

God bless Israel 5772 – 2011

Shana tova may God bless each of you with a sweet prosperous and healthy year. It is heart-warming to see you all here and I welcome both old and new faces and trust that you will utilise and appreciate our new seats and not fall asleep as I attempt to motivate and encourage you over the next hour or so.

I trust that the year has flown by, I know that life is hectic, we have all had good times and difficult times; set backs and advancements. We have shared simchas and loss but I am convinced that we do come out of it stronger and as better human beings. If we find it hard, what should we say to our brethren living in Israel? In addition to life's general challenges they have to deal with outside political pressures especially in the current UN climate. Somehow Israel maintains an upbeat optimism to life even if they have to contend with yet another antagonistic state next door. I guess you can't choose the neighbourhood that you live in. Herzl was right we should have chosen the Australian Kimberly's when it was offered.

An ElAl flight on the way to Israel " Would you like dinner what are my choices yes or no" as it was taxing at Ben Gurion a load of Aussies on board, the pilot announces welcome to Israel all those seated merry Christmas and to all those standing happy Chanukah A "take us to the wall where everyone is crying. So he takes him to the taxation office! Were starving they say - take me to a healthy restaurant I want to buy salad lean meat good vegetables looking forward to a healthy kosher meal. Eh....Ech omrim Mcdonald banglit!

We have witnessed a momentous event the creation of the state of Palestine. I welcome the state of Palestine. I welcome a state that will dwell in peace with its neighbours, a state that will be founded on the tenants of democracy. This does not just mean a state where you have elections to vote for one candidate; it means a state where democracy allows you to choose between two opposition parties; it means a state where you can have a change of government without blood shed on the streets. It also means a state where freedoms of religion gender and creed are guaranteed. It also means a country where both Jew and gentile can live.

I address this state on this day because sadly I do not think we will wind up with such a state. Sadly we do not yet know the outcome of the Arab spring uprisings of Tunisia Egypt Bahrain Libya Syria and now Yemen. We do not know; whether they are genuine quests for freedom or are they going to be a return to the dark ages of Fundamentalist Islam the Brotherhood and al Qaida.

I welcome the words Peace because Peace means the basic understanding that I recognise your right to exist and you recognise my right to exist. This is what peace minimally means.

We certainly know what a free Gaza means and we certainly know what a Hezbollah led Sth Lebanon means. What kind of state will Palestine be?

How does the world contemplate peace when Hamas remains committed as a matter of principal to the elimination of the State of Israel? If Palestinians had elections today then Hamas will not only rule in Gaza but they would be voted in the West bank as well and in Jerusalem. How can we have peace if missile attacks will emanate not just from Gaza but from the West Bank & Jerusalem as well. How can you have peace when both Hamas and Hezbolah continue to propagate to its children the

next generation vicious anti Semitic myths? How can you have peace with the often forgotten but continued constant threat of a nuclear Iran?

Until Hamas and Hezbollah who are representative of the Palestine peoples undergo fundamental change there may be a process, there may be a state there may be a UN vote and a UN declaration and resolution but the Palestinian state will be no better than Tunisia Egypt Bahrain Jordan Lebanon Syria and Yemen. It will be no better than Saudi Arabia and it will be no better than Dubai; a decadent state of sheiks and gold digging expats with an underclass of philipino Pakistani and asian working drones, Dubai is a state drowning in its own oil with no where to go and nothing to spend on. Especially after Israel will expand and develop its better place.

Have you heard of the listed company better place? Better Place is a venture capital backed Israeli company that aims to develop an electric car that will run on an electric grid swapping batteries much like having to go to the service station and buy petrol. It was primarily started to reduce global dependence on petroleum and to tackle emissions of carbon for climate change from cars. It had its beginning during an International think tank in 2001 when someone asked how can we make the world a better place by 2020. They answered by reducing the dependency of petrol cars. Well Israel is well on the road; excuse the pun, to making the world a better place by 2012, next year. Israel has already developed this electric car called better place so if you want to make the world a better place then invest in better place and travel the path of the electric car coming to a site near you soon. Canberra will be the first Australian city to trial the better place car. So if you are like me you can day dream about your travels along those scenic green highways of clean air where the windows can be wound down and you will be able to breathe the fragrance and aroma of how nature meant it to be and not the belching blackness of petrol emissions.

50 years ago Martin Luther King delivered that memorable speech August 28 I have a dream. I have a dream he said that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: that all men negro and white are created equal." I have a dream That the sons of slaves and the sons of owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that America will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

Well; we too have a dream today!

