

ISRAEL TODAY

IT IS A PRIVILEGE TO SPEAK TO YOU ON THIS ROSH HASHANAH EVENING. AT MY AGE, WELL INTO MY EIGHTIES, ONE HAS TO BE GRATEFUL THAT HE LIVES TO EXPERIENCE ANOTHER HIGH HOLIDAY PERIOD. I DON'T THINK THAT MOST OF YOU ARE QUITE THAT OLD, BUT IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE, NO MATTER HOW OLD YOU ARE, THAT EVERY YEAR, EACH DAY OF LIFE, IS A PRECIOUS GIFT. ALL OF US CAN SAY WITH FEELING THE TRADITIONAL BLESSING UPON EXPERIENCING A HAPPY OCCASION, "BARUCH AHTAH , MELECH HA-OLAM, SHEHEHCHEHYANUA V'KIYMAHNU V'HIGIAHNU LAZMAN HAZEH. MY LOOSE TRANSLATION IS: THANKS BE TO YOU, OH L-RD, OUR G-D, WHO HAS KEPT US ALIVE AND UPHELD US, AND ENABLED US TO EXPERIENCE THIS WONDERFUL OCCASION." AMEN.

I AM ALSO GRATEFUL TO RABBI BOOKMAN, WHO HAS INVITED ME TO SPEAK TONIGHT ON THE SUBJECT OF "ISRAEL TODAY." FRANKLY, I AM AWED BY THIS SUBJECT, BECAUSE THERE IS SO MUCH FOR US TO SHARE ABOUT

ISRAEL. UNFORTUNATELY, WE HAVE LITTLE TIME TO SAY ALL THAT NEEDS TO BE SAID IN JUST ONE CONVERSATION. WE CAN, AT LEAST, MAKE A BEGINNING. THEN, AS RABBI HILLEL SAID TO THE WOULD-BE CONVERT, AFTER GIVING HIM A SUMMARY DEFINITION OF JUDAISM, THEN WE MUST GO FORTH TO STUDY AND LEARN MORE.

X ALL OF US HAVE WATCHED THE TV_x AND READ THE NEWSPAPERS ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT ISRAEL HAS JUST ENGAGED IN A MILITARY EFFORT AGAINST AN AGGRESSIVE ENEMY ON ISRAEL'S NORTHERN BORDER. AFTER SEVERAL WEEKS OF BOMBARDING THE SUPPLY ROUTES OF THIS ENEMY, KNOWN AS HEZBOLLAH, AND AFTER SENDING GROUND FORCES TO PUSH THE ENEMY BACK AWAY FROM THE ISRAELI BORDER, A TRUCE WAS DECLARED BROKERED BY FRANCE AND OTHER NATIONS. STILL THE MOOD IN ISRAEL HAS NOT BEEN A HAPPY ONE. THERE WAS A GENERAL FEELING IN ISRAEL THAT THE ARMY HAD NOT ACCOMPLISHED ITS PURPOSE. BECAUSE OF THE THOUSANDS OF MISSILES HEZBOLLAH SHOT INTO ISRAEL, A MILLION OF ITS CITIZENS HAD TO LEAVE THE NORTH

DURING THE BATTLE, WHILE THOUSANDS MORE HUDDLED IN BOMB SHELTERS WITH LITTLE FOOD AND WITHOUT OTHER NECESSITIES OF LIFE.

THERE WAS A GENERAL FEELING THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD NOT BEEN ADEQUATELY PREPARED EITHER TO DEFEND AGAINST THE MISSILES OR TO ORGANIZE A GOOD MILITARY PLAN. THE ISRAELIS HAD SUFFERED A GREAT DEAL, AND THEY FELT AS IF THEY HAD LOST THE WAR. THERE WAS, OF COURSE, A MORE POSITIVE SIDE TO THINGS AND THIS WAS ABLE TO EMERGE WHEN THE LEADER OF THE HEZBOLLAH, SHEIK NASRALLAH, DECLARED ON ARAB TELEVISION, THAT IF HE HAD KNOWN THAT ISRAEL WOULD RESPOND SO VIGOROUSLY, HE WOULD NOT HAVE KIDNAPPED THE TWO ISRAELI SOLDIERS. ONLY THEN DID THE ISRAELIS REALIZE THAT THE HEZBOLLAH ARMY HAD SUFFERED A SUBSTANTIAL DEFEAT.

