JERUSALEM IS THE CAPITAL OF ISRAEL
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz – Temple Sholom, Vancouver BC
December 22, 2017

When the United States declared that it was moving its embassy to Jerusalem, thus making real the official position of the US Government for more than 30 years that Jerusalem is the capital of the Jewish State I was in Boston at the URJ Biennial convention with 6,000 other reform Jews.

And in that moment, surrounded as I was by the leaders of our movement, the largest assembly of non-orthodox Jews anywhere in the world I felt very much alone.

What should have been a moment at the very least, yeah we already knew that and at the most celebration was in fact a moment for great angst for many of those assembled in the cavernous convention hall.

The presidential politics of the United States permeated nearly every aspect of the biennial convention. In a sentence I never felt more Canadian. In two sentences I wondered if I was at the right convention because it seemed like a political rally.

As our Scholar in Residence Rabbi Jeff Salkin wrote:

"Anyone who attended this biennial convention would have left with the impression that the single largest item on Reform Judaism's agenda is social justice (with our youth and camping programs a very close second).

Social justice was the constant theme of the special presentations during the plenary sessions. We heard from such luminaries as Senator Elizabeth Warren and Reverend William Barber, who moved me like no other preacher since Martin Luther King. They brought the assembled throngs to their feet.

Let me be clear and as you well know, the social justice component of this movement is crucial to me, and to our congregation. Our congregation's leadership in particular and Canada's in general for the cause of Syrian Refugees was recognized in front of the entire assembly.

But, any number of my colleagues walked away from the biennial convention, and they asked themselves that old Peggy Lee question: "Is that all there is?"

The answer was no, there was more but much of that more centered on the Reform Movement's official position on the Jerusalem as the capital of Israel statement by President Trump and the planned move the US embassy.

As Jewish Agency Chairman Natan Sharansky pointed out, “The Reform response to the recognition of Jerusalem was terrible. When … a superpower recognizes Jerusalem, first you … welcome it, then offer disagreement. Here it was the opposite.”

Sharansky was referring to the Dec. 5 statement issued by all 16 North American Reform organizations and affiliates in response to President Donald Trump’s declaration recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The operative clause reads: “While we share the President’s belief that the U.S. Embassy should, at the right time, be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, we cannot support his decision to begin preparing that move now, absent a comprehensive plan for a peace process.”

There have been several attempts to clarify this position, but not by all of the original signatories. It is still the official position of the entire North American apparatus of the Reform movement. If our movement’s affiliates have had a change of heart, all of them should say it through another statement: “We made a mistake.”

If not, and if we still stand by our original statement, I want you my congregation to know that this position is not my position.

'Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and the heart of the Jewish people. It always has been and always will be.' FULL STOP

That should have been the position of our movement, as I truly believe it should be every Jew and every Zionist.

Let me then speak to those that say, wait what about the peace process, what about the subjugation of the Palistinians, what about their right to a state of their own, on their own holy land. To this my response is YES AND…

Yes they are being subjugated and oppressed, and some of that is being done by the State of Israel, and much is being done by their own leadership. Yes they have a right to their own state, yes Jerusalem is holy to them, as it is to Christians, as it is to Jews.

AND… Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Israel and the eternal heart of the Jewish people. It has been since Abraham first left his father’s house for a Land that God would show him, since Joshua crossed the Jordan, since David built the city that bares his name and Solmon built the Temple. It remained our eternal capital after the Greeks laid siege to it in 586 and we took It back in 516bce and King Atiochos tried to do the same in 167 and failed at the courageous fight with the macabees, and when the Romans laid siege in 70ce and then when the Jewish people rose from the ashes of the Holocaust and re-established the Jewish Nation in our ancestral home in 1948 and then captured the ancient city itself from the Jordanians in 1967. Even if they kick us out again, and God forbid that should happen, it will still be our capital and the focal point of our prayers. Every synagogue in the world has faced toward Jerusalem for

more than 2,000 years. If I forget O Jerusalem, scripture admonishes, may my right hand lose its cunning.

I am unabashedly a progressive Jew, and inspite of my sense of alienation from our movement at the moment I am proudly a Reform Jew, and I firmly believe that you can absolutely hold that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and the heart of the Jewish people and still be those things.

