ROSH HASHANA
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There are no words …

I have made a living out of speaking, but sometimes there are no words! For me, there are no words to describe how I feel these past two years since the massacre by Hamas on October 7, 2023. I feel as if my whole world has been thrown into turmoil. I've been obsessed! I spend 3-4 hours a day reading about the situation. I try to understand, but I don't. There are no words on how and why the whole world has turned against us.

Sure, I understand how bad Israel has been made to look in its war against Hamas. How else should one feel when day after day newspapers and social media feature stories of tens of thousands having been killed, hospitals destroyed, neighborhoods leveled, schools attacked, and then they show those pictures … those pictures of hungry starving children. Sure, it can all be explained:
- How Hamas uses the people of Gaza as human shields while its soldiers hide in tunnels.
- Hospitals are used as weapons depots, and schools are used to shoot rockets.
- The statistics that Hamas provides of the deaths and destruction are known to be blown out of proportion.
- Many of the news stories they provide are "fake news."
- And as to the pictures of starving children … some of the mothers holding the starving children look like they should go on a diet!

Yes, that's all true, but then there are those pictures; those pictures of starving children. How can the world not sympathize when you see those pictures almost every day on the front page of your newspapers? That I understand! But this I don't understand: at the same time all this has been going on, in Sudan's civil war, more than 150,000 people have died and over 12 million have been displaced. Mass atrocities are unfolding. Children are dying not only from bullets but from malnutrition, disease and despair. And yet, have you seen any pictures of this on the front page of your newspapers?

And you know who else didn't' make it to the front page? Evyatar David. Last month Hamas released a picture of Evyatar David, who has been held hostage and has not seen sunlight for the past two years. The picture showed him so emaciated, forced to dig his own grave. The picture was heartbreaking and devastating. Do you know how many newspapers around the world placed that picture on its front page the day it was released? Exactly one, the New York Post! No one else! Not one! How to explain that? There are no words.

-What's there to say when, long before all the pictures, the day after Hamas's brutal massacre of some 1200 Israelis, the very next day 33 campus organizations at Harvard University issued a

statement blaming Israel for its citizens haven't been raped, brutalized and burnt alive. The day after! What's there to say? Harvard! Supposed to be smart! There are no words … except "stupid."
- How can you explain that in the 21st century, on the campuses of the greatest intellectual institutions in the world, Jewish students feel threatened?
- And what can I say about Peter Beinart, a proud Jew who has become a much publicized critic of Israel. On television he told John Stewart that the Arab citizens of Israel do not have equal rights of Jews. What should I say when Israel has Arab judges, when 50% of its pharmacists are Arabs, 25% of its doctors are Arabs and 27% of its nurses and dentists are Arabs. What should I say? There are no words.
- What is there to say when in our day and age some countries are called "corrupt," some "dictatorial," some "guilty of ethnic cleansing," some "imperialistic," some "colonialistic," some practicing apartheid, white supremacy … and if all that is not enough, "guilty of genocide." There are some countries considered guilty of some of these things, but only Israel is considered guilty of *all* of these things.
- What can I say about "Queers for Palestine" … the only thing I can say is, "*Gey. Gezunderheit!*"

-Will you tell me what to say about Emily Hand. All of eight years old she was living with the family in kibbutz BEERI when Hamas attacked. At the time of the attack, she was sleeping over at a friends house, and for two days her family didn't know if she was dead or taken hostage. Thomas Hand, her father, described to CNN his reaction when hearing the news that his daughter has been killed: "They just said we found Emily, and she's dead." He said he punched the air, "I went "'yes!" I went "yes!' and smiled while fighting back tears. "Because that is the best news of the possibilities that I knew." "She was either dead or in Gaza. And if you know anything about what they do to people in Gaza, that is worse than death." That's what it's come down to for us Jews? We have to be grateful that an eight year old was fortunate enough to be killed? What's there for me to say? There are no words.

But I have to say something so I will use the words of others that have impacted me in the last two years and have affected my thinking.

The first words that impacted my thinking came from George W. Bush when he was President. There has been much talking about anti-Semitism. The only thing people agree on is that Kanye West is an anti-Semite. Mazel tov!

I am sick of it, of all the talk and surveys on how to define anti-Semitism. Last year the Anti-Defamation League revealed that they have assets of $261,508,222 … which they use to combat anti-Semitism. But last year when Jonathan Greenblatt addressed the Knesset about the outbreak of anti-Semitism he declared, "We failed."

George Bush came up with the best approach. It was right after 9/11 with the attack of Bin Laden on the World Trade Center that George Bush told the world in his address to

Congress: “Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.” That’s how it is for me now.

