In an article from Newsweek, from July, entitled: *Exodus: Why Europe's Jews are Fleeing Once Again,* (the title alone should send shivers down our spines) we read of the rise of anti-Semitism. "The mob howled for vengeance, the missiles raining down on the synagogue walls as the worshippers huddled inside. It was a scene from Europe in the 1930s – except this was eastern Paris on the evening of July 13th, 2014.

Thousands had gathered to demonstrate against the Israeli bombardment of Gaza. But the protest soon turned violent – and against Jews in general.

Yet for many French and European Jews, the violence comes as no surprise. Seventy years after the Holocaust, from Amiens to Athens, the world's oldest hatred flourishes anew. For some, opposition to Israeli policies is now a justification for open hatred of Jews – even though many Jews are strongly opposed to Israel's rightward lurch, and support the establishment of a Palestinian state.

As Stephen Pollard, the editor of the Jewish Chronicle, argues: "These people were not attacked because they were showing their support for the Israeli government. They were attacked because they were Jews, going about their daily business."

Jews are fleeing France in the thousands now. A few years ago, 1000 or so Jews made Aliyah a year. This past year, it was close to 6000 Jews who left.[2]

Imagine if Israel did not exist for those Jews of France? It would be an awful lot like 1939. But Israel does exist and we ought not be ashamed of it for one minute.

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[2] http://www.newsweek.com/2014/08/08/exodus-why-europes-jews-are-fleeing-once-again-261854.html

Unfortunately evil exists all over the world and Jews are often the target of the venomous snakes of anti-everything. And while our Torah teaches us to always pursue peace before we go to war, make no mistake about it – we need power to protect ourselves. We need power to prevent another Holocaust from happening. It is ironic that 6 million Jews live in Israel today – that number will never decrease on my watch. When we say never again – we mean it.

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In speaking at Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Museum in Jerusalem, Prime Minister Netanyahu pondered: "I ask myself: why, in the years preceding the Holocaust, did the overwhelming majority of world leaders and Jewish leaders fail to detect the danger in time?

"Very few world leaders understood the enormity of the threat to humanity posed by Nazism.

"So I ask: How is it possible that so many people failed to understand the reality? The bitter and tragic truth is this: it is not that they did not see it. They did not want to see it. And why did they choose not to see the truth? Because they did not want to face the consequences of that truth.

"Month after month, year after year, more and more information was received in London, Paris and Washington regarding the capabilities and intentions of the Nazi regime.

The picture was becoming clear to everybody. However, 'they have eyes, but cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear' [Psalms 115].[3]

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My friends, my job today is to tell us to make sure our eyes see and our ears hear. We, lucky Americans, live in relative freedom and security. With that comes responsibility. A grave responsibility. We must be sure the world sees and hears and if they choose not to do anything about evil in the world, especially against Jews, we must.

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Netanyahu went on to say: "When you refuse to accept reality as it is, you can deny it. And this is precisely what the leaders of the West did. They dismissed the murderous Nazi rhetoric as internal German politics; they downplayed the seriousness of the danger of the military build-up of the Nazis, claiming that it was the result of the natural will of a proud nation, that it should be taken into consideration, that it should be accepted.

"Today, we have a sovereign Jewish state. As Prime Minister of Israel, I do not hesitate to speak the truth to the world, even when faced with so many blind eyes and deaf ears. Unlike our situation during the Holocaust, when we were like leaves on the wind, defenseless, now we have great power to defend ourselves, and it is ready for any mission. This power rests on the courage and ingenuity of the soldiers of the IDF and our security forces. It is this power that enabled us, against all odds, to build the State of Israel."[4]

[3] http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/179978#.VAYBw2NhsTB

[4] Ibid

"We will never forget the victims of the Holocaust, we will never forget the ultimate crime against humanity. And we will never forget our obligation to prevent this from ever happening again."[5]

Israel is not just the defender of land in the Middle East – it the defender of a life affirming people, who say L'chaim – to life, always. But make no mistake about it – we, in defending such an attitude and way of life, are forced with impossible choices.

In his amazing piece about "The Ethics of Jewish Power," delivered in 2000, Rabbi Itz Greenberg, a modern day philosopher, writes the following: "Power corrupts. But there is no other morally tolerable choice. The alternative is death. This is the lesson that the Jewish people learned from the Holocaust.

He teaches: "Says the Talmud: Those who are merciful to people who deserve cruelty will end up being cruel to people who deserve mercy (Midrash Kohelet Rabah 7:16). Often the punishment for failure to take reality into account is to do the opposite of what was intended. In the 1930s, an underground religious group considered assassinating Hitler, but decided against it on the grounds that there is no moral right to kill a bad ruler. The millions of innocent victims of Hitler's later murderous war on Jews and others could well claim that the righteousness of the German underground paved the way for the cruel sadistic war on them.

