BREXIT & THE JEWS – WHAT IS GOING ON?
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Last night I gave a sermon about the far too tame and measured response to the Orlando shootings. I spoke about the emptiness of the phrase 'my thoughts and prayers are with you' and urged us to move beyond thoughts and prayers to actions, for they speak much louder than words.

It was a sermon I had been ruminating on since the shooting, but only had a chance to share last night, two weeks after the horrific event. I wish that time had made my message irrelevant. I hoped, perhaps pointlessly that in the intervening days people of good character and values would have taken to the streets and demanded a change to gun laws in the US and attitudes towards the other around the world. But instead too many continue to meekly express their shock and horror through such rote sentiments as 'thoughts and prayers' or updating Facebook status statements with imagines of rainbow flags.

Last night I reminded us that Moses had to come down the mountain to confront the people, he didn't tweet his moral leadership from a Starbucks while sipping a latte.

I almost didn't give that message last night as well, because of the breaking news yesterday morning of the Brexit Vote and Britain's decision to leave the EU.

In the immediate aftermath the British Pound dropped 10% (and with it the value of salaries, pensions, etc), banks and industry are looking to flee the country, the Prime Minister of Great Britain has promised to resign. Huge numbers of EU migrant workers now face expulsion over the next few years, British citizens who live in Spain or France could face enormous problems. Scotland and Wales are clamoring to break from England. Most importantly of all, the entire political structure of the European Union is threatened with decay as other countries now call for referenda to opt out.

How did this happen? The tropes should sound very familiar to our Jewish historical ear. Xenophobia, racism, protectionism, a failing rural economy with high levels of wealth inequality. Generational divides in wealth and success in Britain are some of the highest in the world, but are not unique to the western world. The Sanders voters and the Trump voters in the US are expressing the same sentiments raging anger over economic inequality and while tame by those comparisons, the vote here in Canada during our last election road a similar wave of economic realignment. Ultimately, all these factors led to a rise in far-right-wing politics and a rage-vote of no confidence in the EU and it is leading to a similar one in the US.

My thoughts on Brexit and the Jews - While it is much more complicated than just this, Brexit and the sentiments that drove it are tied to the rise in nativist/nationalist, isolationist, anti-immigrant and anti-globalization forces within UK. The rise of such forces within a nation has never been good for the Jews historically (or any other racial or religious minority) and no reason to think that will be any different in this instance.

My message last night and the one I share this morning are closely related and in fact they go all the way back to what I shared with you on Kol Nidrei this past September when I challenged us to Love The Stranger because that is our Torah and that is own story.

What we are seeing in Brexit, and Trump, and anti-immigrant, anti-other violence around the globe is eerily reminiscent of post WWI Europe, the isolationism the followed the failed League of Nations which spurred the nationalism that brought about Nazi Germany, an expansive Japan and the fascism of Mussolini.

I'm not a political scientist and the days when congregations turned to their spiritual leaders for political analysis have long been replaced by satellite news channels and the internet but there is a moral message here that maybe we will only hear in synagogue or houses of worship and it needs to be said and we need to be called by it to action.

We must not allow hatred, fear, and xenophobia to govern the democratic process. Analysts point to the anti-immigrant forces as being what tipped the scales in Britain toward the Leave position and in the US they are driving Trump voters as well.

A young reform rabbinic colleague, Rabbi Jason S. Rosner, of Wimbledon Synagogue, in London, England shared with me that in London the fear is the Syrian refugees and Muslim 'terrorist' migrants.

As Jews, the echoes should be obvious: a group of people fleeing an oppressive government, camped on one side of a narrow strait of water looking for a way to get across to safety. If the Biblical echoes aren't enough, we only need to reach back a few decades to see our own people feeling from Iran, Ethiopia, Poland, etc.

In the US, fear of Mexican immigrants has prompted a case for building a new Great Wall of China.

And so while you don't look to your Rabbi to give a political message or analysis – there is a moral message that most be clearly stated.

We must not allow demagoguery to triumph, we must not allow rage to dictate the democratic process. We must not let fear and hate win, if we do then we all lose.

We live in an unredeemed world, there is no messiah coming to save us, we don't sing Moshiach, Moshiach in this congregation or in most – salvation will not come down from heaven, it will come when we make heaven here on earth. When we take to heart our Jewish imperative to repair the brokenness in our world.

And to echo what I shared last – we will not repair the world from our Facebook pages or our Twitter accounts or our heartfelt but ultimately empty sentiments about thoughts and prayers the only thing that will bring down heaven to earth is each of us getting out there and pulling on the rope, drawing us each nearer in words, but more importantly in deeds to that vision.