

RH1 Sermon – The Perils of Misinformation

Twice a year at the Western Wall, volunteers go up to the wall, and clear out the prayer notes between the cracks in the stones to make room for new prayers. Before 1967, for 19 years, we could not go to the Western Wall, and then the IDF entered the city and opened the Wall for people of all faiths and – when the soldiers came down to the wall they recited Kaddish, blew the shofar, and sang Hatikvah. We and our children are fortunate to have been born into a world in which the State of Israel was a reality. To witness Menachem Begin, and Anwar Sadat, make the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. To live at a time when Israelis have developed the latest technology that we carry with us every day when we see the spirit of entrepreneurship that Senor and Singer shared in their book Start up Nation, the spirit . Among us today are those who were there in 1948 when Israel became a reality, when people really did dance the hora in the streets, and again in the home of Meir Dizengoff, 1st mayor of Tel Aviv, they played and sang Hatikvah. And today there are those among us who have worn the IDF uniform and fought for Israel's survival, and those who support the IDF and Israel with our presence, time, and funds. We wish, with all our hearts that we could live in a world in which Israel finds itself at peace within and outside its borders. For all the sacrifices in people and land, the one Jewish state in the world is no closer to a lasting peaceful future today than it was in 1948. And it is once again up to us, here in the Diaspora, to be a dependable rock upon which our brothers and sisters in Israel can lean on for support. We have to be there especially now that the so-called Palestinians are seeking to leverage world-opinion to create a State that would virtually choke Israel into non-existence. It is up to us to be the voice of awareness and initiative in a process that has taken so much from Israelis and given them back little except

more casualties, more destruction, more loss of land and morale. It is up to us because we know how painful it is when students on campus, the media, and others lash out against Israel. While it is never easy to cut through the rhetoric that has swirled around these issues for six decades, there are some facts that bear our witness today, facts that are part of the mission of striving for truth that the New Year demands of us.

The fundamental issue with the declaration of a Palestinian state is that they must recognize Israel as a legitimate state among the family of nations. The early documents testify that they have never recognized, nor do they ever plan to fully recognize, the Jewish state, "Palestine is the homeland of the Arab Palestinian people." The Hamas Islamic Resistance movement, now part of Palestinian leadership, refers to the Holy Land a waqf, an eternal endowment to Muslims, and by the way, they also say, "This is the status [of the land] in Islamic Shari'a, and it is similar to all lands conquered by Islam by force, and made thereby Waqf lands upon their conquest, for all generations of Muslims until the Day of Resurrection." According to Hamas, *all* lands once conquered by Muslim armies are *still* considered to be under their jurisdiction.

The idea that the Palestinians wish to have a "state" of their own is problematic as well, and this year is not the first time they have declared a state. We know too well that if they had wanted to receive international recognition and their own "state" they could have agreed to the Partition of Palestine, the vote of November 1947, just as the early Israelis did. Did the PLO ever want its own state? The original Fatah principles call for "restoration of the independent democratic State of Palestine", but such an entity never existed. It was part of the

Ottoman Empire, the Mustafariyya of Jerusalem, and later part of a British post World War 1 mandate. And if Israel is today, to concede even more territory – then we must more strongly advocate that Turkey be held accountable for its occupation in Cyprus, China for its occupation and oppression in Tibet. It is time to end the double standard Israel faces among the family of nations.

A major problem, was, and is, with whom do we speak when dealing with Arab/Palestinian issues? In 1918, Chaim Weizmann, who was elected the first president of Israel, met with Emir Feisal, son of Husain, Sherif of Mecca, who “carried the responsibility for Arab policy.” Weizmann wrote, “among the many difficulties facing us in this field perhaps the paramount trouble is the lack of any single personality or group of personalities capable of representing the Arab world and speaking on its behalf.” Feisal later was installed as King of Iraq, and as King, he denied having ever written the following words, “Jews are cousins in race...and by a happy coincidence have been able to take the first step towards...their national ideals together...we will wish the Jews a most hearty welcome home”, and quote, “All necessary measures shall be taken to encourage and stimulate immigration of Jews into Palestine on a large scale...” In 1919, the General Syrian Congress offered a memorandum suggesting that Palestine is the southern part of Syria – notice that they do not consider the Holy Land a country of its own, rather an extension of Syria.

We talk about a “unilateral” declaration of independence, but is it really unilateral? The Palestinian people have been bitterly divided since hundreds died in fighting between Hamas and Fatah in 2007. 3 months after a unity agreement there are no visible steps toward an actual unity government. A summer report from the BBC: “The division between Hamas and

Fatah is not about the prime minister or who gets how many cabinet seats here and there," says Omar Shaban, a political analyst and economist with the Gaza-based think-tank, Palthink. "It's much deeper than that. It is about their ideology, their agendas, the history, the desire for revenge between the two. Political unity is an illusion." And we hear the same story from Mahmoud Zahar, leader of Hamas, who said "the [reconciliation] agreement was completed [in Cairo], but its implementation is defunct." And he said that any sort of talks that have occurred between officials in Fatah and Hamas are concerned simply with "peripheral matters."