CONCERN OVER THE FEAR THAT THE UNITED NATIONS TROOPS ASSIGNED TO SUPERVISE THE TRUCE WOULD BE UNCOMMITTED TO THEIR JOB, AND CONCERN OVER THE

ABILITY OF THE LEBANESE ARMY TO ASSERT ITSELF AGAINST HEZBOLLAH SEEM TO HAVE LESSENERED AS THE LEBANESE HAVE SHOWN A WILLINGNESS IN THE LAST FEW DAYS TO TAKE THEIR ROLE IN MAINTAINING THE PEACE SERIOUSLY. WITHIN ISRAEL, ONE OF THE MAIN CRITICS OF THE GOVERNMENT, THE FAMOUS NOVELIST A.B. YEHOSHUA, CHANGED HIS VIEWPOINT AND PUBLICLY DECLARED, "I THINK THIS WAS A SUCCESSFUL WAR." THE SHEIK NASRALLAH'S ADMISSION THAT HE HAD MADE A MISTAKE IN JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN TO MEAN THAT HIS ARMY HAD PAID TOO HIGH A PRICE.

ISRAEL IS NOW GOING ABOUT REPAIRING ITS WOUNDS AND LEARNING HOW TO CORRECT ITS OWN TACTICAL ERRORS. CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT HAS GENERALLY SOFTENED, WHILE THE ISRAELI ECONOMY CONTINUES TO OPERATE IN A CONFIDENT FASHION. AMERICAN FIRMS LIKE JOHNSON AND JOHNSON CONTINUE TO INVEST IN ISRAELI COMPANIES ON A SUBSTANTIAL BASIS. STILL ISRAEL WILL NEED BILLIONS OF DOLLARS TO REPAIR DAMAGE DONE TO BUILDINGS THAT WERE SHELLED

BY MISSILES, AND THEY NEED TO RESUPPLY THE ARMY.

THE RECENT MILITARY CONFLICT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HEZBOLLAH IN THE NORTH AND AGAINST HAMAS IN GAZA IS A REMINDER THAT ISRAEL IS SURROUNDED BY HOSTILE ENEMIES ON ALL SIDES. IT SEEMS THAT THE ARABS HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO FACE UP TO REALITY. THE ARABS CHARGE THAT ISRAEL WAS ESTABLISHED ON ARAB LAND. THE TRUTH IS THAT ISRAEL HAS SETTLED IN ITS ANCIENT LAND WHICH NEVER WAS A PART OF A PALESTINIAN NATION. FURTHER, MODERN ISRAEL WAS SETTLED ON LAND ASSIGNED TO IT BY THE UNITED NATIONS, AS PART OF ITS PARTITION PLAN. WHEN ISRAEL DECLARED ITS INDEPENDENCE IN 1947, IT WAS OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED BY THE UNITED NATIONS. VERY SHORTLY THEREAFTER, THE INFANT NATION WAS ATTACKED BY A GROUP OF ARAB NATIONS WHICH INCLUDED EGYPT, JORDAN, IRAQ, AND SYRIA. MIRACULOUSLY, THE ISRAELI SETTLERS WERE ABLE TO DEFEAT THE ASSEMBLED ARAB ARMIES. IN THE GIVE AND TAKE OF BATTLE, SOME OF THE LAND ON THE ARAB SIDE OF THE PARTITION LINE.

