**A Message for the King**
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**Temple Sholom - Vancouver BC Canada**
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Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha'olam,

she'natan mi'kvodo livasar va'dam.

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, who has shared divine glory with human beings.

If that blessing doesn't trip off your tongue from your Hebrew school days it's because most Jews never have the opportunity to use it in their lifetime.

No it's not the blessing for a Canadian team winning the Stanley Cup, it's the blessing we are commanded to say when we meet a king, head of

state or a person entrusted with the power to shape the fate of nations, a perhaps the only occurrence more rare than a Canadian Stanley Cup title.

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What is so unusual about this blessing is that we don't say that God has transferred power, or holiness, or righteousness to those who govern. We say that a trace of divine dignity is placed upon

certain individuals because of the responsibility they carry. They are “God-like” not because they are virtuous, but because their decisions affect the lives of millions.

On Monday I will have the rare opportunity to say this blessing. I will be attending “Hanukkah on the Hill” in Ottawa, a reception with Prime Minister Carney, the leaders of all the political parties, ministers, MPs, and many senior government officials. I will be one of maybe 100 people in the room, yet as a rabbi from Vancouver, I will likely be given a few fleeting moments with one or more of our national leaders. Enough time to shake a hand,

offer a sentence or two, and then watch the next person step forward.

If you were me, what would you say? How would you use your 30 seconds face to face with the Prime Minister of Canada?

Looking for guidance I've been studying what our tradition expects from a Jew and a rabbi in that moment and I've found that next week's parashah gives us one of our oldest models.

Next week we will begin to read the story of Joseph. You may recall from the Torah or the musical that

among the things that Joseph, he was, for a period of time, held prisoner in Pharaoh's dungeon. Then one day he is brought before the Pharaoh without explanation or preparation.

Torah does not call it a meeting of equals, similarly I'm under no such illusion for my time in Ottawa. Joseph bows low to Pharoah. I'm not planning on doing that.

He knows exactly where he stands.

Yet when Pharaoh asks for help interpreting his dreams, Joseph does more than translate symbols.

He offers a plan for the economic survival of the nation as it faces an ensuing famine that only he can foresee.

With access to power uses his moment to preserve life and the nation that has imprisoned him.

Later he tells his brothers: “God sent me before you to preserve life.” That is his self-understanding. He wasn’t placed in the palace for his own honor. He was placed there because people were frightened and hungry, and he knew how to help.

Joseph becomes a model for Jewish public service. When Jews find themselves before rulers, the question is rarely “What do I gain from this meeting?” The question is “What lives can be protected? What good can be done because I am here?”

That question echoes across Jewish history, and it rings in my ears as I imagine my moment on Parliament Hill.

If Joseph teaches the value of selflessness, the story of Esther teaches the value of courage.

Esther stands before a monarch whose mood swings determine life and death. That might resonate for some as an echo of a more impetuous national leader further to our south.

Esther approaches the king uninvited, a position that puts her own life at risk should he refuse her an audience.

When the moment comes, she doesn’t speak in abstractions, she gets right to the point. She says, “Grant me my life, and my people.” No hesitation. No apology.

Her courage is not only in speaking. Her courage lies in knowing when the moment has come and stepping into it fully and with a clear message.

There is a detail we sometimes forget. After the king grants her request, she goes back again. She presses until Haman's decrees are reversed and her people are safe. Esther shows that one comment at a banquet is not enough. It takes persistence. She presses the issue till safety is secured.

That too is a message that resonates this year. A single photo, a single holiday greeting from a leader, does not solve the crisis of antisemitism. It takes

repeated, steady, principled leadership. Esther reminds us to keep showing up, to not let up until the situation changes. Actions speak far louder than words, and Esther reminds me not to be so easily satisfied with platitudes and rhetoric.

The story of Daniel, my biblical namesake, is less familiar, yet it speaks perhaps most directly to this moment.

Daniel serves the kings of Babylon and Persia, interpreting dreams and visions. He becomes a respected advisor. Yet he never lets proximity to power compromise his moral clarity.

When he interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 4, Daniel does something extraordinary. He tells the king that the dream warns of downfall, and then he adds a line rarely quoted: "Redeem your sins with righteousness and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor." Daniel calls a tyrant to compassion.

Think about that. A Jewish exile, essentially a civil servant in a foreign empire, reminds the most powerful man in the world that his greatness will be measured by how he treats the vulnerable. That is

Daniel's legacy. Not brilliance, not charisma, but speaking truth to power with courage.

Daniel also models integrity. When officials try to trap him and the king signs a decree forbidding prayer, he prays anyway. He respects the king but refuses to obey a law that violates conscience. Even the lions' den cannot frighten him away from faithful living.

Daniel's lesson for a modern democracy is simple. Access to leaders is not meant for flattery. Access is meant for moral reminder. It is a chance to say: the

mark of leadership is compassion, justice, and care for the vulnerable.

