

Israel Talk: GJC-Rosh Hashanah 2023: " Grab my Arm!I will save you!"

In 2014 my rabbinical association had its one and only trip to Israel. It took place in the summer and it was during the Gaza war. Until the last moment we were unsure if the trip would happen at all but we all persevered and the trip was on. It was thrilling for me to be in Israel with my colleagues and to see the country with such wise and thoughtful rabbis. There was not one day of our time together that at some point we didn't have to go into a shelter or look for cover as the sirens were happening consistently and we saw the Iron Dome take many rockets literally out of the sky. Towards the end of the trip Ben Gurion Airport was on the brink of closing and most of my colleagues scrambled to get out of Israel before that happened. I was unable to get on a flight out of Israel in time.

In 2014, only one of my daughters lived in Israel so it was fine with me....I thoughtto have several days added to be with her especially during such a fraught moment. So after all of my colleagues left I gathered up my belongings and moved into Emily's apartment in Old North Tel Aviv. At that time she was still a lawyer in the Justice Ministry....so during the days I was on my own to negotiate my time living in an Israel at war. Emily would review all of the things I needed to know with me each day as she left for work and we kept in very close contact. And, I did venture out each day on my own to accomplish my motherly errands for my daughter....trying to keep things seemingly normal like all of the Israelis I was encountering.

I want to take you with me on one particular morning outing....it will illustrate, I believe how we continue to need to keep our connection with Israel vital and alive. For my daughters having mother or parents visiting offers the luxury of having someone to " make life a bit easier" by doing certain errands for them even during the war! So I planned my route well for how to accomplish everything in the most efficient and hopefully safe manner that morning. I set out to Kikar Ha medina a circular outdoor shopping area and was totally absorbed in my own thoughts when I felt a hand on my arm grabbing me inside of his store..." Giveret...I see you are not Israeli and you did not pay attention to the Siren...come to the back of my shop and you will stay here until all is clear! Sit, I will give you a cup of water and explain what you need to be careful of!"so he and I got to know each other a bit as he became my teacher sharing how I was to conduct myself as I was here with my daughter during a war. He was kind and considerate and understood that he had to help to keep me safe near his territory. When the "all clear" was obvious I thanked him profusely and took off to the next stop with more knowledge.

Less than ten minutes latter there was another siren and now I was aware of it...but now there was an older women coming out of the beauty parlor with curlers in her hair grabbing at me and saying " run with me I will take you to the shelter!" And so, I followed on her tail into the apartment building around the corner with the door wide open to the shelter in the building. The shelter was full of a variety of people and somehow all of them fixed their sights on me....seeing that I was the novice here and in a mix of Hebrew and English they each told me a bit of advice on staying out of harms way. There was truly a mix of all of Israel sitting together in the shelter, elders, young mothers with babies, shop keepers,

tenants in the apartment building....everyone looking out for each other.....and this unschooled American mother now their new responsibility.

KOL YISRAEL AREVIM ZEH LAZEH.....all of Israel became responsible for every other

In that one short walk I felt the power of these words. The ones that grabbed my arm repeatedly understood that we all share a common destiny and we need one another and thus we must be responsible for the safety and the good of the other.....for all of humanity especially in Israel we must be ready to grab the arm of anyone we see who is oblivious to danger.....

We are living and watching a treacherous and concerning time for our family in Israel whatever position you may support concerning our homeland, it is clear that it approaches a dangerous precipice....

I FEEL PERSONALLY THAT I WANT TO GRAB ISRAEL BY the ARM and PULL IT INTO A SAFE REFUGE...if only I could..

I believe that the myriad voices and people out on the streets in Israel attest to the fact that Israel's destiny matters in an existential fashion to everyone who lives there....they must be together out in the streets shouting, and protesting to allow Israel to continue to be ...just to be....it must be!

And this gives me hope.....its like the arm pulling us back from the edge.....I pray

I have joined them on the streets on Motzei Shabbat....as Shabbat goes out...those same folks who grabbed me to safety....I hope to show them I care for their continued safety....

I feel inspired by watching so many people....such diversity....united to assure Israel stays vital....they live each week understanding their responsibility at this time....

The most recent demonstrations in Jerusalem have re-branded themselves their motto being:

Shomrim al habayit mishuteff.....

“ Guarding our Shared Home” ...”shared” being the operative word here!

I include each and every one of us in this “sharing” we are the brothers and sisters who must
Join our arms to guard our house.

I cannot grab Israel by its arm....but I can lend my presence to the need for its existenceand the existence of all of those who live in the land. We read in Torah that we are not to stand idly by the blood of your fellow man.....and thus it speaks loudly to all of us, at this time.

So what can we do now to traverse this time....how can each of us Grab the arm of the other...grab onto Israel?

1. We must continue to educate ourselves concerning the situation that exists currently in this time of crisis....it is complicated but we must read and discuss and try to help each other to know the meaning of what is transpiring.
2. We need to remain in relationship with our homeland....now it is more important than ever....we can not turn away out of disgust or frustration.....no we must each ask ourselves how can I grab the arm....in my own way and allow for a means of safety for my people

3. Find the organization that represents the positions that you feel most connected to in Israel....for Israel is a wondrous country that has so many good causes to assure its ongoing life
4. Let us grab onto each other.....and continue to discuss and learn together here at GJC about how best to understand and support Israel....we need each other and realize that if one of us is in trouble...in this case Israel....we must join together to repair what is broken.

On our last night in Israel in February the Cooper family sat together and watched Issac Herzog, President of Israel give an unprecedented speech begging the two sides of this current struggle that is coming from within Israel to find a way to compromise....to talk, to agree that the fate of Israel was what was most important.....surpassing the "rightness" of any one position.....we all watched as his hands shook as he talked....and we wept together, all of us ,for the fear we felt....

He ended his remarks with the words of the Psalmist from Psalm 29: a psalm we recite when we return the Torah to the ark....

יְהוָה עָזַז אֲזְמוֹתַי יְהוָה יַרְבֵּק יִהְיֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַשְׁלוֹם

God impart strength to Israel

God bless all of the people in Israel with peace

My hand reaches out to Israel and prays that today they can find a way back to peace.

Amen