FURTHER, THERE WERE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES ON BOTH SIDES. THE JEWS IMMEDIATELY STARTED INTEGRATING THE JEWISH REFUGEES, BUT NO ARAB NATION HAS BEEN WILLING TO ABSORB THE ARAB REFUGEES. TO THIS DAY, THE ARABS HAVE NOT FACED THE REALITY THAT THEY STARTED THE WAR, AND THEY MUST ACCEPT ITS CONSEQUENCES. INSTEAD, THEY HAVE REVERSED THE TRUTH AND CLAIM THAT ISRAEL MUST TAKE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ARAB REFUGEES.

THE ARABS STARTED ADDITIONAL WARS. AS TIME WENT ON THE VICTORIOUS JEWS WERE ABLE TO PUSH THE ARAB ARMIES BACK. JORDAN HAD CAPTURED THE SO-CALLED WEST BANK IN THE WAR, ^{of 1967} BUT THE ISRAELIS PUSHED OUT THE JORDANIAN ARMY, WHEN IT ATTACKED ISRAEL AGAIN. ISRAEL HAS LEARNED THAT YOU CAN'T LET THE ARABS GET TOO CLOSE, BECAUSE THE ARABS WILL JUST ATTACK FROM BETTER VANTAGE POINTS. AN EXAMPLE OF THIS IS GAZA. THE ISRAELIS CAPTURED GAZA IN THE WAR OF 1967 BUT RETURNED IT TO THE PALESTINIANS RECENTLY TO SHOW OUR WILLINGNESS TO

The Palestinians,

COMPROMISE. UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF HAMAS,
INTERPRETED THIS RETURN OF GAZA, AS A SIGN OF
WEAKNESS AND IMMEDIATELY STARTED SHELLING
ISRAEL FROM THEIR NEW ADVANTAGED POSITION.

TO UNDERSTAND HOW THE ARABS PERVERT THE
REALITY OF A SITUATION, WE HAVE ONLY TO REVIEW THE
TERRIBLE TRAGEDY OF THE ATTACK ON THE TWIN TOWERS
IN NEW YORK CITY. ALL THE CLEAR EVIDENCE TELLS US
THAT A GROUP OF SAUDIS, WHO WERE MEMBERS OF AL
QUEDA, DROVE TWO AMERICAN PLANES LOADED WITH
PASSENGERS INTO THE TOWERS AND KILLED ALMOST 3,000
INNOCENT PEOPLE. AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS AND TV, ON
THE BASIS OF THIS EVIDENCE, ANNOUNCED THE NEWS. AT
THE SAME TIME, ARAB NEWSPAPERS AND TV WERE
ANNOUNCING THAT THE ISRAELIS PERFORMED THIS
COWARDLY DEED. FURTHER, THE ARAB MEDIA
ANNOUNCED THAT ALL THE JEWS WHO WORKED IN THE
BUILDINGS WERE TOLD NOT TO SHOW UP FOR WORK ON
THE DESIGNATED DAY OF THE ATTACK. SOMEONE SHOULD
TELL THAT TO THE HUNDREDS OF JEWISH FAMILIES WHO

HELD FUNERALS FOR THEIR LOVED ONES AFTER THE STRIKE.

LIFE IN ISRAEL HAS BEEN DIFFICULT FROM THE BEGINNING. AMERICAN JEWS LOOK WITH PRIDE BUT ALSO ASTONISHMENT AT THE COURAGE AND THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THEIR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN THE HOLY LAND. THERE IS THE STORY OF THE AMERICAN JEW WHO ASKED AN ISRAELI, "HOW ARE YOU ABLE TO GO ON IN THE MIDST OF ALL THESE WARS AND HARDSHIPS?" THE ISRAELI ANSWERED, "LIFE IS LIKE STRINGING A NECKLACE. EACH DAY YOU TRY TO PUT AT LEAST ONE BEAD ON THE STRING, AND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, YOU HAVE A NECKLACE!" "THE IMPORTANT THING," SAID THE ISRAELI, "IS NOT TO GIVE UP HOPE."

THE MEDIEVAL JEWISH POET, YEHUDAH HALEVI, WROTE, "WE JEWS ARE AHSIRAY TIKVAH, PRISONERS OF HOPE."