I don’t care if you’re “woke” or “unwoke,” liberal or conservative, Republican or Democratic, straight, gay or in between … I don’t care if you are White privilege or Black Power, Evangelical or Buddhist. I don’t care if you are indigenous or immigrant, binary or non-binary, queer or pansexual, favor one state or two. I believe we are all created in God’s image. But what I do care, is: which side are you on? There are people out there who want to harm my family – the Jewish family. These people have raped, slaughtered, beheaded, taken hostage Jewish people. They have forced Israelis to hide in shelters, leave their wives and children for extended periods of time to defend their country. So, I ask you just one question: while all this was happening to members of our family, did you stand by us or stand against us? Are you with us or the terrorists? The answer, for some, is already clear:
Bill Maher – our side, John Oliver – against;
Wall Street Journal – our side, NY Times – against;
ADL, AJC – our side, JStreet – against;
Commentary Magazine – our side, The New Yorker – against;
Bari Weiss – our side, Peter Beinart – against;
Nikki Haley – our side, Bernie Sanders – against;
Douglas Murray – our side, Piers Morgan – against;
Lindsey Graham – our side, Chris Van Hollen – against (shame on you!)
And then there is Alexandria Ocasio- Cortez (AOC) and her squad, for whom there are only the Yiddish words: *zol ligen in der erd*.

Which leaves us with one question. Why are so many against us? Why do so many hate us? Lots of answers have been given but none resonate more these days than the simple answer of jealousy. They hate us because they are jealous of us!

Let me show you what I mean. The infamous anti-Semitic protestors in Charlottesville … what were the words they chanted? “The Jews will not replace us!” Why should they think we Jews are going to replace them? We are less than 6 million in this country of 350 million citizens! We are going to replace them? In a world of 8 billion people, 14 million are Jews! And we’re going to replace them? Why should they think that? I’ll tell you why! It’s the same reason Cain hated Abel. Eisau hated Yitzchok. His brothers hated Joseph. Why? They were jealous! They hated them because they admired them . . . they desperately wanted to be what their brothers were.

Don’t take my word for it. Take the word of a non-Jew who happens to be the U.S. Ambassador to Israel – Mike Huckabee. In his words, “There is a real hatred toward the Jewish people and toward Israel. There are certain levels of jealousy. The Israelis have built an extraordinary economy and life and world in a tiny sliver of land … and then there is the historic blood libel that “let’s blame the Jews for everything.”

In regard to the world … what makes the universal hatred of the Jews even more intense is the realization that we are successful *because* of them.

As someone pointed out:
- They didn't allow us to own land, so we needed to make a living with our brains. When Popes were still illiterate, Jewish kids were studying the Chumash.
- We were restricted from guilds and unions, so we went into what was available – entertainment, garment work, story-telling.
- The Church banned Christians from lending money with interest, so Jews became money lenders and tax collectors. We got involved with money because of them. And in response, they called us "greedy."
- They treated us as second class citizens and then forced us out of their Islamic countries, so we built our own country – Israel.
- The end of WWII marked the beginning of the end of colonial power. These are some of the countries that were created around the same time as Israel: Indonesia, Jordan, India, Pakistan,the Philippines, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, North Korea, Libya ... Look how they are doing and look at how the start-up nation is doing. To the envy of the world.

If you want to know what I mean, go to Jerusalem's Mamilla Mall which connects the "old" and "new" city of Jerusalem. Under Jordanian control it was a vast wasteland; literally a dump. Then Israel captured it in 1967 and you have to see what it is today. The Israelis have built this gorgeous open-air mall right at the foot of the Jaffa Gate, with a five-star modern hotel, outdoor restaurants overlooking the old city, with high end stores … Tommy Hilfiger, Diesel, Adidas, Zara, Boss, Timberland, American Eagle, Pierre Cardin … world class! And the Arabs in East Jerusalem walk through this mall … they remember what the area looked like when it was under their control and they see what it is like now.

You tell me:
- How would you feel as an Arab living in East Jerusalem, so much of which is in decrepit shape, and now you can just take an ultra-modern light rail train or walk through the Old City and enter Israel's Mamilla Mall.

- How would you feel if your child needed advanced medical care and the only way to get it is by bringing him or her to Israel?

- How would you feel when Israel keeps announcing a new invention, a new discovery, a new high-tech buy being acquired by Google or Yahoo or Apple and all your people have exported in recent years are suicide bombers?

- How would you feel living where a good portion of the population is illiterate, and then you see that Israel produces more scientific papers per capita than anywhere else in the world, that Israel is the nation with the highest ratio of university degrees to the population and the world, that

Israel has the highest world-wide publication of new books, the highest percentage in the world of computers per capita?

