

Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel  
Shabbat Morning, November 4, 2023

## MICAH AT SIXTY

### WE ARE TRUE TO OUR ROOTS\WE ARE TRUE TO OUR NAME

Dear Friends,

This morning, as I begin my remarks, I want to especially thank Peggy Banks—the informal chair of our 25\50 year clubs. Peggy worked with us every step of the way in planning this service. Peggy is instrumental in creating these yearly recognitions—especially this year.

I also want to take a moment to thank Dan Moscovitz—another longtime member of our community—who is with us on Zoom. It was Dan’s idea to first create these services where we could honor, thank and recognize those who have made lifetime commitments to our community. Dan, thank you!

Micah surely is the composite of those who stick around and whose presence, participation and leadership serve to form who we are.

I have looked forward to this service for a long time. In these remarks, I had long planned to reflect on Micah at 60—our successes and challenges, who we are and what lies before us.

Anniversaries are a time to both celebrate as well as take stock.

Those remarks will have to wait for another time.

This, after all, is Temple Micah—and if there is one thing that we take seriously, it is engaging with the world around us. We know this and see this in so many ways.

This is found in our name—Micah—deliberately chosen for the great text on the wall above us.

וְכִתְּבוּ סַרְבֵּתֵיהֶם לְאַתִּים וְחֲנִיתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמָרוֹת לֹא-יִשְׂאוּ גֹי אֶל-גֹּי חֶרֶב וְלֹא-יִלְמְדוּן עוֹד מִלְחָמָה:

And they shall beat their swords into plowshares

And their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation shall not take up

Sword against nation;

They shall never again know war;

וְיָשְׁבוּ אִישׁ תַּחַת גִּפְנוֹ וְתַחַת תְּאֵנָתוֹ וְאֵין מִתְּרִיד :

But every family shall sit

Under its own vine and fig tree

With no one to disturb them.

And for just one more historic example—we are a congregation-which according to at least some accounts-- held its first Shabbat service in 1963 in the wake of the assassination of President John Kennedy.

Speaking to the challenges of the outside world is in our DNA.

So-this morning—the 4<sup>th</sup> Shabbat since Since Simchat Torah--—we remain as Yehuda Ha-levi who wrote from Spain 1000 years ago--

“Libi ba Mizrach

V’ani b’sof Ha-Marav

My heart is in the East and I am here at the end of the West.”

I also recognize that there are many children here-

My remarks will therefore be much briefer than they otherwise might be and guided by the principle of Kavod La Tzibbur-

Recognizing the necessity to always honor the assembled congregation and understand who is present.

There are two situations we must realize:

The War in Israel

And

The resurgence of antisemitism

# 1. The War in Israel-

1.

I fully support Israel in this war. I believe it to be an existential war for the survival of the state. By that I mean, when the war ends, the residents of the border communities in the South that were overrun by Hamas must feel fully safe in returning and rebuilding their communities. If the result of this war is an effective re-drawing of the border, with those communities abandoned, Israel as we know it will no longer exist—and I do not mean simply geographically—with borders implicitly, if not explicitly re-drawn. It will mean far more-- that the country is in a constant state of existential uncertainty.

Having said this, I also fully support a humanitarian pause that in a real and structured way helps non-combatant, innocent, Gaza civilians to leave the area safely. I also believe that the all hostages must be returned but I do not condition the humanitarian pause on the hostages even as it might be a sensible negotiating position. This is where the international community must weigh in heavily and seriously on both sides. Such a pause cannot simply be about rearming Hamas. It must be about saving the innocent. We must always remember that Abraham bargained to save the innocent in his confrontation with God over Sodom and Gemorrah.

Jewish law prohibits laying siege to a city. People who wish to leave must always be allowed to leave. Food must always be allowed to enter.

2.

The above is all made much more complicated by Netanyahu remaining in office. Israel is in the horrible position of fighting a just war—a war of self-defense. In these hazardous times, Israel is led by a person that no one can trust. He has proven to be in every possible way an abysmal failure. Over five years ago, on Yom Kippur I said that Netanyahu was a leader of Israel who has scorned Zionism.

