

**Wilmington's synagogues set an example of unity for the
Jewish World**

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The Year is 2048 and your child, grandchild, or great grandchild is considering going abroad for a semester to study either in London, Paris or Al-Quds, Palestine (Al- Quds is the Arabic name for Jerusalem). It is obvious why someone would want to study in London or Paris, but why Al-Quds, Palestine. The answer is to see the ruins of the capitol of the Jewish State of Israel, which fell in the year 2014, shortly before the youngster was born.

It is hard for most of us to envision such scenario, a world without a Jewish state, just as it was for the Jews of the first and second temple periods to imagine such a world. But just as those two Jewish states fell, so can the third, the modern State of Israel. What can we do to ensure that this third Jewish state survives the many daunting challenges it faces? In a word: *achdut* (unity)! We are a small people and can only survive by unifying. Shortly before we ask God to rebuild Jerusalem in the *Boneh Yerushalayim* (Rebuilding of Jerusalem) prayer of the *Amidah*, we ask God to gather the dispersed of his people Israel, as one, in the *Kibbutz Galuyot* (Ingathering of Exiles) prayer. The fact that the prayer for the

Ingathering of Exiles precedes the prayer for the rebuilding of Jerusalem should serve as a reminder that in order for Israel to survive, unity is needed.

But does it remind us? Unity is not something that we Jews appear to be good at. According to the Talmud (Yoma, 9b) the second Temple was destroyed due to the sin of baseless hatred. Jew fought Jew even as the mighty Roman legions besieged Jerusalem. During antiquity there was bitter fighting between Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. And today Reform, Conservative, Orthodox and Reconstructionist Jews spar with each other. Even as we approached Tisha B'Av this past July and prepared to mourn the destruction of our temples, violence broke out at the Western Wall regarding differing styles of worship. Have we learned nothing over the past 2000 years!

Furthermore, Judaism embraces diversity. The Mishna (Sanhedrin 4:5) teaches that though God stamped each person with the seal of Adam, no two people are alike. In other words, although we are all created in the image of the one and only God, we are all uniquely created. According to the Midrash (Rabbinic lore), the Red Sea did not split into one path, but twelve, one for each tribe.

However, the Torah commands us *lo titgodedu* (Deut. 14:1), which literally means that we should not cut ourselves. Yet, our sages understand it to mean that not only should we refrain from imitating the idolatrous Canaanite practice of

cutting ourselves, but we should also refrain from cutting ourselves apart from each other by separating into different groups (Yevamot, 14a). But how can we embrace diversity if we are commanded at the same time not to separate ourselves?

Let us not forget that according to the *Midrash*, although each tribe took its own path through the sea, they all arrived together as one people to receive the same Torah at Sinai. Not only did the tribes unite at Sinai, but they continued together on to the land of Israel where they eventually formed a unified nation, the first Jewish State.

We here in Wilmington are following in the footsteps of our ancestors, figuratively. Today, we don't refer to our group as a tribe; we refer to it as a denomination. And our three denominations, Orthodox, Conservative and Reform, are joining together, not from Sinai, but from Wilmington to make a pilgrimage to the State of Israel. Our pilgrimage is more than a showing of support for our brothers and sisters in Israel. It is a statement to the Jewish world that our diversity does not have to separate us. It is a statement to our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren that we are willing to work together to ensure that there will be a State of Israel for them.

But our pilgrimage is not only a statement; it is an opportunity, an opportunity to get your children excited about being Jewish. It has been shown that a trip to can create a thirst for Jewish education in teenagers and children. Instead

of “dragging” your kids to Hebrew school, expose them to Jewish life at its zenith and get them excited about learning about Israel and Judaism.

I ask you to join with me next June in setting an example of *achdut* for the rest of the Jewish world as I join together with Rabbi Beals, Rabbi Robinson and members of our three Wilmington synagogues: Adas Kodesch Shel Emeth, Congregation Beth Emeth, and Congregation Beth Shalom on our pilgrimage to the land of our ancestors.