I have a dream that there will come a time when both Israelis and Palestinians will rise up and live out the creed that all men are created equal. That the sons of Jews and sons of Arabs will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that Israel; and Palestine will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that we will see the end of suicide bombers. I have a dream that gilad Shalit will be released. 63 years ago after the Holocaust the dream came true. We fulfilled the dream of the establishment of the State of Israel a state where all men are created equal and where the government is of the people by the people for the people. These words resonate strongly because it is the idea that all men are created in the image of God that no ruler is above the law and that everyone is entitled to justice. The greatest dreamer of them all Theodore Herzl in 1880 in the first Zionist Congress professed this dream. But he said it a little different he said Im tirzu ain zu agada . If you will it tis no dream!

I have a dream of a better place. I have a dream of a two state solution. Two states where Jews live in Israel and Arabs in Palestine, but where Jew can travel to Palestine and Arabs to Israel without fear or favour. However what is evolving now with Palestinian determination at this moment is the advent of a subtle but dangerous change. What we are seeing now is a tone of double speak of flowery words and intricate secrecy it is a universal claim one that tugs at the heart and pounds at the emotions and sounds good to the ears. Now no more do we hear of a two state solution; two states for two people but now we hear the cry emanating; one state for one people! Law of return. Let us live together in brotherhood they say, let us transform this place to a single oasis of justice and freedom let us not judge each other by the colour of our skin but by the content of our character let us have one state for one people, let us live together . Subtly and slowly they plot the demise and ruin of the modern state of Israel. They use the forces and arguments and inherent weaknesses of our democracy to undermine and defeat democracy through itself. Self inflicted pain. They use our own emotions of compassion sympathy care and consideration to terminally wound the life of our own home. By agitating for one state for one people they endeavour to bring about the end of a Jewish home by default. What it means that Israel will vote itself out of existence. Israel will cease to exist.

However I am much heartened by the recent proclamation of Palestine it has become good news, for unwittingly, the line has been drawn in the sand. It is now bleeding obvious that there will be two states for two people and Israel the Jewish state is here to stay. Israel is not afraid of this outcome; because right now Israel has more than 1 million Muslim citizens that enjoy full democratic rights with 12 Arab members of the Knesset. Israel is the only Middle East country where Christians are completely free to practise their faith. That is why only a united Jerusalem in a Jewish Israel can be trusted to be there for all faiths.

The Bible our Torah loves Israel. Throughout it is called the land of milk and honey, Throughout it is called Zion the land of our hopes (Hatikvah) heck we wandered for 40 years in the the Sinai desert just to get there, why 40 years you ask, because men never like to ask for directions, ever since we have been kicking ourselves , if only Moses would have gone right instead of left we could have landed up in Saudi Arabia and had us all that oil. The Bible praises the topography of Israel from Hermon in the north down to Kinneret and down the Jordan to the Dead Sea and Masada and down to Solomons Eilat ; back up to Goliaths Gaza the Mediterranean Sea Haifa and Rosh Hanikrah. The Bible praises its people and its fruit. In the Grace after meals we quote the biblical verse from Deuteronomy 8:10 “you shall eat and be satisfied and you shall bless the land which has been given to you”

This verse is the source of making a blessing after food and for saying grace after meals. But the blessing is strange because instead of blessing God for the food we are thanking him for the land. The verse reads you shall bless the land that has been given to you. Why bless the land? What has the land got to do with it?

May I suggest an answer in light of current world perception of Israel. It used to be that Israel was the darling of the world we were the underdogs; and post the Holocaust the UN voted for partition, and Israel came to be. The UN recognised that peoples and nations were distinctive and different and that diverse peoples made up the countries of the world. We celebrate our differences and cultures by involvement and membership as member states of the UN. The whole world understood

that there had to be a safeguarded from another Holocaust and the Jews deserved their own place of their own to call home.

Now however the paradigm (theory) of the West has changed. It is becoming increasingly apparent that world view is less Nationalistic and separatist and becoming more global. We now talk about a global GFC and a global war on climate a global war about food production and global approach to water security. To bad we can't have a global Carbon Tax!

Rather than National rights we now speak of universal rights rather than individual governments we speak of a World Government Going back to the days of the George Orwell's 1984.

The most powerful example of this Universalism is the European Union in which countries like Germany France and the UK are losing their identities and national histories and pride in favour of a more universal culture and Euro. In this context Israel has become an anachronism (relic). Why do we need a separate Israel in a Middle East? Let there be one state and one country. The rhetoric is even stronger Israeli Nationalism makes it into an apartheid and fascist state.

But Europe is the prime example that Universalism does not work. Portugal is not the same as Norway and Spain is not France and Britain well Britain is not like Turkey. Indeed in the current climate, the European Union is lying down dead before the steady march of Islam. Furthermore the former despotic face of the universal Soviet Union which collapsed to separate cultural and ethnic entities is proof positive that Universalism, does not work.

