A PARADE OF ELEPHANTS
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Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uY5Y6P4EFQY

Tonight, I want to talk about the elephant in the room; a simile attributed to both Dostoevsky and Mark Twain.

Now you would be forgiven for asking, yes rabbi but which elephant? There us so much going on rather than one elephant that needs mentioning, we have a small herd.

Just to prove the point and because for the first time in a long time Im talking infront of actual people who can talk back not my computer monitor and a zoom window.

What elephant in the room do you think I plan on talking about?

What's the issue of the day that we need to address? Don't worry I won't change the sermon by tacking on what I am sure similarly pressing issues; but I am curious to know what is on your mind, because I already know what is on my mind.

[ASK FOR IDEAS]

Good topics, thanks for helping me develop my list of sermon ideas for the High Holy Days.

BTW speaking of elephants – I learned while watching that herd of elephants that was roaming through southwest China on a year-long journey to nowhere, wreaking havoc, capturing hearts and confounding scientists along the way.

The elephants left their home on a wildlife reserve in the southwest Yunnan province more than a year ago and have since travelled roughly 500 kilometres.

The creatures have been seen trotting down urban streets, raiding farms for food and water, visiting a car dealership and even showing up at a retirement home, where they poked their trunks into some of the rooms, prompting one elderly man to hide under his bed. They were most recently seen on the outskirts of Kunming, a city of seven million people.

Scientists don't yet know what sparked this unconventional journey, but many have speculated they're trying to find a new home because their traditional one is no longer suitable.

While a group of elephants is most commonly called a herd, the preferred term is a parade of elephants, and who doesn't love a parade?

Well, I'll tell you who doesn't love a parade – apparently anyone who has to see an Israeli Flag, a Jewish Star or a Falafel on a street in a major North America city this past week.

Early this week you may have heard (as in with year ears not the elephant kind) that the Chicago Dyke March, an annual LGBT parade that as far back as 2017 ejected marchers carrying flags with Jewish symbols; did it again. This year they promoted their upcoming event with an image showing the burning of Israeli and American flags. The Instagram promotional post was removed by the social media company for "hate speech or symbols," in a warning that threatened to delete the group's account.

The Chicago Dyke March responded by urging followers to capture a screenshot of the post, "and share to prevent any attempts by Z1ON1ST and Instagram to censor our account."

BTW they used the word Zionist in the singular and I think there are a lot more than one of us that object to their Jew Hatred and consider it hate speech.

The march's stated goals are to abolish the Chicago Police Department, "the Israeli occupying forces," and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the event's description listed no LGBT-specific efforts.

An unrelated but not entirely dissimilar news story reported that a Philadelphia Food Truck Festival called Eat the Borders was cancelled when groups objected to the inclusion of an Israeli food truck called Moshava and threatened protests and even violence if the truck was not removed. At first the organizers agreed with the Jew Haters and disinvited Moshava; then when that sparked outrage amongst those who felt that Jews were being targeted for hate, the organizers decided to cancel the entire event.

The event organizer issued the following statement "Our mistake this time, with not only our event partners but in general, was not educating ourselves. And not properly making sure that everyone is properly represented, so that's where we made the decision to cancel the event."

I'm not entirely sure what they mean by, "our mistake this time" or what not being educated has to do with their decision? Does that mean they never should have included the Israeli cuisine food truck in the first place, or as one report had it, that because the Palestinian Food Truck refused to appear if the Israeli Food Truck was present, they should have disinvited the Israeli Food truck pro forma.

BTW in Israel, Israeli and Palestinian restaurants not to mention food itself exist on the same street and often the same dinner table and plate, but apparently not in Philadelphia the city of brotherly love.

What I do know is that what they didn't say was, "geez we are really sorry for letting our event be pushed around by a bunch of Jew haters; for letting Humas being equated with Hamas and

we apologize to Moshava and the Jewish community for being complicit yet again in allowing Jew Hatred to be normalized.

No they didn't say that – instead the Jewish Food Truck was scapegoated and made the reason that all the other food trucks had not festival to participate in that weekend.

I'm not going to solve the millennia old scourge of Anti-Semitism here tonight and maybe not ever, but I do want to say one thing on the anti-Semitism that seems to be flourishing on the activist left particularly when it comes to the intersectionality of multiple social justice issues.

