

Erev Tov and Shanah Tovah.

'We are.' Two common words. Words used in television ads: 'We are Farmers, da, ta, da...'  
But words that can also have a special meaning. Just ask anyone who is connected to Penn State or Council Rock. For those schools and countless other colleges, high schools and businesses, 'We Are' is a rallying cry and a source of pride; uniting men and women, those who attended school together and those who graduated years apart.

As we enter 5775, my wish is that we live 'We Are' this year and forever into the future.

But I am not asking you to live we are Penn State or Council Rock. I am asking that we dedicate ourselves this year and beyond to living: 'We are Israel.' Just as 'We are' has united students and alumni of schools worldwide, I am hopeful that 'We are Israel' will unite us as families, as a community, and with the larger Jewish world.

Such a statement should be a no-brainer. Israel is our homeland. Israel is the lone democracy in the Middle East. Israel is America's strongest ally in the region.

But after this Summer, I have concluded that Americans and the international community feeling 'we are Israel' is not such a slam dunk. No question, the Summer months were difficult for our brothers and sisters. Rockets were fired relentlessly, day and night by Hamas, an organization designated as terrorists throughout the world. These rockets, routinely launched from schools or hospitals, and the terror tunnels built by Hamas, had a sole purpose: to kill Israeli civilians, young and old, strong and weak -- to wipe Israel and the Jewish people off the map. If you do not believe me, let me share Article 7 of Hamas' charter with you: 'The time (of our rule) will not come until we will fight the Jews (and kill

them); until the Jews hide behind rocks and trees, which will cry: There is a Jew hiding behind me, come and kill him!'

As rockets rained down and Israeli civilians had to scurry for shelter; as Israel's young men and women defended our homeland with courage and bravery, I followed American and international news coverage and watched and listened in disbelief. My thoughts turned to the words of Martin Niemoller -- 'First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out -- because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out -- Because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out -- Because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me -- and there was no one left to speak for me.'

And so, I say tonight: Even though most of us are not Israeli, let us say and live 'We are Israel' this year and forever more because when Hamas came for Israel this Summer, the majority of the world, remained silent, and when they did speak, the words they used condemned Israel.

In July, after Israeli artillery hit an UN school, which was supposed to be a refuge for those in Gaza, UN Deputy Secretary General Jan Eliasson stated: "This is a moment where you really have to say 'enough is enough,' When asked if Israel should be held accountable for war crimes, Mr. Eliasson responded: "The scale of the response is of such a violent nature, questions of accountability come up."

Ravina Shamdasani, a spokesperson for the UN added that there is no 'legitimate' reason to strike homes in Gaza - terrorists or not. "Even when a home is identified as being used for

military purposes, any attack must be proportionate... and precautions must be taken to protect civilians."

And the UN condemnation went all the way to the top when, in August, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon called for an 'investigation into the repeated shelling of UN facilities harboring civilians' by Israel.

Israeli military stated that there were rockets being directed towards Israel from UN-run schools and hospitals, and that they were fighting back while trying to limit the loss of civilian life. But, Hamas was using human shields and directing military operations from locations they knew would cause the deaths of their own people and a PR nightmare for Israel. The UN did not back down from their condemnation until weeks later, when it was proven Hamas was using women and children as human shields, weapons were being stored in multiple UN schools, rockets found in those schools were given by UN officials back to Hamas and a senior Hamas official admitted that rockets had indeed been fired from heavily populated areas 'by mistake.'

UN condemnation of Hamas' actions were weak and beyond too little too late. To quote the Associated Press: 'The admission that Hamas had...fired from places that endangered Palestinians does little to retroactively blanch Israel's blackened image.'

How does one respond to such a situation? We begin tonight by saying: We are Israel. We respond by not letting the UN off the hook, by not supporting the causes they promote, and by sharing with our friends, family and co-workers the words of former Israeli Ambassador to Canada Alan Baker. In a letter to Ban Ki-Moon he wrote: 'Rather than falsely accusing Israel, one might have expected that...you would have admitted responsibility of the UN for

such abuse of its facilities, and instituted a thorough inquiry as to how and why UN facilities were placed at the disposal of the Hamas terror organization, how and why the UN officials responsible for such facilities permitted this situation to occur, and why those rockets and other weapons that were discovered were transferred to Hamas, for their continued use against Israel's citizens. In permitting the storage of weapons, and in transferring such weapons into the hands of Hamas, the UN has in fact permitted itself to become accessory to the commission of war crimes. Mr. Secretary General, your exaggerated, selective, biased and often false accusations against Israel and your total disregard of the truth, have irreparably discredited you and the UN.'

