HaTikvah
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3/30/02 Temple Judea

I had wanted to tell a some what funny story about Passover tonight. To relate the cute and witty nature of my families Passover Seder with all its tradition and irreverence. I could have also spoken tonight about the coming visit of our scribe Neil Yerman April 9-12, when he will teach us Thursday night of the history and story behind each of our Torah scrolls and then guide us on Saturday evening in a hands on repair of those sacred and ancient scrolls. In all truth part of me didn't want to talk at all tonight, I wanted to be home, reading a book, watching the shows I taped during the Seders of the last two nights. You see when you are a rabbi at a Seder, even a family Seder it can be kind of like going through oral exams. Every year, no matter if it is just family or friends around the table, or my mom's conversion students, as soon as the g'filtah fish is served so are the questions, rabbi, why do we do this, why can't we eat that, did the ten plagues really happen, how do we know there were ten, who is this Rabbi Hillel, why is Shamai always on the losing side of an argument, on and on… Its not that I mind the questions, but its not that I look forward to them every year either. My brother-in-law sympathizes with me, he is an accountant, and while my end of the table is asking about 10 plagues, his is asking about 1099s.

I had wanted all of those things for this night's sermon, and maybe some of you wanted them as well, I am sure the elderly Israelis in Natanya wanted something of a normal Seder Wednesday night as they sat in the Park Hotel singing Dayenu, it would have been enough. But normalcy was not on the menu that night, or in another way of looking at it an escape from what has become normalcy was not to be. I don't know

when the suicide bomber walked into to the Seder. By the way I absolutely hate that term, as though it is a profession, blowing up innocent civilians. These people are terrorists in the truest sense of the word, they kill innocent, unarmed civilians sitting in cafés, restaurants, super markets and bus stops to cause terror and the loss of life, call them terrorists, let them be associated with who they really are, the same people who fly planes into office buildings and kill young American reports with expectant wives at home. They are terrorists, the very same people that our nation is at war against. And we must not allow the world to over look that fact.

As I watched CNN last night, the screen split into two, on one side was the bombed out ruins of the Park Hotel with a voice over of a spokesperson for the Palestinian Authority claiming that they were freedom fighters, like Americans in the revolutionary war. While on the right hand side of the screen was the mug shot to Mousauii, the 20th hijacker and the scrolling text that the US would seek the death penalty in his case. If the enemy of my enemy is my friend, then the enemy of my friend is my enemy as well. Who is the US asking Israel to make peace with, the same mindset that would unleash weapons of mass destruction on American cities if they could get their hands on them.

I don't know when the terrorist walked into the Seder, the irony that it could have been when we open the door for Elijah and recite, "Let all who are hungry come and eat" so confounds my ability to reason that I am numb. This was a festival of freedom, a celebration of life, of family, of tradition, of memory. It was old people having matzah ball soup and telling stories, it was a haggadot stained with wine not blood, it was life being lived around a dinner table just like it was in each of our homes Wednesday night,

on the most basic level this struggle is for the right to have a Seder, to go to a pizza parlor, a coffee shop, to ride a bus home from school.

For hundreds of years our people have been denied those very basic and pure expressions of life. Countless societies and governments have sought to prevent the Jewish people from even enjoying these most fundamental of life experiences. And now in our own land, after the holocaust, the inquisition, the crusades, pogroms, and a culture of anti-Semitism that persists even today, even in this country, even on tapes from the oval office. They would seek to destroy us, to deny us even the basic right to assemble with our children, break matzah and have a Seder. NO! It will not happen again, the Jewish people will not be made the scapegoat for the failures of Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian leadership to imagine a future of peaceful coexistence for their people. We are not the reason there is no peace. Our very existence does not give them license to destroy us. To sit in Beirut and say, if you agree to march yourselves into the sea we will consider that you have a right to exist, at the very moment we seek to bring about the end of your existence as a nation and a people.

Israel is a peaceful and just nation; it has contributed immeasurably to the pursuit of peace and righteousness in this world. As a nation it has contributed more in terms of medicine, science, industry, technology, poetry, scholarship, compassion to the Middle East than any other country in the region. In its 50 years of existence, in spite of endless wars and the constant threat and brute force of terrorism Israel and its citizens have, per capita done more to better the world we live in than perhaps any other nation in the world. What have the Palestinian people done for the betterment of society, the world, and their own people? Taught them that the taking of innocent life is justified as long as

it is Jewish blood that is spilled. Danced in the streets when the planes slammed into New York and Washington DC. Who would they have us make peace with?

Friends, I know I am not offering solutions, and I do think that they are to be found, though I am sure by wiser men and women than me. Both sides lamenting who did what to whom first will not sure any purpose of peace. But at the same time, the world must not forget why this tiny parcel of land was given to us in the first place, and neither must we. The wounds of the holocaust, seem like they will pain us forever, but be honest they have already subsided, our children read of it in the context of other genocides throughout history. The historical tragedies and traumas of the inquisition, the pogroms the crusades are incomprehensible. Purim, the ancient story of our people's near anniliation is celebrated with costumes and carnivals. It was Santayana who wrote those who do not study history are bound to repeat it. Let history not be repeated through the spilling of Jewish blood ever again. For a people of the book, we should read that book a little more in this weekend, find in there just what this little nation means for us as a people, find in there the meaning and blessing of its national anthem, HaTikvah the hope of our people for 2,000 years, to live freely as Jews in our own tiny parcel of land.