

Coming Together in Times of Joy – Rabbi David Arias

Until this past Shabbat, Jews in Israel and Jews in the Diaspora have been reading different Torah portions. Since second day Yom Tov of Pesach, celebrated only in the Diaspora, we have had different Torah readings. However, rest assured; we will once again be reading the same Torah portion, this coming Shabbat, *Shabbat Hazon*, Parashat Dvarim. This unique Shabbat received its name from the Haftarah, the final one of the "*tlat de-pur`anuta*", the special *haftarot* we read during the "Three Weeks" which start on the 17th of Tammuz and end on the 9th of Av. We always read Parashat Dvarim on *Shabbat Hazon*, among other reasons, because of the verse spoken by Moshe:

"אֵיכָה אֶשָׂא לְבַדִּי טְרַחְתְּכֶם וּמִשְׁאָכֶם וְרִיבְכֶם" – "How can I bear unaided the trouble of you, and the burden, and the bickering!" In some Ashkenazi communities this verse is read in the tune of the Book of Lamentations.

Beyond these practices, one can see in this unification, another message, Diaspora Jews and we, Jews of Israel, have progressed at a different pace in reading the Torah, and in a sense we are on different "Jewish rhythms". Meaning, the challenges and disputes within Judaism in Israel are different from those abroad, and at times, it manifest as tension between the two Jewish communities. Even within the Conservative Movement there are examples of such disagreements, those who regard the Movement in Israel as being too "conservative", and on the other hand there are voices saying that Conservative Judaism abroad, is too "liberal". The discrepancy between the weekly Torah readings, sometimes reflect the difference in which we view our Judaism.

Until something unfortunately happens....

Until the old demons emerge, and remind us that we are one people, גוי אחד בארץ, despite being scattered and divided among the nations, we are still one people.

Unfortunately we experienced it yet again, in Pittsburgh, in the "Tree of Life" congregation, when a terrorist entered the synagogue, and murdered 11 souls during their Shabbat prayers.

In response to the horrific massacre, we were united in Israel and abroad, voices from across the religious spectrum and from all streams shed tears of mourning, and we felt that we were indeed one people.

Because in the face of disaster, in the face of incessant calamity, it is impossible not to unite. And similarly, just before the 9th of Av, we will reunite, for Shabbat Hazon. We will reunite in order to read together about the various disasters that have befallen the People of Israel throughout the ages. As the verse in Psalms goes "עִמּוֹ-אֶנְכִי בְצָרָה"

"I will be with him in distress". However, as Rabbi Dr. Benny Lau said in a memorial event held by the Masorti Movement after the Pittsburg attack: We Jews know how to come together when death or disaster takes place, however, we struggle and have a hard time coming together during the mundane day to day, our challenge is to be willing to say **עִמּוֹ אֶנְכִי בְשִׂמְחָה I will be with him in Joy!**

There is a Talmudic story which echoes this idea. It tells of a two-headed creature that came before King Solomon and demanded double inheritance because it is two different entities. King Solomon, in his wisdom, said that one should pour boiling water on one of the heads, if the other head screams ... it is a sign that this is one person ... And so it happened, the two-heads screamed and said: "We are dead."

It is easier for us to unite with our people, within Israel and abroad, during difficult times, When there is a war, or other disasters. However the real test is not just to cry bitterly together, but to cry with excitement and joy together. May we all come together for moments of happiness and joy, and thus the words of the prophet Zechariah will be fulfilled: ***"The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth month, the fast of the seventh month, and the fast of the tenth month shall become occasions for joy and gladness, happy festivals for the House of Judah; but you must love honesty and integrity."***