But, you say, no one in the United States could have done anything like that? No institution, organization or individual could engage in such anti-Israel rhetoric? Israel is our ally. Israel is the lone democracy in the region. Sadly, you would be wrong.

About a year ago, The American Studies Association, which represents stellar academic institutions in America, including NYU, Stanford, and Northwestern voted to boycott Israeli academic institutions. In a statement their National Council declared: 'We believe that the...boycott is warranted given...Israel's violation of international law and UN resolutions and the extent to which Israeli institutions of higher education are a party to state policies that violate human rights.'

Interesting, considering Israel allows non-Jews to live within its' borders, freely practice their religion and be members of government. I ask the Association: Is this true of any other country in the Middle East? The answer is a resounding 'No.' In many of these countries it is illegal to be openly Jewish. In many of these places, including Gaza, one can be executed by proclaiming their Judaism. But for the ASA, Israel violates human rights to a greater

degree than any of these countries. This must be true because the ASA has yet to academically boycott any of these countries.

But the ASA is not alone. Human Rights Watch, an American organization claiming to monitor human rights violations worldwide, recently released their report on the events of this Summer. They concluded "Israel's actions were "unlawfully disproportionate" and that "Israel has a long record of failing to undertake credible investigations into alleged war crimes." Not surprisingly, their report has little mention of the truth: Hamas storing and firing rockets from schools, intentionally putting civilians in danger. Hamas' headquarters in Gaza being located in the basement of a hospital.

Then there is a man who was once hailed as having done the impossible – bringing peace between Israel and her neighbors. In August, former President Jimmy Carter wrote: 'There is no humane or legal justification for the way the Israeli Defense Forces are conducting this war....Three Israeli civilians have been killed by Palestinian rockets, while an overwhelming majority of the Palestinians killed have been civilians. The need for international judicial proceedings to investigate and end these violations of international law should be taken very seriously.'

How the once hailed have fallen. President Carter – Shame on you. I could spend hours on your years of anti-Israel vitriol, but I will simply paraphrase Rabbi Eric Yoffie, former President of the Union for Reform Judaism, who wrote it is true that more Palestinians died than Israelis. But it's not like Hamas wasn't trying. What else were the rockets fired for? What else were the tunnels built for?

Why should we commit to saying and living 'We are Israel?' Because if we do not, who will? This Summer proved we live in a world where when they come for Israel, the international

community, the American Studies Association, Human Rights Watch, a former President and many others stand quietly or condemn Israel. We cannot be silent anymore. We cannot stand idly by why our neighbor bleeds.

But how can we 'be Israel' thousands of miles away?

We can visit. This is the most direct way to show you are Israel and connect with the land of Israel. I have stated this before and will say it again: there is no stronger factor on a person's Jewish identity and living a Jewish life than traveling to Israel, whether for a week, a semester or longer. And I am proud to say that over our congregation's life we have had hundreds of members who have traveled to Israel on their own, as teens and with the congregation. I am excited to announce that Ferne Levy and I will again be taking 8th and 9th graders to Israel this December. It gives me a great feeling to announce that members of our congregation are going with Sar-El later this calendar year to volunteer with Israel's military.

So, I encourage you to travel to Israel this year, whether you have been in the past or never in your life. And when your friends ask you: Isn't it dangerous? Didn't the FAA ban flights there earlier this Summer? You tell them: I am going to Israel because I am Israel and it is safe to be there. That the FAA's actions were unparalleled and suggest an anti-Israel bias. To prove your point simply relay the following two pieces of information to anyone who asks you about safety and/or the FAA:

- a) As I mentioned last year, you are statistically more likely to be a victim of violence here in America than in Israel. This fact remains true even after this Summer. Remember, as hard as Hamas tried, six Israelis were murdered this Summer, three as a result of terrorist missiles and three young boys by the hands of Hamas militants. How many

people do you think were victims of violence in Philadelphia this Summer? My guess is far more than six.

