

## **The Crazy World We Live In - Erev Rosh Hashanah 5782 / 9/6/2021**

Thank you for all being here on zoom once again. Crazy to think how the world has changed in just a year let alone during all of the pandemic and now back again. Humanity continues to struggle against itself, science versus belief, individual rights versus global health. The Jewish people have wandered for years trying to help humanity find its inner peace. Our journey continues. Our struggle for survival continues. Our struggle for acceptance continues.

Thank you all for being part of something bigger than all of us, part of Har-Shalom, part of the Chicago Jewish community of Illinois, as a Jewish American or an American Jew, as a Jewish person or part of a Jewish family within a world where individuals still think we don't have the right to exist.

We are a people who managed to walk into the desert, through the wilderness, and across great rivers to survive the history happening to us and around us time and time again.

We are a people united by blood, by time, by faith, by culture, by history, by religious traditions, by an experience and by a belief. And yet we sit here with so many different beliefs within all of our similarities. These days it is easy to start an argument, lose a friendship, end a relationship all by touching on our differences of opinion in this chaotic period of history. Even with seemingly simple questions "Mask or no mask? Vaccine or no vaccine?" We created rifts that haven't been there for over fifty years. We've survived worse and yet at this moment feel as if the divisions are insurmountable.

Imagine the world Abraham and Sarah left behind. Imagine what it took for two young individuals to talk deep into the night, look at their families of origin and walk away from it all, from everything they'd known and loved, from all the arguments and disagreements. Abraham shared his dreams and vision with Sarah. In the words of Earth Wind & Fire, "Every man has a place, in his heart there's a space And the world can't erase his fantasies."

I can imagine Abraham also quoting Bruce Springsteen to Sarah as all young lovers do "baby this town rips the bones from your back, It's a

death trap, it's a suicide rap, we've gotta get out while we're young, because tramps like us, baby we were born to run.”

And run they did. Together, side by side they walk away from their families who can't share their vision. They leave behind the idolatry and the culture that didn't mesh with what their hearts were telling them and run toward their dreams of a better tomorrow, a better life together. They didn't look back and we've been walking towards their vision and dreams trying to create the place they dreamt of ever since. But as a society we can't always run away from each other.

For over five thousand years we've been trying to make Abraham and Sarah's dreams come true. For us to be sitting here tonight, and in all the congregations throughout the world, means that for over 200,000 thousand years before Abraham and until this moment our ancestors succeeded in their struggles to insure our genetic survival. For over 5000 years we've been trying to actualize the dreams of two young, hopeful individuals who continue to inspire us and push us forward. Generation after generation we do our best to raise kids within our culture and ancient wisdom in order to bring some light into this too often dark world. At the same time generations of individuals have tried and continue to try to wipe out our existence for their own petty beliefs, swallowing and spreading so many lies and deceptions.

In June and July of this year “Statements condemning Israel – from faculty groups and academic departments to student governments and anti-Israel student groups – were released on 152 college campuses according to the Israel on Campus Coalition. Many of the statements repeated demonstrably false charges of ‘apartheid,’ ‘ethnic cleansing,’ ‘genocide’ and ‘settler colonialist.’ Groups at Franklin and Marshall College and Princeton now have leveled the dangerous charge of ‘Jewish supremacy’ against Israel in their latest statements.”

During the May acts of war by Gaza so many talking heads and news outlets railed against Israel while barely a word was said against Hamas. Recently the Taliban took over the entire country of Afghanistan and so much less fervor was raised against them compared to when the world blamed Israel for being attacked by a terrorist organization. Israel's right to exist gets questioned every day, everywhere, but a group of patriarchal, fundamentalist authoritarians takes over an entire country and barely a

word is said against them. Not a single campus protest occurred. Not a single Muslim student read a flyer telling the Taliban to leave campus because they share a common heritage with the members of the Taliban. The silence is deafening.

In a world where countless countries commit daily crimes against humanity, somehow it is only Israel that faces false accusations time and time again. Falsehoods that imbed themselves into the brains and beliefs of those susceptible who don't have the mind or the willpower to seek truth and understanding of what is actually going on in the world. Don't get me wrong. Israel isn't perfect. But Israel has a better humanitarian and democratic track record than China, Russia, Germany, Great Britain, the United States, Spain, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan and Libya just to name a few.

The United States you ask? Israel has never had a history of slavery, racism or Jim Crow. Germany? Well some Germans still believe Hitler should have finished the job. Russia? Stalin killed twenty million of his own citizens after World War II while the world watched and is currently involved in a global attempt to destabilize as many western democracies as it can just because they think this is all some big game. Great Britain helped create the modern slave trade as we know it and expelled its Jews plenty of times from its shores. Spain expelled all of its Jews and then for a thousand years pursued and tortured any converts from Judaism they suspected of not being Christian enough.