I was right then and am so sadly proven right now. He cares not one iota for the Jewish people or for the country he purportedly leads. He cares for nothing but saving his own skin. How can he be trusted with anything? He must go. I strongly support any movement in Israel to oust him from office right now.

3.

Finally- and most difficult—can Israel win this war in the way their language suggests? Can Hamas really be destroyed? Has ISIS, Al Queda or any of the other Islamic terrorist organizations really been destroyed? Defeated is different than destroyed. Hamas represents an idea, a murderously anti-Semitic idea, a murderously anti-Enlightenment idea. An idea can only be defeated with a better idea.

I believe that it is long past time to patiently sit and think through a viable political solution. Harsh extremists on all sides—Jewish and Islamic, in Israel and the Arab world, in Washington, DC and in capitals around the world all began a campaign against Oslo from the moment Oslo was conceived.

If you like perpetual war, you currently have what you like. If you prefer peace—it is time to get real and to silence the naysayers on all sides who, for whatever reason, do everything in their considerable power to corrode the possibility of peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

## #2. THE RESURGENCE OF ANTISEMITISM

I am beyond stunned.

Antisemitism has become the “must go to” playground of this era’s “useful idiots,” an expression that I would like better were the idiots not so dangerous.

Antisemitism and antizionism are siblings.

Antisemitism is hatred for Jews scattered around the diaspora.

Antizionism is hatred for Jews returned to our historic homeland and forming a nation state. Imagine, a Jewish, Hebrew speaking country and it is hated by the so-called intellectual left. There is much to say here at another time.

Rabbi Crawley added for me this week—it is disdain and hatred of Jewish power. It is belief in ridiculous mythic lies about Jewish power. Jews control the world's banks. A Zionist lobby controls American foreign policy. Antisemites love conspiracy theories about Jews.

And

A story.

A few years ago, I was visiting in a Micah home for a social evening. The hosts and Louise and I were the only Micah folks. There were neighbors and other friends gathered. The gathering was during the time of a previous Israel-Hamas or Israel-Hezbollah war. It was not a good time and there were the expected articles about Israel over-reacting and proportionality. (BTW- I find the concept of proportionality morally repugnant—as if ratios exist that once so many on one side are killed, then so many on the other side can be killed. I only see this in reference to Israel)

I was sitting politely at the table as the dinner conversation pursued greater and greater judgmental vehemence against Israel. I made a couple of comments—trying to show the larger picture. (BTW- I just love talking about Israel with people that have never heard of the original partition plan of 1947.)

Our hosts could see how I was restraining myself and at one point, one of them said—“Don't hold back for us.”

I turned to three of the guests and asked them why they were so bothered about this war. Why the judgmental vehemence? One of them a non-Jewish European said, “Well, we expect so much more from Jews.”

My instant response. “That is anti-Semitism in a nutshell. You expect more from Jews? First of all, it is my role to expect more from my family—and I do. But you? You who are not Jewish? You have just said that you judge Jews by a different

standard than you do others. What is that if not antisemitism? Not judging Jews in the same way you judge others is a classic definition of antisemitism. Finding fault in Jews for that which you do not find fault in others is antisemitism.”

As a liberal Zionist, we have been abandoned by the Left that could not wait to pounce. On October 8, the day after the attack, Louise and I looked on in horror at the pro-Palestinian, anti-Israel, antizionist, antisemitic celebration in center city Philadelphia.

This is the world we are in.

We have to call this antisemitism out whenever we see it.

We have to support our kids on university campuses around the country and as I have said elsewhere, we have to double down on the principles of the Enlightenment as never before.

Equality

Freedom

Universal values

No one is allowed to get left behind.

As Diana Butler Bass wrote me “Surely, there are enough vines and fig trees for us all....”

We pray for that day as we celebrate Temple Micah our anchor of civility, our refuge in the storm, our place of deep friendship—our Jewish home where Torah as a Tree of Life is always our guide.

Shabbat Shalom!