AFFLICT THE COMFORTABLE
ROSH HASHANAH DAY 5775
RABBI DAN MOSKOVITZ

My homiletics professor in rabbinical school taught us that the purpose of a sermon, was to, 'Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.' I fear I have nothing comforting to share with you this morning.

The world is burning.

The world is burning with a fire of savagery and blood thirst, hatred and evil we have not seen since the dark days of Nazi Germany and World War II. Jews are once again its target, but we are not the only ones.

Humanity itself, freedom, morality, faith, reason our very way of life and all we hold dear are the ultimate objective of the roiling wave of **radical extremism** that is crashing upon the shore of the 21st century.

The Jew; we are merely breakwater in its way.

We alone cannot stop it, Israel alone cannot stop it, at question is will we survive it? Can we defeat it?

Let me be clear, if you look around the globe right now from Boko Harem in Nigeria to ISIS in Iraq and Syria. From Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza and their patrons in Iran to Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan. From violent riots and blood thirsty mobs in the streets of Europe's greatest cities to the seething anti-Semitism that liters the internet spewing hatred and ignorance by the megabyte the source of this world upheaval has only one name, Radical Islam. In another time and era we called it Nazism. They are for me one and the same.

They seek world domination, to impose their barbarian, myopic, fanatical way of life upon the rest of the world and as they have shown us time and time again through grainy YouTube videos of masked men standing with Kalashnikov and knife raised to the throat of innocents they will impose their evil will through unfettered violence.

"To camouflage their identity is sedition. To excuse their deeds is contemptible. To mask their intentions is unconscionable."[i]

The world is on fire with hatred – we must put out the fire before it consumes all we hold dear, before it consumes us all.

"Let us understand that the radical Islamist assaults all over the globe are but skirmishes, fire fights, and vicious decoys. Christ and the anti-Christ. Gog U'Magog. The Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness; the bloody collision between civilization

and depravity is on the border between Lebanon and Israel . It is on the Gaza Coast and in the Judean Hills of the West Bank . It is on the sandy beaches of Tel Aviv and on the cobblestoned mall of Ben Yehuda Street . It is in the underground schools of Sderot and on the bullet-proofed inner-city buses. It is in every school yard, hospital, nursery, classroom, park, theater – in every place of innocence and purity.

Israel is the laboratory – the test market. Every death, every explosion, every grisly encounter is not a random, bloody orgy. It is a calculated, strategic probe into the heart, guts and soul of the West.

Israel in her struggle represents the civilized world, while Hamas, Hezbollah, Al-Qaeda, Iran, Islamic Jihad, ISIS, Boko Harem represent the world of psychopathic, loathsome evil.

As Israel, imperfect as she is, resists the onslaught, many in the Western World have lost their way displaying not admiration, not sympathy, not understanding, for Israel's galling plight, but downright hostility and contempt. Without moral clarity, we are doomed because Israel's galling plight ultimately will be ours.

Hanna Arendt in her classic 'Origins of Totalitarianism' accurately portrays the first target of tyranny as the Jew. We are the trial balloon. The canary in the coalmine. If the Jew/Israel is permitted to bleed with nary a protest from "good guys" then tyranny snickers and pushes forward with its agenda."[ii]

This summer, during the height of the Gaza conflict as rockets rained down on Israel by the hundreds every day my colleague Rabbi Menachem Creditor wrote:

"For every thing there is a time." For Jews, now is the time to realize that the world sees us as one thing, one group deserving of hatred, unworthy of self-determination, an ever-displaced People.

No more.

We are wanderers no more.

We have come home, and we will defeat those who try to kill us. And there are those in this world who want to kill us.

They are trying tonight through missiles, they tried today by savagely beating a Swedish woman for wearing a Jewish star necklace, they tried yesterday by attacking a synagogue in Geneva, and they tried last week by declaring an "Israeli-free zone" in England. It is that brutally simple.

Peace is a commitment the Jewish People makes to the world. But it is a commitment premised upon us being alive to fulfill it. And we have no intention of dying.

We've got work to do, ancient work under incomprehensible trials.

Never Again is not a past-tense commitment for a Jew. Never Again is right now."[iii]

Like the Shofar Blast we just heard thundering through this sanctuary, I would add to my colleague's powerful call to action that it is not just for Jews that Never Again if Right Now, it is for all of humanity.

Four-thousand years before YouTube a scene in the Bible is laid out, that we read this morning, in which Abraham is told to sacrifice his son. With a machete in his hand, he is about to behead his own child – but God intervenes and says…no…no more. We don't act this way anymore. Moral people, people with integrity and depth, people of faith – if, you say you believe in Me, if you say you love Me, then sacrifice and beheadings are not the way. Even the Koran, the Muslim Holy book, recounts this version, although it is Ishmael being offered up, not Isaac.[iv]

And yet it is like we are living in a time machine, back to the days BEFORE Abraham and his sons when smoke from child sacrifices to the God of Molach darkened the known world. Judaism has been called an *Or L'Goyim*, a light unto the nations, what was that light? It was the light of reason and hope, the light of monotheism and the awakening of moral consciousness that boldly in its day declared that God did not God's children sacrificing each other in the name of religion.

Elie Wiesel called the world to account for this horrible return to ancient ways when he published a full-page letter in major newspapers around the world this summer.

Wiesel wrote, "In my own lifetime, I have seen Jewish children thrown into the fire. And now I have seen Muslim children used as human shields, in both cases, by worshippers of death cults indistinguishable from that of the Molochites.

