

RH 5785

Our Lives After October 7 2023

We cannot sit here this morning and only think about ushering in the New Year 5785 with joyous tidings and the sweetness of apples and honey. On this Rosh HaShanah, we would do ourselves a disservice not to address the dangers to Jews both in *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel, and here in our American home. On this Rosh HaShanah, let us hear the sound of the shofar as it was intended: As a wake-up call to action.

On Simchat Torah last year, October 7, we were shocked out of our comfort and security. You are all familiar with the sickening details. The murderous onslaught of Palestinian Hamas terrorists who targeted innocent young people at a music festival and ravaged peaceful Kibbutz Be'eri and other villages. They murdered around 1,200 people, wounded hundreds more, and took 250 people hostages. Subsequently, many of the hostages were murdered by Hamas. We do not know how many still survive.

It was not shocking that Israel was attacked by those who seek to destroy her. Rather, we were shocked at how vulnerable and unprepared Israel was for the terrorist attack.

And here in the United States, we were not shocked that the incidents of antisemitism continued to rise. They have been rising steadily for years. Rather, we were stunned that the incidents of antisemitism more than tripled in a single year. We were unprepared for the speed and numbers of anti-Israel and antisemitic groups who rallied to intimidate Jewish students on campuses and to harass Jews when we gathered for events and programs. We were unprepared for the stark feeling of abandonment we experienced when we saw on the front lines of those marching for the destruction of Israel some of the groups that Jews partnered with and once called allies.

My friends, the blasts of the shofar call us to shake off the numbness of routine and complacency. They call us to sharpen our focus and to become alert to the tremendous challenges we face both spiritually and physically. They call us to reexamine what happened the past year and ask ourselves, “why?”

Why were we taken by surprise on October 7, 2023? Well before then, Israel was already aware of the genocidal aims posed by Islamic terrorists by many of the nations in the Middle East.

Well before October 7, 2023, Jews in Colorado already had to invest tremendous funds and devote countless hours to protect our synagogues and other Jewish organizations. The rise of antisemitism was already at unprecedented levels before October 7.

So, why were we surprised when we saw anti-Israel and antisemitic encampments on local campuses? Why were we surprised when Jewish students reported being harassed by fellow students, outside agitators, and even some of their professors?

Why are we surprised that almost every gathering of Jews in the Denver area is beset with radical protestors spouting propaganda in support of Palestinian Hamas terrorism and against the existence of Israel? They even target the homes of Jewish leaders, including the home of Temple Sinai member Ilana Spiegel who is a Regent at the University of Colorado.

The simple answer is that we should not have been surprised. The harsh truth is that we should have been more aware and better prepared. It shouldn't have taken a tragedy to wake us up. But it did.

Those of us who are over 30 years old remember what it was like as Americans, 23 years ago on September 11.

The experience of air travel, visiting government buildings and other public venues, attending sporting events and theaters all changed drastically after 9-11.

We knew that there were Islamic threats against the United States before Sept 11, 2001. The first attack by Islamic terrorists on the World Trade Center was in 1993. That attempt killed 6 and wounded over a thousand but the structure survived. Our American countermeasures at that time were not greatly increased. It was an oversight we will forever regret. After 9-11 we fully understood that there are groups and nations that are determined to bring down western civilization. Last year's attack on October 7 amplified that awareness for Israel and Jews.

We have long known that there are threats against Jews from the far right, groups like the Neo-Nazis and the Klan. Six years ago, on October 27, 2018, Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue was attacked by a far-right antisemite. He murdered 11 people. We are used to far-right thugs like those who marched in Charlottesville chanting ""Sieg Heil," and "Jews will not replace us." But we were not prepared for leftist radicals to turn so harshly anti-Israel and even antisemitic. We did not expect that they would harass Jews on college campuses throughout this country with their own chants against Jews and Israel.

The Pro-Palestinian chant, “From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will be Free,” is a direct descendant from the Nazi cry for a Germany “*Judenrein*” (a land “cleansed from Jews”). Those who chant for a “Global Intifada” are calling for a renewal of the suicide terrorism that targeted Jews in Israel on buses, schools, and restaurants. Yes, there are haters and bigots and antisemites. The truth is, there is not much we can do to stop them from being haters.

As professor Gil Troy put it, “Jew-hatred is the problem of the Jew-hater not the Jew! We need to spend more time building ourselves up than defending ourselves from the haters.”

He’s right. Our wellbeing is in our hands. Our sense of vulnerability is increased when we do not know how to respond to antisemitic propaganda and falsehoods. Not enough of us have a knowledgeable response when a radical begins to pontificate about Israel as a colonial state or accuse Israel of genocide. Too few know how to react when our concerns about antisemitism are dismissed by radicals who mock us as mere privileged whiners. As a result, there are some Jews who have had their vision of Israel clouded by the hyper-criticism of antisemites. Some have turned away from their brothers and sisters who are fighting for their lives against Palestinian terrorists, Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran.

We are sad for them and will forever hold the door open for them to return. Indeed, patience, education, and faith are the keys to overcoming this crisis that is afflicting the Jewish people.

Throughout this year, during special classes, sermons, and especially at Thursday's Lunch & Learn, many of us have explored the history of the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

In recent weeks we have had sessions on the origin and ideology of Hamas and Hezbollah and the role played by Iran. We have considered the origin and role of UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. We have read and reviewed articles about each from reputable and varied sources like the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Atlantic, the New Yorker, Commentary, etc. Over the past several months, I have forwarded to all those on our Sinai email list, PDF copies of many of these articles so even if you can't attend a particular session of Lunch & Learn, you will still have access to the material. For additional insights, we have turned to important Jewish organizations like the ADL, AIPAC, StandWithUs, and Hillel International. Please take the time to look at some of the articles and resources that we've sent. And just as important, please share this material and talk about it with loved ones.