Yet only Jews and Israel face global condemnation time and time again. Almost no one takes the time to even understand our history and the history of lies leveled against us.

Don't get me wrong, the Palestinian people deserve to live in peace and prosper without violence, terrorism or corruption. But their own government that they elected, Hamas, holds them hostage, terrorizes them and uses them as shields in a war they cannot win. Only Hamas actively states its desire to push Israel into the ocean while people blame Israel for being heavy handed. Only Hamas fires rockets at and tunnels into another sovereign nation to commit murder and destroy innocent lives while propaganda organizations vilify Israel on the majority of our college campuses.

A handful of our democratically elected officials even spout the same lies with little pushback from the White House. Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.) says that Israel is "promoting racism and dehumanization" under an "apartheid system."

There is no apartheid system in Israel. While I don't agree with the settlements or the animosity they create, Israel has never been an apartheid system. Israel wants peace and trade. They wish they didn't need all the security measures in place to secure the safety of its citizens. Rep Ilhan Omar has said "Israeli airstrikes killing civilians in Gaza is an act of terrorism" during the conflict started by Gaza in May. Let me be clear, the 4360 rockets fired by Hamas from Gaza into Israel were war crimes that not enough nations condemned. No other nation would tolerate what Israel patiently accepts as part of the process towards peace.

When Russia invaded and annexed Crimea the world barely blinked and it was out of the news cycle before you could spit. Ethiopia recently called everyone to war to defend against the conflict in Tigray. How many of us even knew there was a war in Ethiopia or that they even had enough economic funding to conduct a war?

Our lives here in Chicago are pretty special. We live safely in one of the largest thriving Jewish communities in the world.

But the members of Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh also thought they were living safely until a lone gunman shouting antisemitic slurs killed eleven Jewish congregants in the midst of their prayers and wounded six others in October of 2018.

This past May 18th while Hamas continuously bombed Israel, "a group waving the Palestinian flag assaulted diners seated outside a Los Angeles restaurant after reportedly asking if they were Jewish. As of July 21st neither assailant has been charged with a crime after their arrest for assault with a deadly weapon.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/06/22/spate-antisemitic-attacks-us-during-recent-mideast-tensions>  
<https://www.google.com/amp/s/forward.com/news/472696/that-attack-outside-la-sushi-was-antisemitic-right-think-again-says-lawyer/%3fgamp>

In New York City, two days later, assailants pummeled a young man wearing a skullcap on the street, a few blocks from where pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian demonstrators clashed that day."

What exactly are we to do in a world where citizens think it is acceptable to attack other innocent citizens simply because they are Jewish? One of the attackers in Los Angeles was Puerto Rican. He knows nothing of Israeli history since 1948. He only joined the protest because of pictures of Palestinian victims shown to him by his boss. This was enough for him to join the protest and assault Jews peacefully having dinner with a Lebanese business associate who defended them from their attackers. As Jews when we start talking about who is a true citizen, the one who attacks the innocent or the Jews sitting innocently we know how the world often works. There is video proof of who attacked who and yet the police continue to investigate, unable to determine how the conflict started despite all the videos and witnesses.

We are only as safe as we feel. Many Jews are no longer safe in many cities in our nation. We've been targeted at a much higher level over the last four years and the new antisemitism isn't going away any time soon.

We are safe in that we feel safe and continue to make the world a safer place, but new individuals who don't even know us are easily swayed to commit acts of violence and hatred after only moments of being indoctrinated with antisemitic lies and age old antisemitic tropes.

There's no real answer to refuting the lies that individuals choose to believe, that the media chooses to embrace in order to provoke a response and increase sales. As Jews we've survived the lies for over two thousand years and figured out how to thrive time and again expulsion after expulsion after expulsion, after countless pogroms, after the Holocaust, after countless wars in Israel attempting to push us into the sea, after decades of antisemitism throughout the United States and the world. These two thousand years have taught us resilience, how to view the world and how to keep going no matter what the rest of the world chooses to believe.

In this new year, 5782, I implore you to find the blessings in your lives while also staying vigilant. Fill your days with more laughter and less fear while crying out for the safety of the widow, the orphan and the stranger. Fill your lungs with breaths that rejuvenate you while raising your voice for justice and a world free of hate and baseless lies. Be grateful for the life each lungful allows us as we breathe in our incredible existence here in this state and this country. While we remain vigilant, active and vocal we must

also live our best lives, raise our families, improve our neighborhoods and cities for the generations to come. The world has always been a dangerous place, but we have sworn our allegiance to helping make it a better place.

May this year inspire us to continue fighting the good fight. Cyan yehi ratzon - May this be God's will.

On behalf of Jane and myself and our families and the leadership of Har-Shalom

L'Shanah Tovah. May you all be written for a sweet and healthy new year.