"The beginning of ethical wisdom is the recognition that in an unredeemed world, one must be able and willing to exercise power to protect or advance the good.

[5] http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/06/13/israeli-pm-warns-another-holocaust-from-iran/

"However, any exercise, no matter how well-intentioned, will have inescapable 'immoral' side effects. Yet, if doing nothing leads to greater evil than doing something, then failure to act is moral default. Those who refuse to use such 'immoral' means are guilty of placing their moral image above the suffering of others—which is a form of selfishness.

"The truly moral do not avoid stain by not exercising power. They act, but only when necessary, and seek to reduce suffering caused by their actions to the minimum. The firm moral principle is that given the evil that cannot be avoided; there is still an ideal way of exercising power. A moral army uses no more force than necessary. If it uses less force than necessary, and fails, it betrays those it seeks to protect or its own soldiers who died in vain."[6]

Israel's army is a moral army up against a new Nazism instead of swastikas, the radical Islamists wear cowardly black scarves around their faces as they commit their barbarism. Their Gorring, Gobels and Eichmen hide in Qatar as their storm troopers brutalize and murder innocents on both sides of the border. I could go on and on, but suffice to say, Israel, like any country is not perfect, but it is moral and it is good and it is on the right side of humanity. And we as Jews and Jewish families have a special responsibility to be soldiers for Israel strength and survival in any way that we can.

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[6]Greenberg, I., (2000). *The ethics of Jewish power.* United Jewish Communities: 2000 General Assembly. Http://rabbiirvinggreenberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/The-Ethics-of-Jewish-Powerb.pdf.

What can we do? We can do a lot. First and foremost, we mustn't shrink from our Judaism or our connection to the Jewish people. Whether we are born Jews, converted, part of a Jewish family or in any way connected to Judaism, we have a responsibility to stand up and be counted. It is not time for silence. It is not time for political correctness – we are at war between good and evil, blessing and curse. Be on the right side and let our voices be heard.

1. First and foremost – support Israel. Join an advocacy group. From the group Standwithus to Aipac – be part of making a difference. Israel's strength is intimately tied up with our freedom. I am traveling again this year to the Policy Conference of AIPAC in Washington DC in March and I want us to bring a large delegation. Last time we went as a group, we brought twenty-seven people to hear the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Israel speak – we lobby our congress people and made a difference of unparalleled influence. When 14,000 people show up in Washington, the policy makers listen. At this conference, more than half of congress shows up…they are there and you will make your voice heard. Trust me…it works. You can pick up flyers in the lobby after services and we will be announcing a planning meeting in the new future.
2. We are privileged at our Temple for many reasons – but two families have created an organization that might literally change the world. Yossie Hollendar and Eyal Aronoff have a simple premise – if we can free ourselves from addiction to oil, many of the world's problems will dissipate. The Fuel Freedom Foundation is a remarkable organization, lobbying in the highest levels of government, across all party lines, to unlock the shackles of oil dominance in our society. To think that

every time we are filling up our tanks of gas, on some level, we fund the terrorists. Please let your voice be heard and participate in this wonderful organization – Fuel Freedom Foundation. This month was the world premiere of the movie "Pump" which will make you a believer that this is the only course we must follow.

Don't think that we are paralyzed by the world's evil – Yossie and Eyal are doing something about it – so can we. Let's be part of the solution instead of only complaining about how bad it is. You can get more information from flyers in the lobby or from our website as well.

As I think about history, my guess is that most Germans were peaceful, but the radicals drove the agenda. I know that must Muslims are peaceful, I've met with them, worked alongside them, but radicals drive the agenda. We, who are peace loving people, must drive the agenda. This war against terrorism and radical Islam is not just a Jewish issue – it is an American issue…it is a Christian issue – look at how many peace loving Christians are dying because they don't share the same faith as the radicals. Perhaps, my Reform colleagues write more even handed, more nuanced than me…but I am done with political correctness on this issue, I am done with seeing both sides….I have a responsibility to take a side – the right side.

Earlier this summer, rabbis were lamenting about talking about Israel and asking, what positive message can we leave people with – I am leaving you with the message – do something, as you too are a soldier in the fight for civility, humanity and goodness. Come to Washington with me – support Fuel Freedom and do your part and you will have made a

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huge difference. Your voice will have been heard, Israel will have been supported and Judaism will be poised for a good year.

Let me conclude with the words of Elie Wiesel, who took out a full page ad this summer newspapers around the world. He wrote simply this: "What we are suffering through today is not a battle of Jew versus Arab or Israeli versus Palestinian. Rather, it is a battle between those who celebrate life and those who champion death. It is a battle of civilization versus barbarism.

And then commenting on this morning's Torah portion as a reminder of the barbaric backward ways of radical Islam, he wrote, "Let us return child sacrifice to the darkest corner of history, and work towards a brighter future with those who choose life. Arab and Jews alike, all of us Abraham's children."