This is not the time or place to recap all that we've learned. But let's address a few important points.

Let's consider the charge of Genocide. In fact, there is a real threat of genocide in the Middle East. However, the culprit is not Israel.

According to Hamas's own words, as stated in its foundational charter, genocide of the Jews of Israel is their ultimate goal. Hamas's message is echoed by other Palestinian groups, by Hezbollah, and, of course by Iran. The recent missile attacks by Iran have been followed by their bellicose threat to wipe out Israel. Read their words. Consider their actions. That some have the chutzpah to totally twist around reality and charge Israel with genocidal acts is more than just cynical propaganda. It is a blood libel.

Did Jews Colonize Palestine? No. The Land of Israel is the indigenous home of the Jewish people and was so 2,000 years before Muhammad was born and created the Muslim faith. Colonization occurs when nations from distant lands subjugate another land and people. Jews never had any nation other than Israel and Judea. The only colonizers in Israel are those who came to from Europe and the Middle East. They conquered the Jewish ancestral homeland, expelled most (but not all the Jews), and occupied the Land of Israel and Judea for hundreds of years.

The return of the Jewish people to Israel is the end of the Islamic colonization. Zionism is the honored movement to reestablish Jews in our ancestral home. It is not colonialism.

You may have heard that the Palestinian struggle against Jews began in 1948 when modern Israel was born. Or as they call it, *Nakba*, “the catastrophe.” However, decades before the formal birth of modern Israel, Palestinian leaders rallied mobs and troops to kill Jews in the British Mandate of Palestine. The Palestinian leader, Hajj Amin Al-Husseini the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, even went to Nazi Germany, met with Hitler in November 1941 and cemented an alliance of German and Arab forces to kill Jews and defeat the English and the Communists.

Too many Palestinian leaders, from Al-Husseini to Yasser Arafat to Yahya Sinwar embrace an ideology to wipeout the Jewish people from *Eretz Yisrael*. They have all made it perfectly clear that they have never and never will accept a Jewish nation on our ancestral homeland.

You may have heard that Israel has killed 41,000 Palestinians in Gaza.

The number of people killed in Gaza is horrifying and heartbreaking. We pray for the peace of all people, and we pray for the end of suffering for all people, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Druze, Israelis, Palestinians, and the

Lebanese. As we do, we should focus on the fact that this war was started by Hamas and was joined immediately by Hezbollah. The Hamas run health organizations of Gaza report that over 41,000 have been killed. While they don't specify how many of those killed were Hamas terrorists, all of them are dead because of Hamas's actions. They began the war on October 7 and have used the Palestinian people and Israeli hostages as their human shields. There was peace before October 7. There was even a growing Arab-Israeli rapprochement. Experts say that Iran urged Hamas and Hezbollah to attack because they were fearful of an American guided peace that would connect Israel with Saudi Arabia and many other Arab countries.

The deaths of tens of thousands of people in Gaza, Lebanon, and Israel is the result of Iran's opposition to peace.

You might think that being Pro-Israel is a partisan political issue. That is incorrect. The truth is that Democrats and Republicans stand united in support of Israel. Our Colorado Governor, Jared Polis, Senators, Michael Bennett and John Hickenlooper, and most of our members of Congress are strong supporters of Israel. Many of them have spoken here at Temple Sinai from this Bimah.

You are all invited to attend to hear New York Congressman Ritchie Torres, a Democrat, a Black man of Hispanic background who is the first openly gay man to represent the Bronx. Congressman Torres is a proud liberal.

And he will speak here at Temple Sinai on Monday, October 21 at 6:00 PM.

His talk is titled: "The Progressive Case for Israel." Don't miss it. It will be free, but you have to register. Please do so!

The very next night, Tuesday, October 22, we'll hear Mosab Hassan Yousef, known as the Green Prince or the Son of Hamas. It is a FIDF (Friends of Israel Defense Forces) event. A contribution to FIDF is required.

I'm bringing both here to help our community learn and be strengthened.

Yes, October 7, 2023, was a wake-up call for all of us. Our struggle both here and in Israel require us to be alert, aware, and active. And we are blessed to have wonderful friends. We have extraordinarily strong support from most of our elected officials both in Washington and here in Colorado. And though the press tends to over sample the voices of those who are antisemites and anti-Israel, a large majority of Americans support Israel.

Let be perfectly clear. It is essential for us not to conflate Islamic terrorism and radicalism with the Muslim people. There are radicals and terrorists among every group, including Jews. We find extremists on both the far-right and the far-left. Our world is plagued by intolerance.

And we find intolerance both among those who are lacking education and those academics who are twisted by ideological purity litmus tests who try to indoctrinate students to hate.

We best confront hatred and intolerance by educating ourselves and others. Just as America adjusted and found ways both to be cautious and to live life fully and enthusiastically after 9-11, may God give Jews everywhere the indomitable spirit of courage and passion to live with joy and meaning.

The Jewish people have been blessed by God with a resilient spirit and and indomitable sense of hope. So let us, join in song, asking for God's help during this time of crisis. Let us join in song to begin the New Year 5785 with a renewed sense of purpose, pride, and faith.

Avinu Shebashamayim (back cover of handout)