

**Rosh Hashanah Morning Sermon, Sept 12, 2026 - Rabbi Moshe Heyn**  
**“Resolving this 4,000 year old conflict”**

In the Torah portion we just read, Abraham, urged on by Sarah, sends his firstborn child, Ishmael, and the child's mother, Hagar, into the wilderness. And there, Ishmael nearly dies of thirst.

This is a difficult story, because it exposes an insensitivity, even cruelty, on the part of Abraham and Sarah. And it exposes a rift between Abraham's sons, Isaac and Ishmael, which has resulted in four thousand years of intergenerational trauma. We have grown so far apart from our semitic cousins that it seems we have become sworn enemies in a cycle of violence that has been raging out of control, especially in the past three years since October 7th.

We could say that Hamas is responsible for the situation in Gaza. We could also say that we shouldn't criticize Israel, as it only strengthens the hand of antisemites and those who seek Israel's destruction.

There's some truth to these claims, but many Jews use them to deny any responsibility at all. We must recognize that we too are implicated in the wrongs that have been committed.

The longer you stay trapped in a fantasy of innocence and an unwillingness to recognize that you're part of the problem, the more self-destructive it becomes.

As many of you know, I am traveling to Israel in six weeks with my partner, Jill, with Vaughn, and with Laura and her husband, Sam. We are meeting up with groups from other congregations for a peace mission led by peace activists Aziz Abu Sarah and Maoz Inon. Together they co-authored the book *The Future Is Peace*, which documents their shared journey of grief and reconciliation after losing family members to the conflict.

Aziz, who is Palestinian, and Maoz, who is Israeli, lived parallel lives. Both ran travel agencies and believed that travel and education could bring societies closer together. But October 7th changed everything, when Maoz's parents were murdered in their home near Israel's border with Gaza.

Aziz had already emerged from trauma years earlier and dedicated himself to peace. As a 10-year-old boy, he lost his 19-year-old brother Tayseer at the hands of the Israeli military. Tayseer was arrested during the First Intifada in 1990 and beaten in custody. He died of his injuries a few weeks after he was released. For the rest of his youth, Aziz was consumed by the idea of revenge, which drove him toward violent resistance like thousands of other young Palestinian men.

But his perspective shifted after he enrolled in a Hebrew-language class so he could qualify for higher education. There he met Jews who had emigrated to Israel — and, as he describes it, his walls began to come down. And so he started a socially conscious travel agency and has devoted his life to bringing down those walls for others.

When Aziz heard that Maoz's parents had been killed, he reached out. Maoz agreed with him that more people dying would not solve anything, so he decided to focus less on his own travel business and joined Aziz as a full-time peace activist. They now go on speaking tours together. They met with Pope Francis in 2024, with Pope Leo this year, and were invited to carry the Olympic torch in Italy last January.

People say that they are naive but they counter by saying that those who think war can bring peace - they are the ones who are naive, because history shows that enemies can reconcile when they realize there is no good alternative.

Aziz and Maoz are part of a large and growing coalition of Israelis and Palestinians, working locally and globally to build a bridge to a shared future. There are now hundreds of Israelis protecting Palestinians from settler violence in the West Bank, and thousands of young Israelis, Palestinians and women joining protests.

The division is no longer between Israelis and Palestinians. Aziz has said, “If you divide us, let it be as those who believe in peace and equality and those who don’t...yet.”

They know that peace and equality are possible because they’ve been to Vietnam, Northern Ireland, Rwanda and South Africa where they have witnessed people’s ability to rise out of the destruction and trauma caused by war, and come together with former enemies to forge a path of healing and reconciliation. They **know** that the future of humanity is peace; the only uncertainty is how many more innocent people will suffer before we get there.

For that reason, we are going on this trip with them because we agree that violence will never bring peace. We often feel, “What could I possibly do?” but here are two ordinary people who decided to engage around this issue and connect with others they were taught to hate. They have done something amazing and we want to follow in their footsteps.

This year, none of us can come to a service without carrying the unbearable weight of Gaza. The devastation before our eyes demands more than rote confessions. They call us to confront our silence, our evasions, and our failure to act.

Rabbis across the country have been wrestling with what to say. Many have been admonished not to “bring politics” into their sacred space. Others, like me, feel a moral obligation to speak out.

Judaism teaches that responsibility is shared. Our tradition insists: *Kol Yisrael arevim zeh baze**h*—all of Israel is responsible for one another. And in our age, with the power that Jews have in Israel and in the United States, we must also reckon with our responsibility for those whose lives are shaped, diminished, or destroyed by that power.

That is the essence of the High Holy Days. We are supposed to reflect, confess, and ask forgiveness—not to wallow in guilt, but to take responsibility. I know that my words have not always been right, nor my actions enough. People are suffering and dying, and I must ask myself: could I have done more? Should I have done more?

After asking myself these questions last Rosh Hashanah, I decided that there was more I could do, and when I heard about this trip, I decided I should go. I believe it will be transformative. We've already scheduled a time for us to share more with you about our trip after we return. We'll do a program on November 9th and I hope you'll join us for that. This may be the most important thing I've done in a very long time.

I pray that we emerge from these Days of Awe having faced the hardest truths about what is happening to both Israelis and Palestinians. May we recognize their shared humanity, their equal claim to life and dignity. And may we not only confess but commit—to repair, to renew, and to live out the prophetic call at the heart of Judaism: to pursue justice, to protect life, and to resolve this 4,000 year old conflict, so that we might leave things better on this earth than they were when we arrived.

May it be so - Amen.