Fear and Hate - Courage and Faith
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Rosh Hashanah Day Sermon 5775/2014
Temple Sholom

Over the past few weeks when I met with congregants in my office I often began the conversation by asking them how their summer was? For the first few weeks of September, as we enjoyed uncharacteristically warm and dry weather, clear blue skies and bright sunny days – nearly every person responded to my question with an admonition, "Don't use the past tense, summer isn't over yet."

I get it, having now lived here for a year, I know how precious these few months of sunshine and summer truly are, I dread the grey wet days ahead. But I must tell you; I could not wait for this summer to be over.

This was the summer of the kidnappings and murder of teenage boys, Gil-Ad, Eyal, Naftali, and the horrendous revenge killing condemned by all of Israel, of the young Palestinian boy Muhammad. This was the summer that children were once again used as human shields, and that young Jewish boys, one, Max Steinberg who went to preschool at my former congregation in Los Angeles died to defend an ancient but seemingly impossible hope, *l'hitot am hosfshi bartzenu*, to be a free people in our own land. "Children are being sacrificed again upon the alter", Elie Wiesel cried out from the pages of the NY Times.

This was the summer of rockets and terror tunnels, a lost summer for children on both sides of the narrow border between Gaza and Israel. The summer camps in southern Israel were empty, in the suburbs of Tel Aviv they practice air raid drills on the soccer fields. In Gaza the beaches, streets and parks, all the province of children in summer months were now war zones and battlefields and launch sites. It wasn't safe to go outside and it wasn't safe to stay inside.

This was the summer of ISIS, the latest in a seemingly endless list of Islamist Extremist Terror Groups hell bent on returning the world to the Middle Ages through barbarianism and violence against all who oppose their fanatical homicidal world view.

And this was the summer the mobs 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 summer evening in July 2014.

This was the summer of terror. Terror that provoked fear, terror that provoked hate.

The sages teach that those two conditioned responses, fear and hate are the greatest threat to humanity.

"Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering." Ok, that wasn't a rabbinic quote, it's from that little green sage, Yoda in Star Wars but his insight is Talmudic.

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"Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering."

This was a summer of fear; Jews feared that Hamas was once again targeting our children. That fear was justified, they were. That fear gave way to anger and the heinous and despicable revenge killing of Muhammad. But this summer was about so much more than those boys. The mere fact that that Gil-Ad, Eyal, and Naftali were Jews, and that Muhammad was a Palestinian, was fact enough to render their basic right to life null and void, for when tribalism and racism govern our perceptions of each another, there are no innocents.

"When hatred and fear lead to blinding anger and rage it is all too possible to rationalize kidnapping three Jewish teenagers and executing them at point-blank range, or forcing a shy-looking Palestinian boy to drink gasoline and then burning him alive. In the escalating violence between the two groups, atrocities become 'necessary acts of war' or 'vengeful justice.'"[i] And so anger gave way to hate.

In downtown Jerusalem, hundreds of right-wing Jewish extremists attacked innocent Palestinians and shouted "Death to Arabs," and "Kahana was right," while the funerals of Gil-Ad, Eyal and Naftali were taking place.

On Facebook, tens of thousands of young Israeli Jews, including IDF soldiers, echoed the call for vengeance against Arabs. While many called for revenge against the kidnappers, others posted pictures of themselves with slogans like, "Hating Arabs is not racism; it is values."

On the Palestinian side, after Muhammad's autopsy revealed that he had been burned alive, violent riots erupted in Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods and in Arab towns in Israel. Hundreds of Palestinians clashed with the police, throwing rocks, setting tires and trash bins on fire, vandalizing public property, starting brush fires, and in some cases deliberately attacking passing Jewish vehicles with stones and firebombs.

And then the region and the whole world erupted with anger and its by product hate, hate with its companion violence that leads to tremendous suffering, on all sides, in every corner, in every family. The good and the bad suffered disproportionately, the instigators, the terrorists largely got away with murder, and the innocents on both sides, those caught in the cross fire or out in the open, they suffered gravely. Their loved ones who mourn them are still suffering.

The rabbis of the Talmud are humbled by fear, they are in awe of fear and its incredible power to overwhelm faith and reason, most particularly the fear which an apparently weaker party can command over an ostensibly stronger one.

