

Sermon For Yom Kippur Afternoon
September 18, 2010 - 10 Tishri, 5771
Temple Beth El of Boca Raton
By Rabbi Daniel Levin

The national anthem of the State of Israel is the well known song called HaTikva. HaTikva means "The Hope". The words were written by a poet named Naftali Imber, a Jew who emigrated to Palestine from Galicia. He wrote these words upon joining the newly established community called Petach Tikva - literally "The Gateway of Hope". In a nine-stanza poem called "Tikvateinu - Our Hope", Imber reflected on his hope that one day the land of Israel, our ancient homeland, would be a where our people could live in freedom and peace.

Imber moved to Rishon L'Tzion, another development town, where he met a man named Samuel Cohen, who took his poem and set it to music, based on a theme in Smetana's "Moldau" that is partly based on a Scandinavian folk song. The words were massaged, and by 1905 at the seventh World Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, it was adopted as the anthem of the Zionist movement.

Hatikva - התקווה

Kol Od Baleivav Penima,
Nefesh Yehudi Homiyah.
U-L'fatei Mizrach Kadima
Ayin L'Tziyon Tzofiyah.

כָּל עוֹד בְּלִבָּב פְּנִימָה
נֶפֶשׁ יְהוּדֵי הוֹמִיָּה
וּלְפָאֵתֵי מִזְרַח קְדִימָה
עֵין לְצִיּוֹן צוֹפִיָּה.

Od Lo Avdah, Tikvateinu
HaTikvah Sh'not Alpayim.
Lih'yot Am Chofshi B'Artzeinu
B'Eretz Tziyon, Virushalyaim.

עוֹד לֹא אֲבָדָה תְּקוּוֹתֵנוּ,
הַתְּקוּוֹה שְׁנוֹת אֲלָפִים,
לְהִיּוֹת עִם חֻפְשֵׁי בְּאֶרֶצֵנוּ,
בְּאֶרֶץ צִיּוֹן וְרוּשָׁלַיִם.

So long as still within the inmost heart
A Jewish spirit sings,
So long as forward, to the east,
The eye gazes toward Zion,
Our hope is not lost -
The hope of two millenia,
To be a free people in our land,
The land of Zion and Jerusalem.

So it is now, two millennia since the onset of our exile, that we are home. I first visited Israel in 1981, and when I lived in there in 1989, Israel was still a developing country, filled with hope and promise. And hope was central to my experience living at Hebrew University. Why? Because every morning, as I got into the shower, which consisted of a simple pipe extending out of the concrete wall, I hoped there would be at least a little hot water.

Last summer I had the privilege of touring Israel with forty people from our community, ranging in age from eight to ninety-one years old. And while there is still a lot of building going on in Israel, Israel no longer feels like a developing country. It is developed. The cities sparkle with modern hotels, hip architecture, and gleaming skyscrapers. The streets are filled with people. Even in this difficult global economic down-turn Israel's economy is growing at a healthy 4.15 percent. Israel is pioneering amazing technologies in medicine, agriculture, and telecommunications. And Israel is poised to be one of the first countries that will create a completely integrated system for commercial electric cars, which beginning in 2011, will begin a transformation of the country's transportation system to eventually consist almost entirely of electric automobiles.

So why is it that hope seems to be in such short supply in Israel? Why is it that when we count our own blessings, hope sometimes seems to be in such short supply for us?

What is hope? Charles Elliott Vernoff, professor of Religion at Cornell College of Iowa, explains that there is a close relationship between hope and faith. We have a covenant with God, a relationship based on a reciprocal trust that we will follow God, and therefore God will follow us.¹ But there are times when it seems like God isn't following us. There are times when God seems entirely distant, even absent, and we feel all alone, having been left to fend for ourselves.

We gather here this afternoon for Yizkor, our annual pilgrimage to find some answer from God to the question of loss. Some of us come to honor a loved one, to prove to God, to them, to ourselves that memory is not lost, and our love remains true. Some come to find a sense of comfort, to look to our tradition for some measure of balm that will help us to heal from our

¹ "Hope" by Charles Elliott Vernoff in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr, eds. New York: The Free Press, 1987.

wounds. Still others come to find a way to soften the callouses that have formed around our souls. To recover from loss, we grew a thickening around our hearts, to protect us from the pain and the ache, and we come to this safe place, this sanctuary, to find a way to express the pain we keep hidden.

Each of us who has experienced a loss knows what it is to have hope unrequited. We know what it is to sit in the waiting room, filled with hope that the therapy, the surgery, the treatment will restore our loved-ones to life. And when our expectations are transformed into disappointment, we grapple with how to move forward. When our loved ones depart from us, and our hopes are dashed, in what can we place our hope and faith for the future?

This is the question I think that Israelis have been asking themselves for years. Since the creation of the modern State of Israel, a state whose foundation is hope itself, we have hoped for many things. We have hoped for prosperity. We have hoped to be recognized among the community of nations. We have hoped our neighbors will lay down their weapons and grasp our hand in friendship. We have hoped to find a way for the entirety of the Jewish people, who come from so many different lands and who understand God's covenant with us in so many different ways, to feel at one with each other. We have hoped we could be a free, democratic, and modern state, true to our Jewish heritage, and a light to the nations.

