

On our recent trip to Israel, Isaiah and I spontaneously stopped by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook's home when we were switching buses on our way from the old city to Hadassah hospital. Each day spanned centuries and each moment, multiple senses. I will be sharing more in days to come and hope that everyone gets a chance to go to Israel in the new year!

Soon we will launch a year of education *and* action- inspired by ancient and modern thinkers including Rav Kook and Henrietta Szold, founder of Hadassah and the Youth Aliyah movement that saved thousands of young German Jews. Both of their Zionist visions for Israel were deeply rooted in Torah values with universal and pluralistic concerns at their core.

We will invite Israeli activists for Justice, democracy and peace - religious and not religious- to join us on zoom calls this year. This study will inspire us in understanding, and building our own individual and collective visions for both a spiritually grounded America *and* Israel, rooted in justice, compassion and moral concern for all inhabitants.

The prophet whose words we read today is Jeremiah, known as the weeping prophet. He was active as a prophet from 626 BC until after the [fall of Jerusalem](#) and the destruction of the first [Temple](#) in 587 BC, a period that spanned the reigns of five kings of Judah. He spoke to those whose hearts were heavy with the weight of displacement and dreams deferred. He brings us back to Rachel, the matriarch, who lived 1000 years before Jeremiah, weeping for her children. Yet, even in the depths of despair, Jeremiah's message is not one of endless sorrow. Instead, he offers a vision of hope, a promise of redemption. "I will turn their mourning into joy. I will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow."

Rachel's tears and Jeremiah's are all of our tears. Today's Haftarah is a moment of profound intimacy, where the pain of a mother's heart meets the boundless love of the Divine.

Elijah the prophet lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Ahab (9th century BCE). We visited the cave in Haifa, where it is said that Elijah found solace in the "still, small voice" of God, as chronicled in I Kings 19. To this day, we can find solace in returning to the *kol dmama daka*, the still small voice within. Return again ...

My cousin Dana and her 13 year old son Yinon, Isaiah and I took a cable car up to the top of the cliff, and wandered on the path I imagined had been trodden on by Elijah himself. Perhaps, he felt the breeze in the small forest above the cave as well as the cool embrace of the Mediterranean sea below.

Yet the tranquility of the cave - just as for Elijah and also for me - was a poignant reminder of the complexities of modern Israel: Dana and Yinon chose to sit outside, not entering the cave of Eliyahu. For them, government leaders who have partnered with ultra-religious Haredi leaders, have tainted Israel's holy sites. Indeed the cave is now set up like an Orthodox synagogue, separating women and men, not a sanctuary in which I could sit with my son.

But more important is what I saw through Dana's eyes. Living in a nation where Haredim receive exemptions from societal responsibilities, the cave symbolizes deep injustices with real implications for their family. Dana is preparing to send her son Nadav to the army. She works long hours as a social worker and pays high taxes. Just as our prophets called out hypocrisy in the religious establishment, and demand justice, Dana is joining the widespread

movement to call out these and many other social injustices. She is concerned not only for her own family but Arabs living in Israel in the territories. She feels helpless, yet like most Israelis, she will continue to fight for a democratic and just Government.

As we waited for our train back to Modin from Haifa, Dana humored me by listening to the words of Elijah. She wholeheartedly agreed with the essence of Eliyahu's revelation: that God is indeed found within. Yet the connection to Eliahu does not hold meaning to her. Every holy site in Israel symbolizes a hypocrisy she lives inside of every day. That night was Rosh Hodesh Elul. As I reflected on the day, I felt the deep pain of the fractures within the Jewish people. My tears joined those of Rachel, weeping for her children, as told to us today by Jeremiah, the pain of a deeply fractured people in exile from one another.

Our people there *and* our people here.

I encourage all of us to "listen to understand" the stories of the Israeli and Palestinian people. Just listen. Compassion arises when we listen. Compassion is the presence of God: be this for our siblings and cousins in the land. From this, the rift that has grown between us can heal.

Beyond the sanctuaries and nature areas, innovation centers, music, art and graffiti art, packed beaches with every kind of sport played late into the night, archeological sites, amazing public transportation and food, ancient streets and signs with biblical references, Hebrew spoken and seen everywhere; beyond all these were streets that pulsed with the fervor of a people rising up.

We witnessed firsthand the passionate protests against Netanyahu's government and the judicial reforms for almost 40 weeks: the time to gestate a new Israel. On our second night in Israel, I found myself amidst a sea of protesters in Modin, their chants echoing the deep-seated frustrations and fears. The atmosphere was charged with a mix of hope, defiance, and a determination to safeguard the democratic ethos of the nation. The experience instilled in me a desire to do more, to be a part of this movement for change. I hope you will join me. As I learned of Netanyahu's upcoming visit to speak at the UN next week, I felt a calling to show up. I plan to stand in solidarity with those who will be protesting, to lend my voice to the chorus demanding democracy, Justice, hope, democracy, and freedom in the Middle East. Friday morning promises to be the largest protest outside of Israel.

Each protest, as one article poignantly described, is not just a political statement but a "therapy session" for a nation trying to heal its divides and chart a path forward. It's a collective catharsis, a way for the nation to process its pain, voice its concerns, and seek healing.

In the vast tapestry of Jewish thought, the concept of 'Elu v'Elu' – "These and these are the words of the living God" – multiple truths can coexist, and diverse perspectives can both hold validity.

Let us strive to hold multiple truths here and there, to respect and understand diverse perspectives and the partial truth in the other's story, while we affirm our place and stand strong for our beliefs. I urge each one of you to approach the unfolding narrative in Israel with a mind of curiosity, a heart of compassion and an unwavering commitment to justice.

Let us remember that behind every headline, every protest, every policy, there are real people with real stories, dreams, and aspirations. It is our sacred duty to listen to understand, not to judge or offer solutions, yet to stand in

solidarity with those who yearn for peace, justice, and a brighter future. One in four Israelis have considered leaving the country, which threatens to no longer be a home that is safe for them or can offer a future worth fighting for.

The themes of the High Holy Days urge us to not only seek personal growth, but to extend our efforts outward, to champion causes that align with our values and ideals that promote peace, justice, and reconciliation, both in Israel and right here in our own communities.

We live for the most part, peacefully in our lands. Sadly, the rise of anti-semitism is real. We are living history again, not just studying it.

Israel—you *have* fulfilled your role of being a haven for Jews seeking refuge, and we pray that you will continue to open your doors to all seeking safe haven including Ethiopian Jewish community. We also pray that your doors will not be jammed with racism and ultra nationalism. We pray that the gates of justice and DEMOCRAZIA for all inhabitants of the land - on both sides of the green line -will open, and not close in hate and hypocrisy.

Psalm 137 "*Eem eshkech yerushalayim, tishkach yemini*, If I forget you O' Jerusalem, let my right hand wither and be forgotten." I cried saying these words when I left Jerusalem three weeks ago. They are a call to action within a psalm of lament, for the opening words of this psalm are "*al naharot bavel, sham yashavnu gam bachinu*, by the waters of Babylon, there we sat and wept..."

If your experience is one of disconnect and disillusionment, separation and ambivalence, one of being in exile from one another, please turn your face towards Israel, and find the human stories beyond the headlines.

We must continue to pursue our dreams for Israel, for ourselves, and for America.

Ultimately it is all one dream.