All this while you claim, “Islamic” superiority and cry out “Allah Akhbar” your “God is Great” but it looks like the God of the Jews seems to be doing a better job!

Do you know how you might feel? Well, they feel both admiration and hatred, the two go hand-in-hand! And we can’t do anything about it!

And that’s why words that impacted on me and said it all were words written by an Israeli, Avi Lewis, titled, “I No Longer Care.” Listen to some of it:
I don’t care if you’re out on the street, waving your flag and chanting your slogans. We won’t die silently the way you want us to.
I don’t care that you sympathize with Hamas.
I know you wouldn’t tolerate any of the things they did to us if they would’ve done it to you.
I don’t care that you’re outraged by Israel’s response to the massacre more than the massacre itself.
I don’t care that you’ve become overnight experts in international law, that you shout fancy slogans you don’t understand such as proportionality, occupation and apartheid.
I don’t care if you consider yourself anti-Zionist but not antisemitic.
I don’t care that you’ve inverted the truth by accusing us of genocide. If positions were reversed and Hamas held the power we do now, you’d see what a genocide looks like.
I don’t care that you’re angry, boiling and outraged.
For so, so long, I really, deeply cared.
I cared about fitting in;
I cared about what you think;
I cared about being a model citizen;
I cared about setting a personal example of how a tiny people in a tough neighborhood could still be a Light unto the Nations.

But now I’m finally accepting that you don’t care.
You never did.
You don’t see and you don’t hear.
And because I cared about what you think so much, that so deeply hurts.
But you don’t have my best interests at heart.
Don’t expect me to wait for your approval this time.
It doesn’t matter what I do, you’re not going to change.
It doesn’t matter how I act, because your issue is with who I am.
Now I’m going to block out your noise and do what it takes to win this war.
Today …
Finally …
I no longer care.

For me, these words echoed my deepest feelings during the past two years.

Having said all that, I must say: I don't care about *them*, but there are things I do care about. I care about our children and grandchildren. Which side are they on? One half of the Jews alive today live in Israel. The very survival of our people is at stake. So, tell me: Are they "with us?" Sad to say, many members of our own family are not on our side. It's a matter of a whole generation of Jewish children being turned off. They are growing up in a very different generation than we did. They are growing up surrounded by a society that speaks of intersectionality, wokeness, post-colonialism, Ethno-nationalism, white supremacy, racist persecution. They ae growing up seeing pictures of starving Arab children on the front pages of the New York Times.

It is vitally important for them to understand these words, the words of the Chief Rabbi of England, Ephraim Mirvis, when he said, "I am a Zionist because I am a Jew. If you are anti-Zionist, you are anti-Jew and anti-Judaism." The Chief Rabbi was making the point that Zionism is not just a political ideology, it is an expression of being Jewish. Why else did we spend the last 2000 years facing Jerusalem yearning for Israel in our daily prayers, and every time we recited the grace after meals? Why did we fast on Tisha B'av and conclude the Pesach Seder and Yom Kippur with the words, "Next year in Jerusalem." And when we died, got buried with earth from the Holyland. Rabbi Mirvis is not saying you have to be pro-Netanyahu and you can't criticize Israel … what he's saying is that you've got to believe in Israel, that anti-Zionism is anti-Judaism. Rabbi Mirvis concluded, "To attack Zionism when it means the Jewish nation is to attack the Jewish soul."

Do our children and grandchildren understand this? How can they? They were never taught it. How many American Jewish children have received a meaningful Jewish education? Most go to one day of Hebrew school and then drop out. All they know about Israel is what their college professors tell them.

Let me tell you what Bret Stephens, Dan Senor and Elliot Abrams have recently told us. These are all deeply committed Jews – Bret Stephens is an op-ed writer for the New York Times. Dan Senor is the author of the book "Israel Start Up Nation." And Elliot Abrams, a well-known diplomat. They all recently have spoken and written about the situation of American Jews these days. The first thing each of them say must be done is to have more American Jewish children receive a day school education. Statistics show that children with a day school education are the most committed to Israel. The problem is: "Out of 1.6 million Jewish children in the country, only 300,000 attend day schools. Of those, 88% are enrolled in Orthodox schools, leaving less than 5% of non-Orthodox Jewish children — who constitute the majority of American Jewish youth — in day schools today." Are we going to leave future support for Israel only in Orthodox hands? Does that speak well for our future? Instead of Federations giving money to feed Gaza, or instead of the Anti-Defamation League using the offtake from its quarter of a billion dollars for more surveys to fight anti-Semitism … how about using more Jewish money to help make a Day

School education affordable for more Jewish children? That I care about! That's what all of us must care about!

