

Speech for Community Solidarity Service for Israel

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In the last month of my first year of rabbinical school in Jerusalem, I was walking with a friend to get coffee between morning classes from Hebrew Union College's campus on King David Street. As the sound of the memorial siren blasted for two minutes of silence on Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Memorial Day).

For anyone who has been in Israel on this day that falls on the 27th of the Hebrew month of Nisan, it is an incredible sound and sight to see. And as we stood on this busy street on that on that day, as the hustle and bustle suddenly shifted to silence, all but the sound of the siren's pitch, you could see the world around you literally come to a halt. Taxi drivers stopping their cars and stepping outside to place a kippah on their heads, and tourists putting shopping bags down and cell phones,

The emotion felt is hard to describe, and unlike anything I have experienced outside of Israel. And yet, when I first heard the sound of that siren ring out in the air, I trembled with a sudden fear. In just the first millisecond of the sound, I remembered the other sirens I had heard in the land during the two very disparate times I had lived in Israel.

The first sirens I had heard were 7 years earlier as rockets hit as far as Jerusalem in November of 2012 while I was volunteering as a medic with Magen David Adom. The sound was indicative then of the exact opposite of what I heard on Yom HaShoah. It told us not to stand still in a moment of memorial and honor for the dead, but instead a symbol marking a unified moment of dark but deep national pride.

Yet, on that November evening 7 years earlier, the sound told us to hide, to take shelter, anything but stay *still* in unison.

7 years later, the goosebumps on my arms came from an overwhelming sense of pride at the world around us stopping to honor the millions who died in the Shoah,

but those goosebumps first came from a place of deep-seeded fear and panic – one that cried: “Seek shelter!” Something I did not realize lived deep inside me all of those years between living in our beloved holy land of Israel.

So later that day, when I returned to my apartment in Jerusalem, hours after the siren for remembrance had sounded, I sat down to write a final term paper for my first year Israel Seminar class.

Finally shaking the writer’s block, I had been experiencing, I wrote down the short few lines of famed Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai’s poem, *God’s Hand in the World*

He wrote:

*“My pain is already a grandfather:
it has begotten two generations
of pains that look like it
My hopes have erected white housing projects far away from the crowds inside me
[...]”*

The work flowed through me after that moment, and I considered the collective trauma of the land of Israel, since her inception in 1948. I examined Israel as the ‘undiagnosed patient,’ to understand her trauma – the collective trauma of the State of Israel. [And I refer to Israel this way, according to the feminine grammatical construct of *Medinat Yisrael* (the State of Israel)]. As we heard when we sang *Hatikvah*:

*“Hatikvah **bat** sh’not alpayim” –
(“the hope of two thousand years”).*

The project was on terrorism, rhetoric, and inherited trauma in Israel and Israeli society, and with Israel as the patient, I found other researchers and scholars who had explored intergenerational and collective trauma in Israel through a similar lens,

I found that a theoretical conclusion could only be found when looking at Israel's overwhelmingly conflict-related trauma, that it was an intricate 'diagnosis' involving the body as a whole network of organ systems, all coming together to keep the 'patient' Israel alive. I likened it to examining a patient through the scope of internal medicine, as if her condition was not just one ailment that afflicted the entire body, but instead looking at all of the organ systems that make the body whole; frail and fragile sometimes, and still full of life and energy when the body needs to fight for survival, unwilling to give into any infirmity.

I explained that, yes, the country was built on conflict, but it was also built on the people. The people who were there before Israel was named, and those who came after from the darkest places of the ghettos and concentration camps in Europe. These people who had lost everything, but now sought a new life as Jews in the land of Israel.

And then I considered the others, the children who only heard the whispered stories of those dark places in Europe. As the first generation of Israelis, they only ever knew Israel as their homeland; the land promised to them by their ancestors.

And then there were *their* children, who knew no firsthand witnesses of the atrocities in Auschwitz but knew a different a different kind of fate unknown. Perhaps both a burdensome responsibility and sense of national and religious pride in the fact that they would inevitably wear the IDF uniform when they turned eighteen.