But over the years, our hopes have not been realized. We have fought bloody and difficult wars for our independence, wars to maintain our security, wars in self-defense, and wars to root out terrorist threat. Nearly twenty five percent of Israel's citizens, and nearly thirty six percent of Israel's children, live below the poverty line. Israel remains the most chastised nation in the world at the United Nations, and still suffers from all manner of trade restrictions and boycotts. Israel's people remains splintered, not simply between Jew and Muslim and Christian, but between secular, religious, and ultra-orthodox.

And that sense of hopelessness can be seen and heard among Israelis. When asked about the current resurgence of the peace process, many Israelis say they have no expectation for its success. They have been disappointed too many times. In 2000, when Israel brought the most comprehensive peace offer in history to the Palestinians at Camp David, the response was a violent uprising where discotheques, pizza restaurants, cafes and seder dinners were turned to scenes of incomprehensible carnage. In 2006, when Israel unilaterally left the Gaza strip, the response was a barrage of thousands of crude missiles and mortar attacks on the neighboring cities and towns. Where

Israeli universities open their doors to students from across the spectrum, and where the free flow of ideas and political critique crackle in the air, they are met with academic boycotts and slurs. When the world meets to discuss the scourage of racism, Israel, whose democracy allows even the election to its parliament those who seek its very destruction, is singled out for the world's condemnation. And then this last summer, when a so-called humanitarian mission from Turkey sought to violate Israel's legal naval blockade of Gaza, Israel's peaceful attempts at intercept were met with premeditated violence, and Israel again finds itself alone among the condemned.

So Israelis have come to believe that hope is a luxury they cannot afford. They build their businesses, raise their children, arm their military, and go about their business. They have learned that they must rely on themselves and themselves alone to survive in a hostile world.

And we who have suffered and lost, we who have reason to lose hope as well, do we believe that hope is a luxury we can't afford? Will we turn hopelessly inward, and learn from our losses that all we can depend on is ourselves?

The walls we build around ourselves, be they the walls we build around the Jewish state or the walls we build around our Jewish hearts may help us find a temporary sense of safety and security, but they will keep out the faith and hope that will ultimately lead to our salvation. As Rabbi David Wolpe wrote in his book *Making Loss Matter*, "being safe is the opposite of being saved."²

Faith, Rabbi Wolpe writes, is the belief that what we see is not all there is to see. And as faith invites us to believe in that which we cannot prove, hope asks us to believe in a world we have yet to see.

If Israel is truly to be the consummation of two millennia of Jewish dreams, and if we are truly to heal from the pain of our losses, then we cannot give up the hope for a life and a world redeemed.

The Hebrew word Shalom is based on the root Shin, Lamed, Mem, which means complete. There is peace in our world when we feel a unity of our hearts and our mind, of our selves and our spirits, of our dreams for our world and the reality in which we live. It was that way once when the world was born, it was that way when we met God at Sinai, and at so many other moments along the way.

² David Wolpe. *Making Loss Matter*. New York: Riverhead books, 1999.

This last year we celebrated our son, Ari's Bar Mitzvah. I am so grateful that so many of you shared that special day with us. It was, without question, one of the most joyful and spiritually fulfilling experiences of my life. Ever since my father passed I wondered what it would feel like to celebrate that day without him. I wondered how the celebration would be diminished, what his absence would take away from the joy of the day.

But I came to realize something much different. Rather than the pain of his absence detracting from the celebration, it was the life he had lived that proved to be the foundation on which we built a day that lacked nothing. It was not his absence we noted, but on the contrary, it was his presence that we felt. We turned our thoughts away from what was missing and turned toward a grand appreciation for what we had been given, and what we would see built on the foundation that had been laid for us.

The State of Israel faces the same choice. It can retire to the security of its walls, or it can create a hopeful future on the foundation that has been laid by those who built it. It can declare that faith and hope are lost, or it can seek to restore its faith and hope and keep a vigilant eye out for new opportunities for growth and peace. We can look to what we have lost, or we can search for what there is still to find.

One way we can help Israel rebuild its sense of hope and faith is to invest in Israel, to invest in hope, to invest in our dreams for the land and people of Israel. Take this opportunity to invest in a State of Israel bond. Let your investment be part of your own savings, or give the gift of a State of Israel bond to Temple Beth El. Mark your calendars for our State of Israel bonds dinner honoring Jill and Alan Slootsky and Lisa and Andrew Zwick on Monday November 8.

In this new year, I pray that we will seek to rekindle the light of hope in our lives. I pray that in the New Year we will seek to build new life on the foundation of goodness we built with those we have loved and lost. I pray that Israel will return to its roots, that it will rekindle the light of hope a hope of two millennia, L'hiyot Am Chofshi B'Artzeinu. B'Eretz, Tziyon, V'Yerushalayim - To be a free people in our land, The land of Zion and Jerusalem.