

In our psalms we find these words: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, may those who love her prosper". For the last 11 days we have been holding our breaths as missiles and rockets have exploded over Israel, reaching into Tel Aviv and Lod, into the southern part of the state. We have watched as Israeli firepower has sought to cripple Hamas in Gaza, knowing that with every rocket launch, destruction was befalling Palestinians there and the knowing that rockets turn into body counts. The cycle of violence, of hatred, aggression, and animosity is nothing new. And our response as Jews-- the American response, the world response-- is nothing new either. Anti-Israel rhetoric, local rallies- even violence as we saw against Jewish diners in LA, by pro-Palestinians, every bit is predictable. Thankful for a cease fire, we know that it is not over. There will be a next time. There is always a next time. But, does there have to be a next time?

In Israel there is an important political phrase, called "status quo". Leave everything as it is, because to move one playing piece on the board will mean other pieces have to move and things will get out of control- there is power to be lost, god forbid. And status quo has been the de facto position in Israel for 50 years.

But the truth is- nothing stays the same. You can remain unchanging in the appearance of status quo, but that does not mean that people's attitudes or behaviors or understandings are not changing day after day, year after year. Israel of 2021 is not Israel of 2000, or 1967. Palestinians are not the same. Israelis are not the same. We are not the same. The status quo no longer holds things in place, in fact it creates dangerous consequences.

Rob Eshman, national editor of the Forward, writes in a powerful editorial this week "It is all so predictable. The hot war over there is fought as a proxy war over here, with the pro-Israel and anti-Israel sides duking it out over the media, all over social media, and in city streets... ..but what if we on this side of the globe just stopped? The best way for us in America to help ... is to change the object of our obsession. Instead of waving the flag for our respective sides, we should ask: what can be done to advance the cause of reconciliation?.. We here in America are wasting our time and money on partisanship when we should be focused on the many voices of reconciliation on both sides. Israeli and Palestinians have no choice but to reconcile in the land they share. I understand that we easily fall into sides because this is a tribal conflict. But the Israelis and Palestinians do not need us to fight their battles, they need us to fight for their battles to end."

That is a challenge for us- for us to "not fight their battles but fight for their battles to end" means that we would have to bring a new heart to the situation in Israel, a heart that did not automatically reinforce the status quo, or the same unchanging positions we have held for 50 years, of looking to assign blame, point fingers, or justify actions, or villainize the other side.

What if we were to recognize that to leave the status quo means to work for peace and justice, and that when we speak of Peace and justice, we may be talking of two different strategies, for two very different Arab conditions. It is not peace that is needed but **justice** that is needed for Israeli Arabs. As we are understanding more and more in our own country, policies that do not treat all citizens equitably are unjust. Israel needs to stop saying there is no Palestinian people, that they do not exist and that they do not deserve a country, says Retired

Lt. Gen. Noam Tibon, who has spent a career working closely with Palestinian leadership, who I heard speak this week in a small seminar. There are real issues of justice that need to be addressed for Israeli Arabs, from education, to unemployment, to economic support for Arab cities, and the issue of building permits and evictions from Arab neighborhoods. Justice looks like putting Arab parties in the Knesset, and allowing them to be part of a coalition government. The experience of coronavirus has been powerful on Israelis, said Lt.-Gen. Tibon. Watching Israeli Arab doctors and nurses in Israeli hospitals care for Jewish patients moved the needle for the Israeli public, to see their presence and their concerns as more legitimate. We must find a way to bring them inside Israeli society, he said, changing the status quo that Arabs are treated as second class citizens, to seeing Palestinians as a problem not as people. This is how Israel moves toward a more just society for its citizens- without sacrificing democracy, nor being a Jewish state.

And it is **peace** that is a priority to be achieved with Palestinians who live in the West Bank and in Gaza, which is a very different challenge than creating an equitable society within Israel for Palestinians who are Israeli. Peace must be a process of negotiated self-interest, of countries holding Israelis and Palestinians accountable and responsible, with economic enticements. It is no secret that the parties involved in this recent conflict are corrupt leaders- the Prime Minister of Israel faces ongoing corruption charges, the leaders of the PA, Mahmud Abbas and Hamas' Ismail Haniyeh are corrupt. The exacerbation of this conflict through the month of Ramadan was most certainly rooted in Netanyahu's shrinking support, Hamas' shrinking support through peaceful years, and through Mahmud Abbas's fears that his support was shrinking and predictions that he would not win Palestinian elections which he then canceled. Creating peace must be about setting consequences in place that restrict the whims of any one powerful leader. Historically trusted international peacemakers like the United States and Egypt are key to leveraging Israeli and Palestinian wants and also messaging to the world so as to also break the status quo cycle of the usual pro-Israel and anti-Israel voices, and holding both Israelis and Palestinians publicly accountable. Perhaps this is part of the status-quo cycle America has to break- giving money into the hands of corrupt leaders. Peace may not be justice, and reconciliation may not be the outcome, but allowing a generation to live in peace may be a good first step.

As Rabbi Michael Weinberg, of ARZA , the Association of Reform Zionists of America, writes this week, to understand the Israeli-conflict is to set aside our responses of good and evil and, set aside our understand of Israel's politics through the lens of American politics, and understand that this conflict is very nuanced. After more than 50 years, I am ready to follow the sage advice that insanity is to do the same thing over and over and expect different results. I cannot fall into usual rhetoric of support or condemnation, of reducing this conflict to black and white, to good and evil, to Jew and Arab. There are moderate Arabs who seek peace, just as there are extremist Jews who are racist to the core, stoking Jewish fears of annihilation. We cannot move forward by looking backward. We can only move forward by taking our fears and , in the words of Reb Nachman of Breslov, understanding that the whole world is a narrow bridge and the most important part is not to be afraid. Let's pray for the peace of Jerusalem, so that all her residents may prosper. But let's do more than pray, more than defend and attack- let's start to walk across that narrow bridge so that indeed those who live in our beloved Israel can pray, walk, live and love in a country at peace.