Intersectionality can really draw its Raison d'être from an oft quoted but misunderstood and sloppily applied statement by Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr. who famously wrote in his Letter from the Birmingham Jail, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

It's from this noble principle that well-meaning but clearly ignorant and misinformed activists have over simplified both the incredibly complex reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the complexity of race relations in North America; I could say just the United States but of course those issues are absolutely here in Canada as well.

As Yehuda Kurtzer of the Sholom Hartman center explained this week when addressing this issue, "Racial justice is an easy story for people to connect with as a means of mapping it onto a hard story."

In fact, there is nothing that compares the horror of the racial situation in the US to the rather complex, nuanced, frustrating, and emotionally exhausting situation in Israel/Palestine. But people look for similarity. We are constantly categorizing by asking ourselves, 'how is what I see like what I know?'

The social justice movement on the activist left sees a power imbalance, they see organized police against street protesters, they see, or they think they see white Israelis against brown Palestinians and they say this is link that.

But it's not the same.

In fact if you allow for complexity what you see in the Israeli-Palestinian situation is perhaps the end game of what the Black Lives Matter Movement is striving for.

The Jews were a stateless, subjugated, oppressed and powerless people until about 70 years ago. Through political power, tragedy, short lived international empathy or guilt and ultimately like the formation of most nation states through military force the Jewish people, nearly annihilated, subjected to the most systematic genocide in modern history returned to their historical homeland.

They claimed for the first time in 2,000 years and were granted by a 2/3 vote of all the nations of the world in the United Nations a right of self-determination and autonomy and built a state and a civilization informed by their collective trauma and experience. Jews are no longer under the boot of racist police forces and Nazi storm troopers, but now tasked with administering to themselves and others the very justice that they were so long denied.

That's an aspirational story, that's not far removed from the desires of equity, justice and even reparations that the BLM movement seeks.

And its not that simple – one is not a mirror image of the other, they don't fit each other's narratives perfectly, but the cause of Zionism and a Jewish and Democratic State is far closer to the cause and values of progressivism than the non-democratic, non-inclusive, anti-LGBTQ, theocratic movements and countries that these intersectionality aligned groups have attached themselves.

They say politics makes strange bedfellows – but this is an unholy union. It boggles my mind that Jews who have been both on the receiving end of so much of the world's hatred, violence and bigotry as well as on the front lines standing shoulder to shoulder and arm and arm with social justice movements since the days of the biblical prophets are seen as colonialists, white supremacists and compared to Nazis.

To put it frankly to all the movements that want a more just, equitable, inclusive, and diverse society, Israel should be your ambition not your abomination.

AND yes, Israel is still becoming,

And yes, Israel is not fully just,

And yes, Israel is at times racist, extremist, abusive and undemocratic.

AND so is the US and so is Canada and so is, and so is…

But the proper response to those deficiencies in western democracies is make them better not make them disappear. Vote the tyrants out of office and replace them with people who represent your voice and values.

To a moderate degree Israel just did that; it may take many more elections to get to where it needs to be but that is how the country will change – not through violence, not through calls for its destruction from the river to the sea.

But the problem is not only over there, be that over the border or across the sea – its right here in Vancouver as well, its coming to UBC.

This week UBC announced that climate activists and journalists Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis are joining the faculty at the department of geography. Klein and Lewis are a powerful couple in the anti-Israel pro-BDS movement. Local anti-Israel activists will have new allies in their quest delegitimize Israel and to further move these two peoples further apart rather than bring them closer together.

And here is the thing and my final point for now on this issue. None of this yelling and screaming at each other. Not the Dyck march, the food truck ban, the Ferguson to Palestine linkage and chants is going to solve the complex problem and relationship between Israelis and Palestinians and the land they both must ultimately share and live together on.

Any group on either side calling for the eradication or annihilation actual or metaphorical of the other should be rejected from the start.

Famously the story is told of King Solomon who was confronted with an impossible dilemma of trying to determine the birth mother of a baby boy. Both women claimed their child was theirs. Solomon questioned each. Ultimately, he said the only solution was to cut the baby in half. One of the women accepted the horrible and unimaginable solution, the other, the true birth mother, said NO – if the choice is me having my child or the death of the child, give the baby to the other woman so that he may live.

No group on either side that wants to see the land cleared of either people truly loves the land, truly wants peace or can ever be considered right and just.

Left and right will not solve this problem – we must meet in the middle AND its not anywhere near as simple as that.