History Rhymes
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In September of 1978 US President Jimmy Carter was at his wit's end after 12 days of face-to-face negotiations between himself, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Began.

Neither party was at all inclined to make peace, both had legitimate grievances with the other nation, advisors were telling them peace was not possible with the other and that the leader and the nation each man represented could not be trusted. Things got so heated that all three parties had packed their bags and prepared statements that the talks had failed. Cars were idling in the Camp David driveway and Marine One, the presidential helicopter was being readied to return President Carter to Washington empty handed.

Failure then, in the midst of the cold war, would have meant an opening for the further arming of Egypt by the USSR and the nuclearization of the Middle East, where ultimately the fanatical forces that were then lurking in the shadows could very well force the Superpowers into a feared nuclear standoff. This was much like what was happening in East and West Germany at the time, only in the hot desert sands of the Middle East, it was far more likely that tempers would boil over.

These were the stakes at Camp David. The proposition was that Israel give back the Sinai Desert, land it had captured in the six-day war, land that served as their saving buffer zone in the Yom Kippur War just 5 years earlier. Land that contained settlements of Israeli citizens that Began had pledged on his life never to abandon. To do all of that in exchange for a piece of paper that promised peace, signed by three men who did not trust each other.

No one thought it probable or possible, not between these three men, Began and Sadat, who had spent a lifetime fighting each other, and Carter who lacked power at home and credibility abroad.

And yet they signed a peace treaty. Israel had been at war with Egypt in one form or another for literally millennia, since the days of Pharaoh. They have not been at war since and next to Jordan, Egypt is Israel's closest ally in the region today.

Mark Twain said, "History doesn't repeat itself but it often rhymes." No two eras or events are the same, but many if not all have rhyming similarities.

Three years before Camp David, President Gerald Ford had announced that the US would be re-evaluating its relationship with Israel because of Israel's power play, along with France in the Suez Canal. A crisis if you recall that nearly, like the Cuban Missile Crisis, was only a series of missteps away from another nuclear confrontation between the US and USSR.

You could not have had Camp David, if you had not also had the sobering realization of the Suez Canal Crisis. Carter could not have pressured Began to do the good and hard thing for the future of Israel if Ford had not created enough daylight between the US and Israel for Began to see the light at the end of the endless wars with Egypt tunnel.

"History doesn't repeat itself but it often rhymes."

I am neither a politician, nor a political scientist – though in truth I have a degree in the latter and every rabbi must ultimately learn the skills of the former.

I am a student and teacher of history, the history of our people both in the land and yearning for the land of Israel – and in all that has happened in these past many years, really since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin (*aleyha l'shalom*) I hear the rhyme of history.

Call it, 'darkest before the dawn', but while I am filled with worry, the seriousness of the matter gives me hope that it can no longer be ignored or put off. That the pressure of absolutes that made Camp David possible, has returned to make peace between the Israelis and Palestinians possible, though still improbable once again.

The region and its people are under near-bursting pressure. But pressure such as faces Israel also clarifies priorities. The greatest achievements of diplomacy have often come in the face of the most extreme pressure, or as Carl von Clausewitz wrote, 'War is diplomacy by other means'.

Let's examine the pressures in play.

In Israel the status quo between Israelis and Palestinians is set to devolve into a third intifada. Meanwhile, there is a seismic schism between the Jews in Tel Aviv who voted overwhelmingly for the Left and the Jews in Jerusalem who voted overwhelmingly for the Right. Israelis on left and right are living two different realities, and they want two different futures for themselves and for the Palestinians.

In the Arab world, the forces of fundamentalism have shaken what little remains of the nation-states from their complacency with and tolerance for radicalization. Arab armies are mobilized against radicalism and terror. Yes there is a vacuum of leadership throughout the Arab world, and particularly amongst the Palestinians – but that also creates space for a leader to emerge.

Outside of the Middle East there is a fundamental disagreement between Western Democracies that want Israel to act more like them, and Israel that wants The West to see that the terrorist threat confronting its democracy today, is coming to their shores tomorrow. And for much of Europe tomorrow *is* today.

Jews are under attack around the globe. Anti-Semitism has come out of hiding once again.

Anti-Semitism is ignorance and yet where do we find it? Most shockingly in our institutions of higher learning where in the most distorted and twisted forms they equate Jews with Nazis. We see this happening particularly in the BDS campaigns that are sweeping across North American university campuses and right here at UBC. These same anti-Semites defend terrorists as "heroes" inviting them as speakers on campus. The Talmud says, *Olam Hafouch,* the world is upside down. Bigotry masquerades as fairness.

The pressure is not only external. It is internal as well. The relationship between the Jews in the diaspora and the Jews in Israel is becoming a dysfunctional marriage. It's not headed for divorce but maybe separate bedrooms as each tries to focus on things they love about the other, even when they are disappointed in the other.

It seems hopeless I know, this election result whether you are Left or Right – the winner of the election was "Hopelessness" itself.

As Netanyahu declared, in his view their will never be a Palestinian state while he is Prime Minister. Those who voted for him believe that to be true and those who voted against him believe that to be true. That is the very definition of being without hope.

There is no solution to this conflict in this neighborhood, in this region, in this time. And with no Palestinian leader who can do the same. It's just not possible.

And yet, we said the same before Camp David.

We never thought Rabin would shake Arafat's hand or make peace with Jordan.

That Sharon, who built the settlements in Gaza would dismantle them, and that it didn't lead to civil war.

Began, Rabin, Sharon. These were not peace seekers these were warriors; evolved Hawks.

We are not ready for another Camp David today, Netanyahu is not anywhere near ready, and there is no leader on the other side who can be a Sadat or a King Hussein of Jordan, a warrior who has the credibility to make peace.

But by the same token, the ONLY ONE IN ISRAEL that has the credibility to one-day make peace with the Palestinians **is** Netanyahu. If he signed off on it, the people would believe it.

We are in a dark period and it will get darker. The pressure on Israel will only increase. The choices it will have to make will be impossible to get right. Our own solidarity both with Israel and with each other as fellow Jews will be tested, and there will be cracks. But that is nothing new for us, or for Israel. We don't always agree, as Jews here or there, past or present we seldom agree. But in the end what we have always done is survive. There's your biggest improbability: that we are still here.

The arc of history is long; Israel is 67 years old. By comparison it took the United States 150 years to reconcile slavery, a process that included a civil war, incomprehensible social disorder and civil unrest. And the US, which is a almost 200 years older than Israel, is still not there yet on the issue of race, as Ferguson reminds us. Canada could say some of the same about true reconciliation with the First Nations. We are not there yet.

This election was part of the growing pains of a nation and in the age of nations Israel is barely a teenager. Israel is the Bar Mitzvah boy who stands proudly, if not ironically before the congregation and declares, "Today I am a man!" And we all smile and say to ourselves, "Not yet, but today you gave us a glimpse of the man you will one day be. It would be more accurate to proclaim, "Today I will no longer act like a child."

The arc of history is long, Martin Luther King Jr. preached, but it bends toward justice.

That's the history of the world and it's the story of our people, a story we will tell again around our seder tables next week.

What do you take away from the seder? That Pharaoh was cruel? That slavery was terrible. Yes, but also that we were redeemed; that the pressure on Pharoah ultimately helped him see the light.

L'heyhudim hayta orach – we sang just last week at Purim. "The Jews enjoyed light and gladness, honor and joy. May we too experience these same blessings." In another dark time, when all hope appeared lost, there was light.

Let there be light once again!