Of course, I realize not all of you will be able to join us on this exciting trip, but I am not going to let you off the hook so easily. Instead, I am going repeat the remarks of St. Benjamin Anthony of the Israel Defense Force (IDF). At “A Night to Honor Israel,” sponsored by Christians United for Israel in Georgetown, Delaware this past May, St. Anthony explained that during the course of his service in the IDF he has been issued many different rifles. Yet, all of these rifles have one thing in common; each one has engraved on it “Property of the United States.” As the Sergeant pointed out, these weapons are on loan and loans can be taken back. We American Jews must unite to ensure that Israel continues to get the support it needs from the United States. Israel does not have many friends in the international community and U.S. support is vital to ensure her existence. You will not only be helping Israel, you will be helping America as well. If “the little Satan”

falls, her enemies will only be emboldened in their war against “the big Satan.”

But how else can we unite and make our voices heard on Capitol Hill? It’s actually quite easy. Join your fellow congregants and me at the American Israel Public Action Committee (AIPAC) policy conference in Washington, March 2-4. You will have the opportunity to unite with thousands of Jews of all stripes as we will lobby on behalf of the Israel-U.S. alliance. If you interested in attending, please speak to me.

If you cannot join us in Israel or cannot attend the AIPAC policy conference, I am still not going to let you off the hook. As we prepare to remember our dearly departed loved ones tomorrow during *Yizkor*, let’s think about how we would like to be remembered. Surely, we would all like to be remembered as people who contributed to the wellbeing of *Am Yisrael* (the people of Israel). Before you leave shul today, decide on a way in which you are going to support Israel this upcoming year. You can do this in many ways, such as buying an Israel bond, writing a letter to the editor in defense of Israel, or even supporting Adas Kodesch Shel Emeth (AKSE). Now what does supporting AKSE have to do with supporting Israel? Aren’t they apples and oranges? Not at all!

Allow me to share a personal example which illustrates the point. After completing the *Sarel*, Volunteers for Israel army program for the second time in four years, I went to visit my cousin in Tel Aviv. She asked me, “Steven, why did you

come back to Israel again? Why didn't you go somewhere else, like Australia?" The question caught me off guard. Why would one Jew have to ask another why they came back to Israel? Isn't it obvious? But then I realized that to a secular Jew it may not be. My initial response was two words, "I'm Jewish." Then I continued, "I love Israel; it is our homeland." From where did I acquire this love of Israel? Primarily from my parents and my shul.

American Jewish support of Israel will only remain strong as long as we American Jews embrace our Jewish identity. Otherwise, Israel simply becomes another foreign nation which happens to be any ally of the U.S. due to shared values and mutual interests, but her people will no longer be family. If not for the role my shul played in my life growing up, I may very well have gone to Australia instead of going to Israel.

Keeping Adas Kodesch strong means that Israel will retain one more partner in America, a partner which sends congregants to lobby on her behalf, defends her in the media, supports her financially, organizes pilgrimages, and inspires congregants to make *aliyah*.

Your support of Israel and AKSE will be a testament to the fact that during your lifetime you contributed and bound yourself to Am Yisrael. The Mishna (Sanhedrin, 10:1) teaches that, "All of Israel has a share in *Olam Habah* (the world to come)," but then suggests that certain members of Israel may not inherit a share in the world to come. How can certain

members of Israel be excluded from the world to come (such as Korach, for example) if all of Israel has a share in the world to come? They are excluded because they separated themselves from the community of Israel. They caused division. By supporting the State of Israel and AKSE you are taking affirmative steps to include yourself within the people of Israel, thereby reserving your spot in the world to come. And as we look down from *Olam Habah* we will not have to view our descendants visiting the ruins of what was the third Jewish state; rather, we will have the *naches* (pleasure) of having them visiting or living in a thriving Jewish state.

Let us work together to ensure that the Jewish people and the State of Israel live on. That is a legacy which we can all be proud and to which we all have a responsibility. Am Yisrael Chai (The people of Israel live)!