And in my research, I finally found the newest generation of Israeli children, with stories of such bright hope, and yet still such deep dark fear that came from living in a land constantly threatened by enemies all around her.

And I felt I learned about Israel's illness and her symptoms, that there was some genuinely new revelation for all of this. Yet, deep down, I had always known the cause – it was the threat of violence and war always knocking at her door, never allowing her to settle peacefully. Anxiety overwhelmed her and still does, for survival's sake Israel would always need the hypervigilance that came with her trauma of never knowing peace.

A few short days ago now, the morning after the first attack by Hamas on Saturday, October 7th, I looked back to see the last words I had written on that paper:

The common narrative of conflict has been part of Israel's national identity, she has known nothing else. In my analysis, I sadly found many researchers and scholars in the field of Israel Studies who claimed that a supposed "collective trauma" of the State of Israel should not be taken seriously or as a national reality, but rather a fabrication that serves to propagate political status and economic profit in the land of Israel and for Jews all over the world.

But the fact is that rockets are still hitting towns on the country's southern periphery, and sirens still sound all the way to Tel Aviv.

And Israel is still here.

My eyes filled with tears as I realized all the generations I had written about, from the survivors of the concentration camps to the IDF soldiers, and the youngest Israeli children, were all among the murdered this past week.

I remember that as much as I had learned from *living* in the land of my ancestors, both through travel and academic study, I still could not fathom an attack of such magnitude. Not since the Holocaust have so many Jews died in a single day; it is an unfathomable evil. I continued to believe, and now seems so naïve, that Israel would always prevail and overcome her enemies, even if she would never know a world without the threat and occurrence of acts of terror.

Tonight, we stand together once again as Israel is attacked at an unprecedented scale. Hundreds of you have shown up, both within and without our Jewish communities, and I personally feel such awe and gratitude at such an outpouring of support for Israel.

Israel is deeply hurt; her people are in pain. More than ever before in Israel's 75 years as a Nation-State of the Jewish people, the land has been ravished by violence and bloodshed, one can only call 'senseless.'

How else are we to describe so many innocent lives lost and the sight of their grief-stricken families who will *never* be the same— extending across the world.

Now, once again, Israel cries out to us in anguish, and Jews all over the world grieve with her.

We gather for the families still searching for loved ones, who cry out in their grief and in their despair. Who cry out in their fear and in their anger. Who cry out to us in the slivers of hope they still carry; despite all they have lost and live in fear of losing.

Nearly seven thousand miles away, we stand with Israel in her pain, as if we were right there – we feel it *with* those in our Jewish homeland.

The land of Israel won't be the same, we can only do what we can from here to extend our support through whatever means we can and pray that this new war ends, with every passing hour.

So, as I pass the podium to the rest of Augusta's Jewish spiritual leaders, I ask us to reflect on the meaning of the words of our national anthem *Hatikvah*, as we sang together at the start of tonight's service:

*As long as within our hearts
The Jewish soul sings,
As long as forward to the East
To Zion, looks the eye –
Our hope is not yet lost,
It is two thousand years old,
To be a free people in our land
The land of Zion and Jerusalem.*

In honor and solidarity for Israel and our prayer for healing, for justice, and peace I want to offer the following poem on the poem written for the *Mothers of Jerusalem*, by a renowned Jewish liturgist Alden Solovy, whom I am proud to call a friend, we read:

Mothers of Jerusalem

*Mothers of Jerusalem,
Your wail echoes in the hills, your grief resounds in the valleys,
Your prayer rises up into the luminous sky.*

*More fathers and brothers, more sisters and mothers,
More children and innocent,
Lost to the hand of violence, lost to the hand of hatred.*

*How long, oh my God, how long before cruelty ends
And peace reigns within these borders,
Within these walls, within our hearts?*

*How long, oh my God, must we open graves for the lost?
God of generations, God of millennia,
Spread Your tabernacle of safety and shelter over this holy city.*

*Guard our sons and our daughters.
Protect all who dwell within these gates.
Let courage and hope ease this fear.
Let compassion open the souls of the hard-hearted.
Let joy and gladness return, in song and prayer,
To Your steps of holiness.*

And let us say: **AMEN**