

After the Deal, Time to Heal

Okay, since we are in the time of confession and contrition, I have to admit to something which may make some of you quite upset. I'm sorry about that, but I have to admit to something that is, frankly, a bit un-American. I have to confess that I am not a big fan of Disney. Yes, yes, I have been Disney World, dutifully endured the various Disney Broadway shows, and watched the classic cartoons with the kids. Not great, not terrible, just *meh!* And perhaps I did enjoy watching the Disney hour on Sunday nights way back in the 60s when it was sort of required viewing because it was one of the first television shows in Technicolor. Of course, maybe my lack of enthusiasm for Disney is rooted in the until recently suppressed memory that one of my jobs as oldest boy was to hold the rabbit ear antennae that rested uneasily on top of that old television in the fleeting hope that the rest of the gang could enjoy decent reception. Those old TVs radiated heat and apparently some lethal doses of other contaminants, so perhaps those tortured memories have twisted me against Disney. Maybe. But whatever it is, I am just not a fan.

A few weeks ago Susan and I were in New York, Times Square, taking in the sights and sounds of Broadway. Kids were flocking to people dressed as Disney characters and other cartoon heroes. Parents and friends dutifully took pictures and shelled out some cash as tips. (As a side note, stiff one of those characters and they'll give you a very un-Disney-like earful.) From a distance it all looks cute and wonderful. But let's face it. Some schlemiel is inside that giant Minnie Mouse costume. It's August in Manhattan, people! It's 90 degree, sea-level humidity hot and inside that costume

they are sweating bullets. Look past the fluffy, colorful fur, past the smiling mask and some poor shlump is soaking wet and miserable. Behind the mask, behind the flash, behind the façade, beyond the hope and fantasy, real human lives are suffering a harsher reality.

So, by now you must be asking, “What in the world does any of this have to do with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the agreement the United States, Russia, China, England and France made with Iran?” Well, let me continue and you’ll draw your own conclusions!

The controversial Iran Nuclear deal will apparently become American policy. As most of you know, I was hoping that this deal with Iran would be defeated so a much better deal could be negotiated. The majority of Congress agree that this deal is so deeply flawed that it should be rejected. Polls show that a solid majority of Americans agree that the deal should be rejected. A majority of Jews and Jewish organizations agree that the deal should be rejected and a much better deal negotiated. Even many of the deal’s most ardent supporters acknowledge that it has serious inadequacies. For goodness sakes, even the President of the United States admitted that he does not trust the Iranians to obey their end of the deal. His confidence in the deal is based on his belief that the snapback provisions and ongoing economic leverage that we possess will keep the Iranians within an acceptable boundary of compliance.

For those of you who have not been riveted to the particulars of this agreement, let me offer a brief summary. Note that the agreement is readily available online and is actually no more than about 73 pages, followed by several pages listing companies that

will no longer be under sanctions or restricted from certain business deals. On reading it, the first thing you'll be struck by is the very uplifting and positive message.

In the very beginning of the document, in both the Preface and the Preamble, it is stated clearly that the Iranians are agreeing to only using nuclear power for peaceful purposes and that they will not build a nuclear weapon. Okay, that's pretty significant. Isn't it? And backing up that agreement, there are 24/7 anytime, anyplace inspections. Well, that should help us all sleep easier! And just to ensure that the Iranians don't pull a fast one on us, the agreement has snapback provisions for the dreaded economic sanctions. Those sanctions brought the Iranian economy to its knees. Those sanctions are the very reason the Iranians were willing to negotiate in the first place. No way the Iranians would ever want those sanctions back so, for sure, they'll live up to their end of the bargain.

So, what's not to like? Well, it all looks great until you look behind the promises and the hope and discover a very unsettling reality.

First, let's look at the 24/7 anytime, anywhere inspections. Well, we can look, but we won't find it. In fact, the agreement does not give us anytime, anywhere inspections. The truth can be found both in the actual text of the agreement as well as in the side agreement Iran made with the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency). The text restricts the inspections to some of the known Iranian nuclear development sites, but other important installations are excluded. And far from anytime, the text actually provides a window of up to 24 days from the time of a request for an inspection to the time that inspection can take place.