We should recall that when the early State of Israel sought to unify itself, the State ordered the IDF to take control of the Atlalena, the ship filled with supplies for the Irgun force, that the Irgun leaders hoped to land for themselves despite a prior agreement to incorporate into the IDF. As Ben Gurion and the government said, "The Provisional Government and High Command call on all citizens and soldiers to unite in the defense of national unity and the authority of the people." The internal fight was over. The same cannot be said for the Palestinians as they seek independence.

United Nations resolution 242 called for Israel to have secure and recognizable borders. The current Palestinian plan to take over all the West Bank will deny Israel the ability to take advantage of the Jordan River Valley wall as a natural line of defense. To prevent enemy aircraft from entering Israeli airspace, the IDF needs a window of 10 miles to shoot down the enemy plane so that it will not crash into populated areas. Israel needs to, at the very least, be able to monitor the airspace over the West Bank. The mountain ridge that runs along the coast looks over into the bulk of Israel's population and industrial centers, including airports and seaports. Palestinian control of the heights puts all these places at risk.

Misinformation is powerful and has the ability to turn public opinion. It has turned opinion decisively against Israel in many quarters of the globe. Misinformation, willful forgetting, intentional revision of reality, all these things cause pain for us too, much closer to home, in our relationships to our friends, loved ones, and among members of families. Truth is the cornerstone of Rosh Hashanah as we see in the words, of Unetaneh Tokef, "God's throne will be established with loving kindness and God will assume the throne in truth; for it is in truth that God is the Judge, who molds us, and whose knowledge stretches into eternity." Truthfulness, speaking with honesty and openness are necessary for us to enter the New Year with a clean conscience. Truth is not always about saying exactly what we think or feel at any given moment. Truth is about living a search for meaning and connection. It's about gentleness, sensitivity, reflection and wonder. A life of truth is a life of courage in the face of doubt and fear.

Given that honesty is part of a life of truth, I cannot speak to you, we cannot gather together in truth, unless we acknowledge the doubt and fear that have filled the world during the past year beyond the ongoing conflict in Israel. The economy has fallen and is stagnating. Job growth is slow and so many people are suffering from damaged portfolios, wondering about covering costs and retirement. The revolutions in the Middle East have caught fire, but will the fire be a warm and healing fire or a fire that will consume and destroy? Fire destroyed the Israeli embassy in Cairo already. Wind and water caused catastrophic damage right here and around the world – We saw the way that Hurricane Irene pushed water into our homes, ruining our homes, toppling trees, taking lives, and causing mass evacuations and fear. Violence in the street and on the battlefield was present in alarming frequency over the past

year, and, Iran, the number one sponsor of terror continues to supply the Taliban in Afghanistan, militias in Iraq, and terrorists in countries bordering Israel with weapons used against allied troops operating there and against Israeli civilians.

But we must not allow the forces of darkness to replace the world of truth we try to build. We cannot forget the light that emerged between the cracks in the heart of the world this past year. We cannot forget how in Tahrir Square in Egypt Christians helped Muslims to pray in peace and then Muslims did the same, while they both protected a nearby Cairo synagogue, and the antiquities in the Cairo museum. We recall the power of watching Gabrielle Giffords walk into the halls of Congress months after the horrific shooting in Tucson in order to participate in and perpetuate the democratic process. We stood in silence and reaffirmed the strength of our ties to one another on the 10th anniversary of the 9-11 attacks.

The best thing we can do for Israel, for ourselves, for our families and communities is to strive for truth. This is not an easy task, not in a world where Israel, and the Jewish people at large, and the West, have been labeled in a reactionary fashion as the evils of the world. Palestinian leaders must be willing to recognize the needs of Israel as much as their own—that renouncing terrorism in speeches is insufficient! This is not an easy task when we live in a world of uncertainty and our place in the world feels insecure as we look ahead. And so let us pledge to be vocal and active for Israel, let our representatives know that we will not allow another tyranny to take over in the Holy Land as dictators in the Middle East are falling one by one! Let us not allow Jewish students to be bullied on campus in California and elsewhere, but especially right here in New Jersey at Rutgers our state school. We cannot allow students,

professors, and administrators on campus parade anti-Israel messages with incendiary speakers and pseudo-scholarship. And let us pledge together, that we will reach out, love and support one another here today and that we will walk into this new year more united in hope than any previous New Year, hope for the future of the Jewish state that it may be a light unto the nations. Join me now, let us rise, and sing out the message of Hatikvah that humble souls sang in the DP camps, that proud people have proclaimed in Israel and the Diaspora for decades as a message of hope, return, prayer, freedom, and striving for truth in a chaotic world.

As long as the Jewish spirit is yearning deep in the heart,
 With eyes turned toward the East, looking toward Zion,
 Then our hope - the two-thousand-year-old hope - will not
 be lost:
 To be a free people in our land,
 The land of Zion and Jerusalem.

Kol ode balevav
 P'nimah -
 Nefesh Yehudi homiyah
 Ulfa'atey mizrach kadimah
 Ayin l'tzion tzofiyah.
 Ode lo avdah tikvatenu
 Hatikvah bat shnot alpayim:
 L'hiyot am chofshi b'artzenu -
 Eretz Tzion v'Yerushalayim.