In a fascinating analogy the they taught that a lion can be terrorized by a beast which can do it no harm, perhaps by issuing a smell or a sound which convinces the mighty lion it ought to be afraid. A mosquito can drive an elephant crazy - we know what it's like when one buzzes in our ear, just imagine what it must feel like to have one up your trunk!

Their study in animal psychiatry continues as they suggest that a humble swallow may strike fear in the heart of a mighty eagle. And lastly, they describe the alarm felt by a whale at the thought that a small fish might block its blowhole.

In each of these fears it's the **improbable BUT possible** that is so terrifying. The realization that in spite of all our preparations, our readiness, our strength, in spite of the best defenses something could still get through. The smallest crack in the Iron Dome could bring down all we have built, our hopes and dreams.

Rabbi Michael Marmur, Dean of Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem used this text to teach that, "Fear is at the root of all conflict. When we fail to confront our fears on the personal level we are likely to stay trapped. And on the social and political level, if we fail to understand our own fears and those of the other, we are doomed to be incarcerated within a cycle of bloodshed.

Fear leads to hate, hate leads to anger, anger leads to suffering.

On a summer evening as the sun was setting in the west, Major General (Ret) Avigdor Kahalani, one of Israel's greatest war heroes, a veteran of the Six Day War, The Yom Kippur War and the First Lebanon War, rode out in a jeep to speak to the young soldiers of an IDF unit, about to go, in the words of Shakespeare, "Once again into the breach" in Gaza as the ground campaign was set to commence early that morning.

Kahalani – is arguably Israel's greatest living military hero. In the Yom Kippur War his unit fought back against a vicious offensive from highly trained Syrian forces. They counter attacked and recapturing the Golan Heights pushed deep into Syrian territory until they were within artillery range of the Syrian capital of Damascus. It was a feat almost unheard of in the annals of modern warfare. He and the men under his command quite literally saved the State of Israel.

The young soldiers of the IDF gathered around him, they leaned in close as he spoke in a hushed and somber tone befitting the enormity of the moment on the eve of yet another war, for yet another generation.

The General began:

"We never taught you to hate. Not this army, not the Israel Defense Forces. We never taught you to hate. And there are armies in the world who do that. And maybe it works to a degree; maybe by hating the enemy, you are a fiercer fighter. I don't know. But we never taught you that. And I'll tell you why: if we teach you to hate, you can't undo that.

You'll come back from the war and it won't be the 'enemy'; it will be your brother in law, or your neighbor or your former friend. Once you teach people to hate, they'll find someone to hate. So we never taught you that."

Hatred is neither crazy nor insane. It is a condition to which every one of us is susceptible, both individually and collectively. As such, a moral life, a moral society, and a moral universe is one which takes responsibility to ensure that hatred and it's by products racism and bigotry is attacked and destroyed.

In his classic work, "Leadership", James MacGregor Burns distinguishes between transactional and transformational leaders. The former address people's interests. The latter, like General Kahalani attempt to raise their sights. "Transforming leadership is elevating. It is moral but not moralistic. Leaders engage with followers, but from higher levels of morality; in the enmeshing of goals and values both leaders and followers are raised to more principled levels of judgment."

Leadership at its highest form transforms those who exercise it and those who are influenced by it. The great leaders make people better, kinder, nobler than they would otherwise be. That was the achievement of Ben Gurion, King, Churchill, Gandhi, and Mandela. The paradigm case was Moses, the man who had more lasting influence than any other leader in history.

In Deuteronomy 23, a parasha we read just a two weeks ago in shul, Moses commanded the people saying, "Do not despise the Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land." (Deut. 23:8)

This is an extraordinary statement by Moses. The Egyptians enslaved the Israelites, planned a program against them of slow genocide, and then refused to let them go despite the plagues that were devastating the land. Aren't these reasons enough to hate?

Yes but, if the people continued to hate their one-time oppressors, Moses would have taken the Israelites out of Egypt but would have failed to take Egypt out of the Israelites. They would still be slaves, not physically but psychologically. They would be slaves to the past, held captive by the chains of resentment, unable to build the future. To be free, you have to let go of hate, you have to set fear aside. That is a difficult truth but a necessary one.

