

Choosing What to Remember

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick on April 26, 2014

On Tuesday, May 6th, as part of our Yom Ha-Atzmaut celebration of Israel's independence, we will have Gil Hoffman here for a free lecture entitled, "Red States, Blue States and the Jewish State; Behind the Scenes with Netanyahu and Obama." Gil Hoffman is the chief political correspondent and analyst for The Jerusalem Post. Well-connected to Israeli and Palestinian leaders, Hoffman has interviewed every major figure across the Israeli political spectrum, has been interviewed by top media on six continents and is a regular analyst on CNN, Al-Jazeera and other news outlets. The timing of his visit could not have been better considering that The Palestinian Authority just this week decided to cast its lot with Hamas in coalition. All of Israel's agreements with the Palestinians are predicated upon their recognition of Israel's right to exist and forswearing the use of violence - two conditions that Hamas refuses to accept. I think Gil Hoffman's perspective will be most interesting, to say the least.

But on the other hand, it is in a very real sense, somewhat easy to know, at least on a broad/macro level, what Gil Hoffman is going to say. And that is not because he's not a gifted speaker. He is. And it's not because he's uninformed. He is an expert on Israeli affairs. In a sense we know, on the macro level, what he's going to speak about because Israel's problems haven't changed all that much over the last 10 years. Iran must not get a nuclear weapon - that is as true today as it was 10 years ago. The problem grows more urgent and frightening with each passing month, but the resolution doesn't change. When he says that Israel needs a real partner for peace, he'll be speaking the truth but it won't be news, even in light of what has happened in the last 48 hours. So what's the point in attending his talk? And furthermore, you are only one person. You don't live in Israel. You can't, or at least likely won't, go and fight in Israel's Defense Forces. So what's the point of coming to find out the latest information about what is happening in Israel and what is going on behind the scenes between Israel and the United States? Why do YOU need to be here?

Let me share two reasons with you: The first comes from the Torah itself. We just celebrated Pesach when our People began the journey to the Promised Land. And you'd assume, of course, that the journey isn't over until they get to Israel. But that's not true. Only nine and half tribes actually wanted to go into Israel. It's not that the other two and half - Reuven, Gad and half the tribe of Mennasheh couldn't go. They just said, "You know what, we are going to stay here. It's better for us outside the Land of Israel." And it may shock you that they didn't want to go to Israel even when they had the opportunity to do so but the truth is that this has been the pattern throughout Jewish history. It's called the Babylonian Talmud because even when the Jews had the chance to go back after the Babylonian Exile, a lot of us stayed. It was better for us, we said, to stay outside of the Land of Israel. And we American Jews, by and large, we do the same thing. We say to ourselves, "It's better to stay here", even though it has never been easier to move to Israel. So it should be no surprise that the same thing happened in the Torah itself. Some Jews went and some Jews didn't.

But we must remember what Moshe says to Reuven, Gad and the half tribe of Asher: He doesn't say "You can't stay there, you have to go to Israel..." He says, "OK, you can stay outside of the Land of Israel but on one condition: You have to fight for the Land." That is the tax, the price

you have to pay for living outside of the Land of Israel, he says. And what they owed back then we still owe today. You have to fight for the Land.

And what does fight for the Land mean? Today it means that in the absence of showing up, of moving there, you must at least fight by making sure that your voice is heard; that you are well equipped; that you can defend Israel, if not with weaponry then with words. But fighting for Israel also means coming together with people who share your values and then going out and finding more of the same. We fight for Israel when we help to educate good and loyal Americans who support Israel not because it is Jewish State, but because it shares America's values of freedom and democracy and public discourse. Understanding the intricacies of the issues arms us with the facts that will help us to build coalitions of like-minded people. Yours is not just one voice. Yours is the voice that can draw others closer to support and protect the State of Israel.

This week I officiated at the funeral of Pauline Steinberg, a lovely woman who was here in shul almost every Shabbos. Pauline liked to remind me that she and her husband were standing by their radios in 1948 when the State of Israel was declared; they fought back tears and then they danced and sang. And it's a great story, but it's also a poignant reminder: If we don't explain to people who did not grow up with the dream of the State, and I mean both Jews and Gentiles, then they will not know. They will not know how much Israel represents what we hold dear both as Americans and as Jews. We raise our voices again and again, not because the problems have changed so much, but because we have a moral responsibility to fight for Israel by means of education. That is a powerful weapon that you all can use. That's why we need to learn the issues time after time, year after year. It's our moral responsibility to use our voices in defense of the Land of Israel, that's how we fight for it. So you'll want to be here for Gil Hoffman a week from this Tuesday.

But there is another reason why we need to use our voices to defend the Jewish State, and that has to do with what's happening in this week to come. This Monday night our community will be holding our annual Yom Ha-Shoah, Holocaust Memorial service at the JCC. And if we have learned anything at all from our tragic fate it is that it is a sin and a crime for a Jew to remain silent. Come Monday night and you will hear what it was like when the world was silent. Our history is the most poignant and tragic reminder of what happens when there is evil in the world and it is met by silence. We cannot afford to be silent; not when it comes to educating others about Israel, and not when it comes to educating the world, starting with our own children and grandchildren, about what happened in the Holocaust. We must use our voice in defense of our own People.

But you can't do that from the sidelines. Your voices are not heard from there. You have to be in the game. You have to be continually learning and growing in your own understanding in order to better educate others. And that's why these programs that are held year after year are so very important...