Yes, I care about all the Jewish people… But not just them. I care about the American people I care about America. America is going through a period of conflict and turmoil. Yes, there is a problem with antisemitism, but there are so many other problems, conflicts, divisions. Is Donald Trump making America great again or causing irreparable damage? Truly, no one knows what the future is going to bring but we Jews have to know and have to care. We need America! Nearly half of our Jewish people live in the United States. We need America to be strong and secure. And Israel needs America! And America has stood by Israel and that's why the words God bless America ring out for me these days.

It was on Yom Kippur in 1973 when Israel was attacked by all sides. Israel was caught unprepared and was in danger of being overrun. The American government developed a program to re-arm Israel before it could be defeated. Not only did no other government in the world offer such support, but every European government when asked if the American airplanes on their way to Israel could refuel in that particular European country … the answer was "no." No – not to a request of the Europeans to send their soldiers. No – not to a request to the Europeans to send arms. The "no" was to the simple request of allowing American planes to refuel on their land before continuing to Israel. The Europeans would have allowed the people of the state of Israel to be destroyed … all for a barrel of oil. Does anyone think they would act differently now?

That's why I say God Bless America. I don't care if you are a Republican or Democrat, supporter or critic of Trump or Biden. The fact is that when the war broke out Joe Biden flew to Israel to show his support and delivered a speech which caused John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary Magazine, and no liberal leftie, to write: "This afternoon Joe Biden gave what might be the most powerful statement in support of Israel ever delivered by any President." And do I have to remind you that Biden brought along aircraft carriers and fighter jets, and followed up with providing the rockets, the arms, the F-15's, the nuclear sub, the Iron Dome, the billions of dollars in aid, the military advisors.

And as for Donald Trump … sure, he has spoken words that are inexcusable, perhaps unforgiveable, but let's remember:
- It was President Trump who officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moved the U.S. embassy there from Tel Aviv.
- It was his administration which brokered the Abraham Accords, normalizing agreement between Israel and several Arab nations.
- He closed the PLO Mission in Washington DC and cut U.S. funding to UNRWA.
- He has stood by Israel since Oct 7, providing financial and military support and helped Israel knock Iranian missiles out of the skies.

- He has shown solidarity with Jewish students at colleges and universities and defended Israel against charges of "genocide."
- He has defended Israel while England, France, Canada and most everyone else has turned against us.

America under Biden and Trump – and most every President since Israel's founding – have lived up to George Bush's challenge. They have been "with" us.

And it's not just them, but the American people as well. I know about the rise of anti-Semitism in America. I know it's not just Kanye West! I know how this is coming from the right and from the left. And I know the danger it poses. I know we must be vigilant, and I know "it can happen here." After all, it has happened just about every other place. I know of the attacks in Pittsburgh and Poway and Washington and Boulder. But did you know that in Boulder, Colorado the Governor, Jared Polis, is Jewish? There are six million people living in Colorado; only 118,000 are Jewish. So, there must be a lot of non-Jews who voted for him, despite his being Jewish. And there must have been many more non-Jews who have elected the ten U.S. Senators who are Jewish, the 25 members of the House and the five Governors. They didn't get elected because of the Jewish vote when just 2% of the population is Jewish. Three of the most talked about possible Democratic candidates for President in 2028 are J.B. Pritzker, Gov. of Illinois, Rahm Emmanuel, former Mayor of Chicago and Josh Shapiro, Gov. of Pennsylvania. Their being Jewish doesn't seem to be working against them. Indeed, not only do we still have friends in high places, but polls show Americans view Jews more favorably than any other religion/religious group.

No one knows what the future will be. In the past year our world has been turned upside down. But it's still spinning! That's a very Jewish thing to do! On Rosh Hashana is it customary to eat a round challah – symbolic of the cycle of life. When we lift that round challah on Rosh Hashana, we are not just eating bread – we're embracing life. All of it. The full circle … the good, the bad, the joyful, the painful. And we're reminding ourselves that with each turn of the year, there is hope. There is renewal. There is a chance to rise again. In ushering in this new year, we have to have faith in ourselves, in our God, in our country, and in our people. *Am Yisroel Chai!* And yes, God Bless America!

In that spirit, it is most appropriate that it was a Jew named Irving Berlin who wrote those words that still ring out. So, what better way to usher in our hopes than to join with me in singing God Bless America, followed by the Hatikvah. Please rise.

Sermons/RoshHashana/Rosh Hashana2025 There are no words
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