What we are suffering through today is not a battle of Jew versus Arab or Israeli versus Palestinian. Rather, it is a battle between those who celebrate life and those who champion death. It is a battle of civilization versus barbarism.

Do the two cultures that brought us the Psalms of David and the rich libraries of the Ottoman Empire not share a love of life, of transmitting wisdom and opportunity to their children? And is any of this discernible in the dark future offered by Hamas to Arab children, to be suicide bombers or human shields for rockets?

Palestinian parents want a hopeful future for their children, just like Israeli parents do. And both should be joining together in peace.

But before sleepless mothers in both Gaza City and Tel Aviv can rest, before diplomats can begin in earnest the crucial business of rebuilding dialogue… the Hamas death cult must be confronted for what it is.

Moderate men and women of faith, whether that faith is in God or man, must shift their criticism from the Israeli soldiers – whose terrible choice is to fire and risk harming human shields, or hold their fire and risk the death of their loved ones – to the terrorists who have taken away all choice from the Palestinian children of Gaza….

Let us return child sacrifice to the darkest corner of history, and work towards a brighter future with those who choose life, Arabs and Jews alike, all of us Abraham's children."[v]

Friends, this is not an easy sermon for me to write. As a rabbi and a human being I want to talk about spirituality, about Jewish ethics, about living in modern society according to Jewish values. I want to celebrate our 50th anniversary as a congregation and the new Torah we will write with our own hands, to be read by generations and generations of this community.

But I can't help thinking about the rabbis of the 1930s in the United States, Canada and Europe, who boldly warned their communities of the coming storm of Nazism, and they hadn't the prior experience of seeing the world descend into such darkness to awaken their conscience.

How can we, knowing what we know, having been through as people what our people has been through not rise up, how can I not rise up and say, the drums are beating, the world is teetering on the abyss. As Edmund Burke warned more than 200 years ago, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

The rabbis of Jewish tradition took up this call to action hundreds of years before Burke penned his haunting observation.

The Midrash warns us, "Those who are merciful to people who deserve cruelty will end up being cruel to people who deserve mercy." [vi]

Often the punishment for failure to take reality into account is to do the opposite of what was intended. In the 1930s, an underground religious group considered assassinating Hitler, but decided against it on the grounds that there is no moral right to kill a bad ruler. The millions of innocent victims of Hitler's later murderous war on Jews and others could well claim that the righteousness of the German underground paved the way for the cruel sadistic war on them.

The beginning of ethical wisdom is the recognition that in an unredeemed world, one must be able and willing to exercise power to protect or advance the good.

The key difference between today and the 1930s is that Jews are powerful, we have a country, we have an army, we have the backing of powerful friends like the United

States and Canada. We are on the right side of history, we can advance the good in the face of evil.

But like 1930 the world is weak.

It has been 13 years since Radical Islam declared war on the West on 9/11 and still too many in the non-Jewish western world live with the fantasy that this is not their problem, not their fight, not their war.

The Shofar is supposed to wake us from our complacency, but they have not invented a Shofar loud enough to blast the world from its slumber, in the face of the very real threat posed by Radical Islam. What will it take? I don't know, but I fear like that canary in the coalmine – Israel will be sacrificed in the process.

The purpose of this sermon is not to teach you to hate Radical Islam, and certainly not Muslims in general.

Recently I was sent a speech given by one of Israel's most legendary military figures, Major General (Ret) Avigdor Kahalani, a leader long retired from the Israeli Army as well as from his subsequent career in Israel's Kenesset. Let me share with you what a seasoned military hero said to the Israeli troops in the war this summer, as he spoke quietly to young soldiers leaning forward to catch every word:

"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."[vii]

We must not act out of hatred, we must act out of hesed, out of compassion for all of those that suffer and will suffer if the rising tide is left unchecked.

But what can we do?

We can study – join me in a 10 part intensive study of modern Israel and the issues that confront it internally and externally as it struggles to navigate the region and world it lives in today and tries to shape its own future.

We can travel and support Israel and all that it represents by doing what rabbi Heschel called us to do, by praying with our feet. Temple Sholom has three missions to visit Israel taking place this year. Travel with Rabbi and Cathy Bregman next month to volunteer on in support of the Israeli Army. Travel with past president and Temple Sholom members Mike and Mary Cohene on a solidary mission that leaves in just a few weeks. Bring your family, children and grandchildren with me

this coming summer for a multi-generational Israel experience and to celebrate a child's b'nai mitzvah.

We can write – yes in the face of impossible darkness we can bring the light of Torah, a new Torah to the world and our Temple Sholom community. In our darkest moments as a people, the light of Torah was never extinguished. B'nai Mitzvah were held in Auschwitz, members of the IDF made time to daven on the Golan Heights – in spite of everything that is going on in the world and because of everything – we will write a new Torah as a promise to future generations that Judaism and its teachings will not perish.

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[i] Rabbi Schlomo Lewis, "Ehr Kumt, He is Coming." September 28, 2010

[ii] Rabbi Schlomo Lewis, "Ehr Kumt, He is Coming." September 28, 2010

[iii] Rabbi Menachem Creditor, 'Never Again is Right Now' Times of Israel August 20, 2014

[iv] Hayatu 'L-Qulub (Merrick edition, p. 28)

[v] Elie Wiesel, paid Op-Ed New York Times, August 31, 2014

[vi] Tanhuma, Parashat Mezora,1; Yalkut Shimoni, I Samuel, Chapter 121

[vii] Greenberg, I., (2000). The ethics of Jewish power. United Jewish Communities: 2000 General Assembly.