IN THE FACE OF ALL THE ARAB ACCUSATIONS AGAINST ISRAEL, THERE IS THE TRUTH OF THE STORY. HOW WAS ISRAEL REALLY BUILT? HOW DID IT BECOME SUCH A

VIBRANT MODERN NATION? I'M GOING TO TELL YOU ONE FAMILY'S STORY, AND WE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT ISRAEL WAS BUILT BY MANY SUCH STORIES. THIS ONE MAN IS NAMED AVRUM GELLER. AVRUM WAS THE BROTHER OF MY WIFE SELMA'S FATHER. AVRUM CAME TO ISRAEL IMMEDIATELY AFTER W.W. ONE. HE CAME AS A PIONEER TO SET UP HIS OWN FARM IN WHAT WAS A WILDERNESS, DESERT LAND NOT TOO FAR FROM TEL AVIV.

AVRUM ACQUIRED HIS LAND WITH THE HELP OF THE JEWISH NATIONAL FUND, WHICH WAS BUYING LARGE AREAS IN THIS REGION FOR DEVELOPMENT BY JEWS. AT FIRST, AVRUM BUILT A SMALL ONE ROOM HOUSE, AND HE STARTED A CHICKEN FARM, BECAUSE THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT WAS HELPING FARMERS RAISE CHICKENS FOR THE BROAD MARKET. AVRUM HAD LEFT HIS WIFE, RACHEL, IN RUSSIA, BUT WHEN HE BUILT A SECOND SMALL ROOM ON HIS HOUSE, SHE JOINED HIM.

ISRAEL AT THAT TIME WAS TOO HARD FOR RACHEL. IT WAS TOO HOT, THERE WAS NO RUNNING WATER, ^{EA}~~RE~~ THERE WAS NO ELECTRICITY, THERE WERE TOO MANY

MOSQUITOES. SO RACHEL WENT BACK TO RUSSIA AND WAITED FOR AVRUM TO CALL FOR HER WHEN THINGS WERE BETTER. AVRUM DID WELL WITH HIS CHICKEN FARM, AND IN A FEW YEARS WAS ABLE TO BUILD A THIRD LARGER ROOM ON HIS HOUSE, WHILE THE GOVERNMENT WAS NOW ABLE TO BRING WATER AND ELECTRICITY TO HIS NEIGHBORHOOD. AVRUM NOW SENT FOR RACHEL AND SHORTLY AFTER HER RETURN, THEY ADDED A FOURTH ROOM TO THE HOUSE. NOW THEY COULD RAISE A FAMILY WHICH INCLUDED, IN TIME, TWO FINE BOYS.

SELMA AND I VISITED THE FAMILY ONCE AND WERE INVITED TO LUNCH. A SPECIAL MEAL WAS PREPARED FOR THE GUESTS. BOILED CHICKEN. AFTER LUNCH WAS SIESTA TIME. EVERYBODY WAS TO TAKE A NAP. SELMA AND I WERE ASSIGNED TO THE LARGEST ROOM, THE LIVING ROOM. IT WAS SO HOT WITH THE WINDOWS CLOSED THAT WE HOPEFULLY OPENED A WINDOW. THE ODOR FROM THE CHICKENS WAS SO BAD THAT WE CLOSED THE WINDOW. AVRUM AND RACHEL WERE PART OF A MOSHAV, A GROUP OF PRIVATE OPERATORS WHO BANDED TOGETHER TO BUY

AND SELL THEIR PRODUCE TOGETHER. THE MOSHAV IS CALLED NES TZIONA (A MIRACLE OF ZION). OF SUCH PEOPLE AS AVRUM AND RACHEL WAS ISRAEL SETTLED. NOBODY TOOK ANYBODY'S LAND, AND THEY WORKED UNDER THE MOST DIFFICULT CONDITIONS. THESE EARLY PIONEERS IN ISRAEL ARE THE UNSUNG HEROES WHO HELPED TAME THE DESERT.