Lastly the prophet Jeremiah adds a dimension that is essential in Canada today.

In his letter to the Israelite exiles in Babylon, he tells the Jewish community: “Seek the welfare of the city where I have exiled you, and pray to God on its behalf, for in its peace you will have peace.”

Jewish wellbeing is tied to the wellbeing of the broader society. We do not stand before rulers only to speak of our own needs. We speak of the health

of the nation. We care about the safety of all minorities, the stability of institutions, the culture of public discourse, and the moral climate of our country.

Jeremiah calls us to be citizens who invest in the common good. A strong Canada protects all who live here, including us.

The rabbis add further texture. Pirkei Avot teaches, “Pray for the welfare of the government, for without it people would swallow each other alive.” Order and civic stability are blessings. Yet the same tractate

warns, “Be careful with those in power. They draw a person close for their own benefit.”

Together, these two teachings reveal a balanced posture: respect without naiveté, cooperation without surrender of conscience.

And then comes a teaching from the Talmud, Shabbat 54b, which feels written for this exact moment. The rabbis teach that if a person has the ability to protest wrongdoing in their home and does not, they are accountable for the home. If they can protest wrongdoing in their city and do not, they are

accountable for the city. If they can speak out to the world and do not, they are accountable for the world.

The message is sober. Influence is responsibility. If you have a chance to speak and choose silence, the silence becomes your legacy.

You can hear the echo of Mordechai's words to Esther: "Who knows if you have not attained this position for just such a time as this?"

There is one more image that helps me frame this moment. Hanukkah is a holiday about Jewish light shining inside structures of power. The original

miracle did not happen in a private home. It happened in the Temple, a once sacred place at the heart of national life, that had been desecrated by hate and intolerance.

Just as light pushes out darkness, the ancient Israelites, the Maccabees reclaimed that space by defeating those who could not accept religious or cultural differences in their midst.

When we kindle a hanukkiyah this week on Parliament Hill, we place a small Jewish flame inside the seat of Canadian democracy. It is a quiet

reminder that our country belongs to all of us, and that Jewish presence is part of the fabric of this land.

And it's something more, it's the very embodiment of our biblical mandate to be an Or L'goyim, a light unto the nations. Canada is in trouble right now, not only because Jews are under attack, our well being sacrificed on the desecrated altar of demographics and politics that make it too politically expensive to protect Jews and root out those who seek to do us harm.

Canada is in trouble because those very same voices of Jew hatred that are going unchecked on

our streets and campuses will undoubtedly one day, when they are done with the Jews be directed at the next marginalized population, and then the next, and then the next, until all that is left is hate.

We are a light unto the nations in the sense that what is happening to us is a flashing warning light of what will happen to all of us if hate and intimidation is allowed to spread unchecked in our country.

On Monday I will carry more than a blessing and a title as I greet the Prime Minister. I will be carrying the stories that have shaped our people's understanding of power for thousands of years:

Joseph’s instinct to protect life.

Esther’s readiness to speak when the hour demands it.

Daniel’s moral steadiness in the presence of rulers.

Jeremiah’s vision of a society whose wellbeing is shared by all who live within it.

And the rabbinic insistence that a voice unused is a responsibility unmet.

In a gathering filled with political calculation, holiday cheer, and the noise of a hundred conversations, I hope to offer something simple and unmistakable that cuts through the noise and the politics: a

reminder that leadership is measured by the courage to safeguard the vulnerable and by the wisdom to hold a country together when strain pulls at its seams.

My hope, in those few seconds with the Prime Minister or any party leader, is to convey that this moment calls for moral clarity. Jewish Canadians in particular, and Canadians of every background, are looking to their leaders to reinforce the boundaries of civil discourse, to confront hatred wherever it emerges, and to keep the public square safe enough for difference to thrive. The choices made now will shape not only our community's safety, but the

safety of every community that relies on Canada’s democratic resilience.

Hanukkah teaches that a small flame, set in the right place, can reclaim a desecrated space and begin to purify a damaged world. When that flame is lifted in the heart of Canadian democracy, it carries a message for every person who holds power in this country.

If even one sentence spoken on Parliament Hill helps strengthen resolve, sharpen awareness, or deepen responsibility, then that little flame will have done its work.

And so I will say the ancient blessing for a head of state, and in my heart I will add another:

May the light of these days reach those who guide our nation.
May it steady their hands, clear their vision, and deepen their courage.
May it remind them that leadership is an act of moral responsibility, not a performance of political convenience.

And may it remind all of us that even in a fleeting encounter with power, we carry the legacy of a

people who have stood before emperors and kings, who have spoken truth in palaces and prisons, and who have insisted across every century that light has a place even in the most shadowed halls.

We kindle our lamps on Hanukkah as more than a remembrance of an ancient victory; they are a declaration that we are still here.

Still bearing witness.

Still speaking truth to power.

Still defending dignity.

Still pushing back the darkness with our light.