

Yom Kippur 5776

Israel, Iran and Moving Forward

Our tradition teaches us never to wage war without first seeking vigorously the possibility of peace (Deut. 20:10).

This is why the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran, the JCPOA, created an enormous upheaval among all of us who so love Israel.

All of us want Israel to exist.

All of us want Israel's security protected.

None of us want her even more vulnerable in the terrible neighborhood that is the Middle East.

Since it is apparent that the Iran deal is going to go into effect,

It is time for us, as a community of *chovevei tzion*, lovers of Zion, to do what we can to strengthen our commitment to Israel's well-being.

First, about the dispute over the Iran deal.

It is clear to any of us that the deal riled the American Jewish community. So much so that it was written about extensively in the Jewish and mainstream media.

Now that JCPOA is reality, it is incumbent on us to turn our attention to ensuring that Israel's protection remains one of our top priorities.

The relationship between the United States and Israel is too important for the United States to ever turn her back on the Jewish State.

Even though there is that old joke about two Jews and multiple opinions, it is essential that no lasting rift is created between Israel and the U.S., between North American Jews and Israelis, or among American Jews.

We need to agree that however we see Israel, whether we agree with the government of Israel, we have to care about her.

Fortunately the president and Prime Minister Netanyahu have already set a meeting at the White House for later in the fall.

With respect to those who call Israel home, even when there are times when we do not understand each other, we need to respect that they live there, and that in a state with a democratic press, their voices are even more loudly expressed than the debate that happened in this country. Israelis are not shy about expressing an opinion.

Within our American Jewish community, we must stop the name calling and comparisons to the disasters that prefaced Israel's creation.

We must move forward to what comes next for Israel, and for us.

We are able to agree that the U.S.-Israel relationship is of strategic importance, witnessed as recently as last year's war with Hamas where Israeli technology that created Iron Dome was deployed with American resources.

We are able to agree that Iran represents an existential threat to Israel and that the people of Israel deserve assurances that they will never be abandoned by the United States.

We are able to agree that the relationship between Israel and the United States is based on shared values and common concerns. The health of that relationship must never be jeopardized or allowed to become a partisan political issue.

That being said, we, the Jewish People and the citizens of the state of Israel must remain vigilant against a sworn enemy of Israel whose supreme leader as recently as last week said that Israel will not exist in 25 years.

News reports over the weekend say that Russia is going to sell arms to Iran now that the sanctions are being rescinded against Iran. Many of us think that those arms will find their way to Syria. This is why the Prime Minister visited Russia over the past two days to share with President Putin his grave concerns about these armaments falling into the wrong hands.

With sanctions relief, Iran will be receiving billions of dollars. Even if the majority of it is dedicated to peaceful pursuits, with the rush of cash, it is thought that Iran may more than double what it spends on terrorism, to as high as \$10 billion. Whatever it goes to, it is incumbent for the United States, in our homeland, and for our ally in the Middle East, Israel, that adequate protections are put in place to negate Iran's evil intents.

To ensure compliance with the deal itself, we, along with others, need to ensure that:

- Nuclear deterrence remains in place, both during the period of the the JCPOA and after;
- Strict oversight of the deal ensures that Iran does not cheat
- Our president be forthright concerning consequences should the Iranians be caught cheating on the JCPOA;
- The United States strengthens its commitment to resolving Iran's horrific violations of human rights;
- The government of Israel and the United States reach bilateral understandings and agreements which will address the security problems that both sides agree could arise out of this deal, especially those concerning Hezbollah and Hamas.
- Congress and the President develop new strategies for cooperating with Israel and our Arab allies to counter Iranian aggression in the region.

So let me once again state what should be obvious.

Whether you supported or opposed the deal, it is our responsibility put these differences behind us and to come together with a sense of unity, mission and dedication to Medinat Israel home.

With all of the negative energy that we have just been through,

we, as American Jews, need to remind ourselves why we love Israel so and how special she is.

Consider this.

- On April 25, 2015, Nepal was devastated by an earthquake which measured 7.8 on the Richter scale. Nine thousand were killed and 25,000 injured. It was Israel who was first on the scene to come to Nepal's aid at its time a great need. Within 48 hours, trauma units from Israel arrived with equipment.
- Israelis doctors have treated more than 1800 injured Syrians who have come to the fence on the northern border.
- Last year, Israeli doctors saved the life of an Iraqi Christian girl whose family had fled ISIS. The young woman's heart was on the right side instead of the left and was malfunctioning.

- Currently an organization called IsraAid is raising money from Israelis to help Syrians relocate in Europe. This is even more amazing when one considers the history of conflict between Syria and Israel.
- Israel is a democratic country that has free elections, even if we, who choose to live in the United States, do not always like the election's outcome. It has a justice system to prosecute those who take the law into their own hands, as well as adjudicate other issues of a civil society. People there are subject to civil and criminal law.
- Israel is the only country in the Middle East dedicated to the rights of women and LGBT people. Tel Aviv was recently ranked as one of the top cities for LGBT folks in the world.
- Fourteen Israelis have been awarded Nobel prizes, mostly of those in the field of science and medicine. Israel is a world leader in medical advances.
- Israel as a leader in water conservation and desalinization. Its research is also leading the world in terms of renewable energy resources, particularly solar energy. It is the leader in designing processes which turn plastic waste into fuel.
- Israel is a technological leader--which is why all of the major American technology companies--Google, Apple, Intel--have facilities in Israel and regularly buy Israeli tech startups. It is a relentlessly innovative place and the tech world knows it.

This is another face of Israel today.

Let us hope that all of us in the American Jewish community, no matter our position on the Iran agreement, recommit to finding ways to support Israel in ways that we can.

We have realized a dream that many of us never thought would be possible again.

It is up to us to further the dream.