THE MODERN STATE OF ISRAEL BEGAN ON THE BASIS OF IDEALISM. COOPERATION WAS THE KEY WORD IN FARM GROUPS LIKE THE KIBBUTZ AND THE MOSHAV. EQUALITY WAS THE KEY WORD IN THE AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH FACILITIES TO ALL. THE GOVERNMENT MAINTAINED HOMES FOR THE AGED AND THE DISABLED. MODERN ISRAEL IS A CARING SOCIETY. WITH ENEMIES ON EVERY SIDE, ALL YOUNG PEOPLE HAD TO LEARN THE ART OF SELF-DEFENSE AND JOIN THE ARMY FOR A FEW YEARS. THEY WOULD REMAIN IN THE RESERVES AND BE SUBJECT TO CALL IN TIMES OF CRISIS. THE JEWISH PEOPLE, WHICH HAD OBSERVED THE PRACTICE OF NON-RESISTANCE TO VIOLENCE FOR 2,000 YEARS, NOW HAD TO LEARN TO BE

EFFICIENT AT BEARING ARMS. TODAY, THE ISRAELI AIR FORCE IS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE BEST IN THE WORLD.

THE ISRAELIS HAVE DONE WONDERS IN PEACEFUL OCCUPATIONS AS WELL. HADASSAH HOSPITAL IS ONE OF THE GREATEST HOSPITALS IN THE WORLD. ARABS FROM MANY LANDS COME TO HADASSAH TO BE TREATED FOR DISEASES AND PROBLEMS WHICH CANNOT BE SOLVED IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY. THE WEITZMAN INSTITUTE AND THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY HAVE MADE DISCOVERIES THROUGH RESEARCH WHICH HAVE BENEFITTED ALL HUMANKIND. IN AGRICULTURE ^{the Israelis} ~~THEY~~ HAVE DRAINED THE SWAMPS AND IRRIGATED ^r THE DESERT, SO THAT THE ONCE BARREN LAND IS NOW GREEN AND PRODUCTIVE. ISRAEL'S TECHNOLOGICAL INDUSTRIES ARE AMONG THE MOST ADVANCED IN THE WORLD, AND MANY OF THE LARGEST AND BEST AMERICAN COMPANIES ARE ACQUIRING THE SMALLER ISRAELI COMPANIES. WARREN ^l BUFFET, ONE OF THE WEALTHIEST MEN IN THE WORLD, HAS JUST BOUGHT AN ADVANCED ISRAELI COMPANY. ISRAEL STANDS TODAY AS THE ONLY TRUE DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST. MY

Paragraph

WIFE'S HAIRDRESSER, A JAPANESE WOMAN, HAS JUST RETURNED FROM A TRIP TO PARIS AND LONDON. SHE TELLS OF BEING FRIGHTENED BY A DEMONSTRATION IN THE STREETS OF PARIS CONDUCTED BY THOUSANDS OF ARABS DRESSED IN BLACK WHO CARRIED A COFFIN ALSO DRESSED IN BLACK. ON ONE SIDE OF THE COFFIN WERE THE LETTERS, USA. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COFFIN WAS THE SINGLE WORD, ISRAEL. SIMILAR KINDS OF DEMONSTRATIONS, THE HAIRDRESSER SAID, WERE BEING HELD IN LONDON. THE ARABS ARE CARRYING THEIR FIGHT AND PROPAGANDA THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. IN BELGIUM, ANTI-SEMITIC ACTS ARE A FREQUENT OCCURRENCE AND THE GOVERNMENT TAKES NO STEPS TO HALT THEM. IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, BOMBS HAVE EXPLODED IN SYNAGOGUES AND JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTERS IN ARGENTINA, TUNISIA, MOROCCO, TURKEY, AND VIENNA.