Okay, okay, what does it matter? In the end, if the Iranians are playing fast and loose with the inspectors and we catch them red-handed, well, we'll just re-impose those economic sanctions. No problem! Well, it's sort of a problem. In fact, the major rebuttal against those who oppose this deal with the Iranians is the claim that the current economic sanctions against Iran can no longer be maintained. Supporters of the Iranian deal claim that the financial interests of the Russians, Chinese and Europeans are so great that those sanctions cannot be maintained. So, following their logic: since it is too hard for our allies to maintain the current sanctions, we have no chance to get them to go back and renegotiate a better deal with the Iranians. Let's examine this for a second. We can't renegotiate this well-intentioned but obviously flawed deal because the sanctions which brought the Iranians to the negotiating table in the first place will be too hard to reestablish. But if the Iranians flake out on the deal, after receiving their \$50-150 billion in released funds and after sealing lucrative business deals with the Chinese, the Russians, and the Europeans, well, it will be easy-peasy to reinstitute those sanctions. What? You mean, after the Iranians are swimming in cash and the so called agreement partners are all comfy in their own spot along the slop trough that snapback sanctions will really be a snap?

When you wish upon a star;
Makes no difference who you are
Anything your heart desires;
Will come to you.

But maybe I'm being far too cynical. Even the most doubting among us still has to admit that the text of the Iranian agreement clearly states that the Iranians promise never, never ever to build or possess a nuclear weapon. Isn't that enough? Can't I finally, after that heartwarming declaration by the Iranians, can't I finally simply break

down and trust the Iranians to abide by what they said they agreed? Even proponents of this agreement admit that they don't really trust the Iran government. Even proponents of this agreement acknowledge that Iran is already a nuclear threshold nation and that only the current sanctions and threats of military intervention have kept them from completing their ultimate nuclear aspirations. Indeed, the President of the United States has admitted that this agreement is not and cannot be about trust because he does not trust the Iranians. When he addressed the Jewish community just two weeks ago, President Obama spoke of "when" the Iranians cheat. He, along with just about everyone else, both supporters and detractors of this agreement, fully believe that the Iranians will try to cheat on this deal. The difference is that supporters believe that the deal provides enough snapback sanctions to force the Iranians into compliance. That's a hope. That's a wish. That's a gamble.

But now the debate is all but over. The conclusion seems to be set: the agreement with Iran will become a reality. Now what?

I am well-aware that many of you will disagree with me on this issue. I respect the fact that many of the supporters of this agreement are smart, caring and hopeful people. In addition, I reject the idea that this agreement is some kind of litmus test of who is a true friend of Israel. While a healthy and vigorous debate is essential, I have been appalled that some, on both sides, have indulged in heated rhetoric that threatens to demonize good friends and important allies. Let's be clear: this is not and should not be made into a partisan issue. Obviously, some are trying to make it a partisan issue because that feeds into their political and organizational aspirations, but that is a

dangerous, selfish, and cynical game. This Iranian deal is not about personalities, though some profit from that story line.

And note that while this Iranian deal is unfortunately being distorted into a partisan battle here in the United States, in Israel there is a rare unanimity among the major political parties. Both those in the ruling coalition with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his opponents, including opposition leader Isaac Herzog, are strongly against this deal. For Israel, this is an existential issue, an issue of survival.

Those of us who opposed this agreement believe that pushing Iranian nuclear aspirations 10 to 15 years down the road simply is not enough. It's certainly not enough when you look into the eyes of your children and grandchildren and realize that you have just gambled with their lives. You have gambled that the Iranians in 15 years will no longer be terrorist funding, apocalyptical fundamentalists who are have sworn to destroy Western civilization. It is wonderful to hope that the Iranian government will change. It is a beautiful thought to imagine a new peaceful Persian regime. I cannot fault those who want so desperately to believe that this deal will lead to a world transformed: a world where swords have been turned into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks and thousands of centrifuges turning out enriched uranium are used only to produce energy. I cannot fault those who are trying to achieve the long sought dream of peace. But too many of us believe that this dream will turn out to become a nightmare.