As Rabbi Ami Hirsch, also a reform Rabbi wrote:

The world's superpower finally did the right thing, and we opposed it – not on the principle, but on the "timing." The timing? Now is the not the right time? Two thousand years later and it is still not the right time? As if there is a peace process that the Palestinians are committed to and pursuing with conviction.

There were critics who accused the civil rights movement of moving too quickly. The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s response: "The time is always ripe to do what is right."

In his Letter from Birmingham Jail, King wrote: "For years now I have heard the word 'wait' … that [our] action … is untimely. This 'wait' has almost always meant 'Never.' We must come to see that justice too long delayed is justice denied."

King often reminded us that time is neutral, that it can be used constructively or destructively. Israel's opponents have used time more effectively than we have. They have so distorted history that so many around the world question the very legitimacy of Jewish ties to Zion and Jerusalem. We have neglected teaching and conveying, even to our own children, our millennia-old love affair with the Land of Israel and Jerusalem as its beating heart.

Judaism without Eretz Yisrael is not Judaism. Judaism without Jerusalem is not Judaism.

This is not to deny that others consider Jerusalem holy. It is not to deny that the Palestinians seek Jerusalem as their capital. I am in favor of two states for two peoples. For that to happen, some kind of accommodation on Jerusalem will be necessary. If and when it occurs, I will support it.

But let no one be fooled. Peace will never rise on foundations of sand. Any agreement will collapse under the weight of its own inconsistencies if constructed on a scaffolding of lies.

President Trump simply acknowledged reality. It is about time. It should have been done decades ago, in 1949, when Israel declared Jerusalem its capital. Many presidents – Democrats and Republicans — promised to move the U.S. Embassy.

The embassy will be in West Jerusalem. Who contests West Jerusalem? President Trump did not pre-empt the eventual borders of Jerusalem. He did not preclude a permanent status

agreement. He simply acknowledged a fact. Where do people meet Israeli prime ministers, presidents, parliamentarians and Supreme Court justices – in Tel Aviv? Where did Anwar Sadat speak when he wanted to convey on behalf of the Egyptian people a message of peace to Israelis: Tel Aviv?

It is for each country to declare its own capital. What other nation declares a capital unrecognized by the nations of the world? What kind of special abuse is reserved for the Jewish nation?

At the same time, it is proper and necessary for us to remind ourselves and others that we are committed to a two-state solution that will require territorial compromises from both sides, including in Jerusalem. We should continue to urge the American government to help bring about a negotiated peace.

We should also urge the international community to disabuse the Palestinian national movement of its exaggerated expectations and its insidious efforts to undermine and erase our connection to Zion. Until that happens, peace is an illusion.

I want to close with the words of Canadian Journalist, Terry Glavin who spoke here a few years ago at the Federation FedTalks:

Writing about the idea that Israel should give back the city of Jerusalem, Glavin writes, “a robust anti-imperialist analysis must rely on facts and first principles, so, we begin with the fact that the Jewish state acquired control of all of Jerusalem in 1967, from Jordan, after Jordan refused Israeli entreaties to stay out of the war that Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq were waging against Israel at the time. Jordan started bombarding the heck out of Israel, so the Israelis said fine, be like that, and fought back, and won the war against them all, and ended up in control of Jerusalem. An anti-imperialist of the currently faddish disposition would demand that Israel give Jerusalem back to. . . Jordan.

But by the same logic Jordan should give Jerusalem back to the Ottoman imperialists, but the Ottomans seized it from the Byzantine imperialists, who took it from the Roman imperialists, who took it from the Jews. You see where this logic leads?

At root of all of this is - and coming from the left, I can tell you I'm not happy to admit this - it seems to me that for a great many people, mostly on the "left," Israel's most unpardonable offence is not only having survived 1967, but having triumphed. Israel will never be forgiven for this, in the same way that for unreconstructed anti-Semites, the Jews will never be forgiven for surviving the Shoah.”

'Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and the heart of the Jewish people. It always has been and always will be.' Trump did not make that true, it has always been true. FULL STOP