Now, no where is this more apparent than with food. Food the source of life, it is an expression of cultural separatism; different nations have different and distinctive foods. Italy is famous for pasta and France for its wines; Sth Africa Bourwos; Hungarian goulash; Poles sweet gefilte fish; the Aussie meat pie and Israeli Humus. One of our Board members is going to put on an Israeli night and Zvika is going to teach us how to make Humus!! The more humus the better.

The land of Israel is unique, it is one big felafel shop and that is why during Grace after meals we bless the land, because every land is unique and different and we thank God for our diversity and differences, we thank God for our distinctive humanness we thank God whether white or black Ashkenaz or Sefard, Chasidic secular we are all created in Gods all encompassing image. And that is why we bless the land during Grace after meals.

Not far from modern Dubai in the ancient land Iraq there arose the Biblical Dubai it was called the Tower of Babel. The story of the Tower of Babel goes like this, that all of mankind was united under one government one people, one state one language. 'Let us go and build a tower to the sky much like today's modern Dubai's 100 story skyscraper to no where.' Yet with all the good intentions the Tower of Babel was a disaster because trying to mould every person to think alike, look speak and feel alike is like trying to have a kolkhoz Soviet union and it does not work; when God created the human being as a single Adam, the testimony to the greatness of God was that God could mint many people from that same Adam and not one of them was similar. Every Adam born is an individual unique and different. Our torah is a kaleidoscope; it does not profess or demand uniformity and fundamentalism. Our Israel, too, is different, it has its own flag, its own anthem; and it takes its place amongst the nations of the world; the world needs a strong Israel and the Middle East needs a strong Israel even more so! The world needs nation states like our Israel.

How proud I was to learn that members of our congregation were at the forefront of the battle against the abhorrent BDS Boycott Divestment Sanctions of Israel. I heard stories of night riding putting up signs and placards against the Green candidate of Marrickville. There Phil Levy was slinking away in the night; he did not just advocate but he agitated against the Green candidate of Marrickville, there he was Shabbos morning not in shule with his signs and placards in Marrickville, I heard there is a cheap Aldis in Marrickville. Then you had our Shirlee Finn, she was screaming down the rafters at Randwick Council no BDS no BDS, her husband Lou was happy, he was watching TV at home and meanwhile the local Liberal member Bruce Notley smith has Shirlee's phone no. on his speed dial in case of an emergency. Then I switched on Tv and saw Geoff Weinberger advocating the state of Israel outside a Max Brenner coffee shop. We at Coogee shule played our part too. We made sacrifices as well; we also had to do with out, Coogee Synagogue along with all other Lechaim clubs suffered. L"chaim clubs world wide in every shule of which we are part of each Friday night placed our own Boycott on Chivers Regal. Chiver's is a scotch whiskey which is distilled and manufactured in a council region in Scotland called West Dunbartonshire who placed a BDS on Israel. So Lechaim clubs around the world united, and we did the reverse BDS on them! It was tough, I am not saying it was easy but Phil had to return 6 x 1 litre bottles of Chivers and swapped them for Jonnie Walker. Our biggest sufferance by far however was from Paul Lindsey, you see Paul has this thing wherever he goes in every shop in every Westfield, he searches out Israeli products. Paul even buys the Dead Sea skin products, have you seen Pauls skin; but he does it for Israel he has to buy Israeli products; BDS according to him stands for, buy; dish out; splash out; on Israeli products. So Shabbos afternoon he comes to shule with a paper bag and as we sit down for shalosh sudos he pulls out this terrible Israeli Vodka, no body drinks it, just me and him; now you know why he has skin like that and I have so much hair; there we are together drinking away our sorrow why do we have to drink this rubbish! Whilst every one else is on Johnnie walker or Jamison.

Is Palestine going to become the ancient Tower of Babel; a civilisation united in its fundamentalism; a civilisation of sameness; a civilisation where they cried from the minarets lets build a tower for the glory of God, lets climb to heaven lets become Gods; Allah Akbar they cried, or is Palestine going to emulate Israel and bring heaven down to earth; only time will tell what type of society will be built.

In the mean time Israel stands tall and proud, we are not perfect but nor is any Western democracy. But we are striving to make the world a better place.

Israel is a tiny country surrounded by large empires a nation of indomitable courage. Israel's enemies underestimate its strength. Israel wins its battles because of its extraordinary morale, In Israel; social solidarity is the nation's best long term defence. Israel is strong because it never ceases from believing in the future. After the Holocaust we never stopped believing in the future. Israel needs courage, conviction; and it has this in spades; perhaps more so Israel needs strong prophets and Rabbis to live and breathe renewal moral energy and hope; It needs Rabbis' to restate hope again and again to live and breath the dream, to never ever give up on the future

I conclude by wishing you all - Next year in Jerusalem – and I agree whole heartedly with that but how about, perhaps, for the year after, lets all go on a nice long cruise. Shana Tova