Ultimately, I hope that I'm wrong about all of this. I hope that years from now it will turn out that this Iranian deal was correct and that all turned out happily ever after.

But in Judaism, prayer is not just wishing upon a star. Faith for us is not fantasy.

Rather, Jews have faith in *sekhel*, in wisdom, in critical analysis, and in testing ideas. From Abraham, the father of our people, faith for Jews has always been iconoclastic. We smash idols. We expose myths. We are street smart and are loathe to be played for a chump. After thousands of years of dealing with the some of the world's most notorious tyrants, Jews are pretty good about knowing who to trust and who to fear.

So, yes, we believe the Iranians when they declare what their intentions are. And one does not have to guess their intentions because the Iranians are not shy about telling us exactly what they want. Shortly after Iran signed this agreement, the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei led thousands in a national chant, "Death to America. Death to Israel. Death to Zionism." He wrote bluntly last week of his goal for the total annihilation of Israel within 25 years. It is quite clear that this agreement with Iran is no cause for a "kum-ba-ya" moment.

And yet, no matter where you stand on this particular deal, we are all united in the fervent hope and prayer for peace. Those of us who opposed it must acknowledge: we lost. Now we have to, we all have to, confront a new reality. And the first step, indeed, the most essential step is for us to repair and rebuild a bi-partisan support for Israel. Current leaders, both Democrat and Republicans, have promised to develop legislative packages that will address the inadequacies of this Iranian deal. There is already bi-partisan support to enhance America's defense agreements with Israel. Why is this significant? It is significant because it indicates to all of us in the Jewish community and all who care about the security and well-being of Israel, that we still have to work to together.

Note that at this very moment anti-Semites and groups that are devoted to the destruction of Israel are trying to take advantage of the perceived divisions in the Jewish community. Those who are leading the BDS movement are celebrating because they believe that this Iranian issue has seriously divided us and weakened us. Our enemies do not understand that for Jews, a good debate and passionate argument are not signs of weakness. Rather, debate sharpens one's mind and expands one's perspective. Now that this debate is over we have to get back to doing the things that have always been at the core of our Jewish spirit: we have to forgive and reconcile, we have to learn, we have to move forward positively and we have to remember that we are family. We are B'nei Yisrael, the Children of Israel and we know how to overcome our enemies. Whether you supported the Iranian deal or opposed it, we still need each other. Democrats and Republicans, Liberals and Conservatives and undeclared moderates, Israel needs all of us.

Note that Israel does not just need our support, it also needs our input. Israel is struggling mightily with its own internal problems: poverty, social unrest, pockets of racism, and the growing issue of Ultra-Orthodox fundamentalism which threatens the very democratic values of Israel. Reform Jews and Reform Judaism are essential for the future well-being of Israel. Our movement has been growing tremendously in Israel and it will take all of our efforts to see that it continues to do so.

Now is certainly not the time to quit in frustration and turn away from Israel. We need to learn more, get more involved and advocate for her security like never before. Now, 70 years after the liberation of the Nazi death camps, is not the time to ignore the needs, the safety, and the future of the more than 6-million Jews in Israel.

From the outside, Rosh HaShanah is a time of sweetness and joy. We eat apples and honey and wish each other a *Gut Yontif*, a Happy New Year. But on closer inspection, Rosh HaShanah calls us to look past the mask, beneath the costume and peer behind the façade. We search for the inner truth, the real truth, even when it hurts, even when it disturbs our complacency. These are *Yamim Noraim*, Days of Awe. Therefore, let us look closer and examine with keen vision the reality of our lives and the world around us. Now is not the time for fantasy. Now is not the time for wishes upon stars. Rather, now is the time for renewing our bonds to each other. Now is the time for renewing and strengthening our support for Israel. Our world, our Israel, our lives depend on what we do next.