The message is clear, do not forget the past but do not be held captive by it. Be willing to fight your enemies but never allow yourself to be defined by them or become like them. Learn to love and forgive. Acknowledge the evil men do, but stay focused on the good that is in our power to do. Only in that way do we raise the moral sights of humankind and help redeem the world we share.

How do we face down the fear and hate that is consuming us, threatens to consume our people and the whole world? How do we lift our sights, our souls to a higher spiritual and moral plain like Moses and General Kahalani?

Curiosity and Faith.

The most successful remedy for fear has been throughout time, curiosity, wrote Cambridge historian Theodore Zeldin. It is only boundless curiosity that can be effective against fear. Zeldin taught that one of sciences most important discoveries about fear is that its physical symptoms, in terms of the chemicals produced to defend the body, differ only by degree from those produced by curiosity. And that is why those who are fully absorbed in achieving a goal behave as though they are profoundly courageous. But it is not courage, rather curiosity that moves us forward.

The Talmud asks the question, WHAT is a father obligated to teach his son? The response from our tradition is that a father is obligated to teach his son Torah, to teach him a craft and to teach him how to swim. "Why to teach him how to swim?" the rabbis ask, "because his life may depend on it!" they answer.

What is swimming? Swimming is curiosity masquerading as courage; swimming is navigating the rough waters of life, without any support, entirely on your own. We teach a child to swim so that he we will know courage, know to overcome fear, will know that if he can swim, if he can call upon the resources of courage that dwell within each soul, let go of the fear and venture out into the uncertain then, knowing how to swim he can always make it to the other side of any divide, he can always triumph over fear, not be brought down by hate.

But courage and curiosity in the face of fear and hatred will only get you so far. We need one more element, one more thing to buttress our soul and the soul of the Jewish State against the forces of evil that would drag us down to the base human conflicts that tormented us this summer. We need faith.

Not wild religious fanaticism, we've had enough of that on both sides, but the faith that is at the core of both religions, a faith and belief in the sanctity of human life and the worthiness of every human being.

"It is easy to be horrified when an innocent 16-year-old is burned alive. But it is the more mundane forms of racism that must be combated if we are to prevent the next sadistic murder. In every nation there are individuals who can and do commit such acts. It is our responsibility to make sure that they do not find legitimacy for their barbarism in the public sphere. It is our responsibility to not perpetuate the cycle of fear and hate that leads to anger and suffering. We must choose courage and faith and respect for the human dignity of every individual if we are to successfully combat the racism of fear and hatred."[ii]

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks in his final essay as Chief Rabbi of England, entitled "A Judaism Engaged with the World" writes, "Jewish history bears witness to the world that a nation need not be large to be great, nor powerful to be influential. The Jewish people is proof that you can suffer centuries of persecution and exile and still survive and flourish, recovering from every defeat and turning every setback into a matrix of renewal. You can be written off by the world and prove time and again that the world is wrong. Inspired by high ideals and a respect for human dignity, you can outlast any empire. You can suffer and yet sing, walk through the valley of the shadow of death and emerge, limping but undefeated, into the light of new life. Time and again Jews have shown how you can defeat probability by the power of possibility."

For the first time in 4,000 years, Jews have sovereignty and independence in Israel, freedom and equality in the Diaspora. We are strong not weak, we are the fierce lion, the soaring eagle, the hopeful whale, whose appearance our rabbis teach – portends the coming of the messiah.

Yes there are dangers out there, and we must be awake to them, but the far greater danger is that we succumb to fear and hatred. That we are dragged in to the pit and the mire of the very thing we were established to prevent. The senseless hatred, the *sinat chinam* that has been the undoing of humanity and the Jewish people time and again.

Not this time, not again.

"I am not a dreamer, nor do I romanticize our enemy. I am fully awake to the fact that there is a yearning among many to destroy our people and to destroy the land of Israel. However, knowing all this, I must not forget, we cannot forget that every human being is created in the image of God and has potential for moral renewal and for seeking ways of peace and ways of pleasantness to live in this world."[iii]

Courage can concur Fear, Hate is no match for Faith.

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[i] Shlomit Harrosh, Against the Racism of Fear - Shalom Hartman Institute July 15, 2014
[ii] Shlomit Harrosh, Against the Racism of Fear - Shalom Hartman Institute July 15, 2014
[iii] Rabbi Prof. David Hartman, Do Not Invoke Amalek Lightly, December 3, 2008