THE ARAB DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE INVADED MANY AMERICAN COLLEGE CAMPUSES INCLUDING THE U. OF MIAMI. AMERICAN JEWS WHO HAVE FELT DETACHED FROM

THE STRUGGLES OF THE JEWS IN ISRAEL WILL SOON
DISCOVER THAT DETACHMENT IS NO LONGER POSSIBLE.
THE ATTACK ON THE TWO TOWERS IN NEW YORK CITY
SHOULD BE WARNING ENOUGH. THE ARABS ARE TAKING
THEIR BATTLE AND THEIR HATRED OF ISRAEL
EVERYWHERE. OUR BIBLE TELLS US, IN THE BOOK OF
ESTHER, THAT WHEN ESTHER THE QUEEN THOUGHT
HERSELF PROTECTED BY HER ROYAL STATUS, HER UNCLE
MORDECAI ADVISED HER, "THINK NOT THAT YOU WILL
ESCAPE HAMAN'S INTENTION TO DESTROY ALL THE JEWS,
JUST BECAUSE YOU ARE SEEMINGLY SHELTERED IN THE
ROYAL PALACE." HIS WORDS MIGHT WELL BE ADDRESSED
TO AMERICAN JEWS WHO THINK THEY ARE PROTECTED BY
THEIR DISTANCE FROM ISRAEL AND BY THEIR RICH HOUSES
AND LARGE BANK ACCOUNTS. "THINK NOT THAT YOU WILL
ESCAPE THE FATE OF ALL THE JEWS."

WE AMERICAN JEWS HAVE TO DO ALL THAT WE CAN
TO EASE THE BURDEN OF OUR PEOPLE IN ISRAEL. WE HAVE
TO GIVE TILL IT HURTS TO ISRAELI CAUSES, ESPECIALLY
THROUGH THE CHANNEL OF FEDERATION. WE HAVE TO

BUY ISRAELI BONDS. WE HAVE TO JOIN THE MAIN ORGANIZATIONS FIGHTING ANTI-SEMITISM HERE AND ABROAD LIKE THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE AND THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE. OF COURSE, WE REFORM JEWS MUST JOIN ARZA, THE AMERICAN REFORM ZIONIST ASSOCIATION. YOU CAN DO THAT THROUGH THE TEMPLE OFFICE. WE HAVE TO VISIT ISRAEL AND LEARN TO RELATE TO ITS PEOPLE MORE INTIMATELY.

LET ME CONCLUDE NOW WITH A STORY ABOUT GOLDA MEIR, THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL...WHEN PRIME MINISTER MEIR WAS SERVING IN THAT CAPACITY, SHE WAS INVITED TO SPEAK TO A CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN REFORM RABBIS BEING HELD IN ISRAEL. AFTER HER REMARKS, SHE ENCOURAGED THE RABBIS TO ASK HER QUESTIONS. A GROUP OF YOUNGER AND IDEALISTIC RABBIS IMMEDIATELY TOOK THE MICROPHONE. INSTEAD OF EXPRESSING SYMPATHY WITH ISRAEL AND COMPLIMENTING THE PRIME MINISTER ON THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE NEW STATE, THESE IDEALISTIC RABBIS, ONE AFTER ANOTHER, PLIED THE PRIME MINISTER

WITH QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE PROBLEMS OF THE PALESTINIANS IN RELATION TO ISRAEL. IN AFFECT, WHAT THEY WERE ASKING IS, “WHY WASN’T ISRAEL PERFECT? WHY HAS IT SEEMED TO FAIL IN HANDLING THIS SITUATION OR THAT ONE?”

IN AN EFFORT TO CHANGE THE TONE OF THE MEETING, I ASKED THE PRIME MINISTER, “MADAME PRIME MINISTER, WE WILL BE GOING HOME SOON TO REPORT TO OUR CONGREGATIONS. WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE US TELL THEM?” THE PRIME MINISTER REPLIED QUICKLY AND BRIEFLY. “TELL THEM,” SHE SAID, “TELL THEM TO REMEMBER WHO THEY ARE.” TELL THEM TO REMEMBER WHO THEY ARE.

WHAT DO YOU THINK SHE MEANT?