- b) Just a week prior to the FAA banning flights to Israel, Malaysian flight MH17 was shot down over Ukraine. Did the FAA ban flights there? No. Why then did they ban flights to Israel? Tell your friends you are eagerly awaiting the FAA's answer.

We can support Israeli companies by purchasing their products both here in America and via the internet. There are many companies and products I could speak about this evening, but I want to focus on one in particular: Nu. Named after the Yiddish word for 'What's up?' or 'What's going on?' Nu is a t-shirt company based in Israel. Their slogan is 'Wear the Story in Your Heart,' and their t-shirts highlight causes and organizations that are at the center of Israeli life and Jewish values. The images and words on these t-shirts are powerful -- from the Declaration of Statehood in the shape of David ben Gurion's face. The Declaration, which states clearly: Israel will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; to a tree that highlights the efforts of Leket, an organization that in 2013, with the help of over 50,000 volunteers, rescued and distributed 25 million lbs of produce and perishable goods, 1 million prepared meals, and 1.1 million (8,000/school day) volunteer prepared sandwiches to underprivileged children.

There are many more organizations and causes that Nu supports. So, this year, go on Nu's website, buy a shirt or two or three, whatever causes speak to your heart. As Nu writes on their website, wear the shirts with passion. And when someone asks you about your shirt, tell them you bought it because 'I am Israel' and the organization or cause means the world

to me as a Jew. And when they ask, 'aren't there similar organizations and causes right here in America?' You tell them yes, and they are important to support as well, but I am proud to wear what Israeli companies, organizations and citizens are doing across my heart. It shows the world my values; it shows the world Israel's values.

We can invest. How many Israeli companies can there really be on American stock exchanges, let me share this with you: On the NASDAQ, Israel has 57 companies you can invest in. Now, 57 may not sound like a lot, but would it surprise you if I told you that those 57 Israeli companies comprise the third largest number of stocks, behind the US and China, that come from one country on the NASDAQ? More than England, Japan, Australia, Germany and Canada combined. All this from a country that on a population basis is millions and millions smaller than many of the countries I just mentioned.

But perhaps you're a little leery about purchasing stock in a company that you have never heard of, or is based thousands of miles away. Well, while I would disagree, I would urge you to invest in companies like Google, Intel, Berkshire Hathaway or Microsoft, all of whom have significant connections to Israel. In fact, Steve Ballmer, CEO of Microsoft up until February of this year and who just bought the NBA's Los Angeles Clippers for 2 billion dollars, has said publicly: 'If you actually do the math, Microsoft is almost as much an Israeli company as we are a US company.'

If you are able to invest in the stock market, invest in Israeli companies in some small or large way. And, if someone asks 'why are you choosing to invest in these companies?' you tell them: 'I am Israel,' and I am investing in Israeli companies because I want the Israeli economy to flourish and I want to make sure that Israel remains a stronghold of technological and medical innovation.

Tonight, let us commit ourselves to a year and lifetime of saying and doing 'We are Israel.' Let us say and live 'We are Israel' with the clothes we wear, the companies we choose to invest in and by traveling to Israel as often as possible.

Let us do so no matter what questions our friends and family ask, knowing that we have answers to all of their questions that are based on logic and truth.

Let us say and live Israel this year and beyond because we cannot stand idly by while falsehoods and lies are put forth by the United Nations, American Studies Association, Human Rights Watch, former Presidents and others.

Let us remember the call of Psalm 137:

יְמִינֵי תִשְׁכַּח -- יְרוּשָׁלַם אֲשַׁכַּח-אֵם  
אֲזַכְּרֶכִי לֹא-אֵם -- לְחִכִּי, לְשׁוֹנֵי-תִדְבֵק  
שְׁמִחְתִּי רֵאשׁ, עַל -- יְרוּשָׁלַם-אֵת, אֲעֲלֶה לֹא-אֵם.

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand lose its' way; May my tongue cling to the top of my mouth if I do not remember you. If I do not set Jerusalem above my greatest joy.

And so, I say to you, on this Erev Rosh Hashanah: I am Israel.

Are you?

Shanah Tovah.