



Parshat Korach
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I'm Cold. Put on a Jacket.
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This week I returned from Israel after having studied Torah with 30 of our members at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. I want to share with you what I experienced as the single most important hour of the week. Two highly gifted and articulate faculty members at Harman, Tal Becker and Yossi Klein Halevi, were reflecting on the Jewish people today.

They pointed out that since the destruction of the Second Temple, for the last 2,000 years, most Jews throughout history would regularly ask: *where are we going to go next?* We cannot stay where we are at. It is no longer safe. Where can we find sanctuary? Today there *are* Jews *still* asking this question. Yossi Klein Halevi was recently meeting with Jews from Western and Eastern Europe, from France, Germany and England, and from Poland and Hungary, and what they all had in common was that all were asking him: Is this 1932? 1933? 1938? Is it time to go now?

The good news is that all Jews today have a place to go which they did not have in the 1930s, our beloved *eretz yisrael*. We need Israel today more than ever.

And the good news is that for the first time in 2,000 years, 90% of the Jewish people are *not* asking themselves: *where are we going to go next?* Fifty percent of world Jewry are in Israel, forty percent in North America. We are all home. While Pittsburgh is real, San Diego is real, and we now have security guards and fobs, most of us are not thinking about leaving America. Only ten percent of world Jewry is still asking this discomfiting question.

But the challenging news, these Hartman scholars argued, is that the two centers of world Jewry, Israel and America, are drifting farther and farther away from each other.

American Jewry is drifting away from Israeli Jewry. In previous generations Israel was a unifying force. Today all too often it is a source of division. As you all know, the rising generation of American Jewry has a far more critical and complicated attitude towards Israel than their parents and grandparents.

By the same token, Israeli Jewry is also drifting away from American Jewry. Prime Minister Netanyahu is known to have observed that Israel need not worry about the denominations of American Jewry that tend to be most critical of Israel, the progressive denominations, because he believes that in 30 years they won't be here anyway. Liberal American Judaism is going to assimilate itself out of existence, the Prime Minister has observed. All that will be left will be Orthodox Jewry. Israel can wait out its critics on the left.

Tal Becker and Yossi Klein Halevi argue that the single most urgent problem for the Jewish people today is this mutual estrangement. Where does it come from, and how do we stop it?

To answer these questions, Tal Becker offers the following parable. A mother says to her son: "Honey, I'm cold. Put on a jacket." The mother means well. She is cold. She loves her son. She reasons that since she is cold, he must be cold. Since a jacket is her solution to her coldness, a jacket will also be *his* solution to *his* coldness.

There is only one problem. The mother is not the son. They are two different people. Who is to say that he is cold? Who is to say that he wants or needs a jacket?

This parable teaches us that the opposite of empathy is not indifference. The opposite of empathy is not that you don't care. Rather, you care a lot, but *you don't see* the other person, because you impose yourself, you project yourself, onto the other person.

That is what American Jewry and Israeli Jewry do to one another.

Tal Becker and Yossi Klein Halevi point out that American Jews are a minority. Therefore we are alive to the problems faced by other minorities, especially when they are vulnerable. That is why many American Jews are advocates for immigrants and refugees and asylum seekers in America today. That is also why many American Jews are critical of Israel for how it treats minorities in its society.

But Israeli Jews are not a minority in Israel. They do not have a minority consciousness. To the contrary, Israeli Jews have power and sovereignty. And yet they live in a dangerous neighborhood, and their power and sovereignty always bump up against a simultaneous feeling of vulnerability.

Yossi Klein Halevi put it this way. 1945 and 1948. Three years separated the Shoah from the birth of Israel. May and June of 1967. One month separated doom surrounding the expected invasion of Israel from the miraculous victory of the Six Day War. 1967 and 1973. Six years separated smashing victory from the mortal danger posed by the Yom Kippur War. 1973 and 1976. Three years separated Israel's woeful unpreparedness for the Yom Kippur War from its heroic raid on Entebbe. Israel is powerful, Israel is vulnerable, at the same time.

Israel's leaders are not focused on minority rights, like American Jews are focused on minority rights, but are focused instead on continued surviving and thriving in the face of existential threats. How does Israel ensure that Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, or ISIS, with their abundant sophisticated weaponry trained on Israel, not destroy the Jewish state?

When we do not see each other, but impose our concerns onto the other, when we say I'm cold, put on a jacket, the relationship between American and Israeli Jews grows strained.

If the core of the problem is not seeing each other, the core of the solution must be to do a

better job of seeing the other. Can American and Israeli Jews see one another the way the kohein in next week's portion sees somebody who has been rendered ritually impure?

The Torah commands us to choose life, *u'vacharta bahaiim*. If an Israelite were near another who had died, they need to get purified as a way of reaffirming life. The kohein would prepare a sacred concoction involving the ashes of a red heifer which, when sprinkled on the person who is ritually impure, purifies that person. And the kohein who prepares the potion himself becomes impure.

Here is what is important about this opaque paradox, and why it speaks to us today. The kohein does *not* say I'm cold, put on a jacket. Rather, *the kohein starts with the other person*. What are *you* thinking about? What are *your* concerns?

What would it look like if, instead of being the mother in the parable, we were the kohein? What would it look like if we were to start not with what is bothering *us*, but what is bothering *the other person*?

This is a delicate matter. To use one of Donniel Hartman's favorite words, this is a dance. It is a dance because the concerns we have we really care about; and the concerns that Israeli Jews have they really care about. Many of us really care about the rights of vulnerable minorities, as Israel really cares about surviving and thriving in the face of existential threat. Neither side can simply set aside our serious concerns for the sake of *shalom bayit*.

And yet, it is a dance because we are also called to do what all people who love one another are called to do: to hold and honor what we care about, *and* to better understand the other person who may think and feel differently. Maybe the other person is not cold and does not want or need a jacket.

How do we do this? It's not mathematical. There is no formula. But instead of judging

the other, we both need to do a better job of dancing with the other: honoring our concerns and seeing their concerns. That is why it is a dance. That is why real relationship is art not science.

If we can do this dance, we create the possibility of learning from, and being inspired by, one another, which we cannot do as well when we sit in judgment.

There is a town outside of Tel Aviv called Holon. In Holon there is a hospital that runs an important program called Save a Child's Heart where Israeli heart surgeons volunteer their time and expertise to treat for free children with serious heart ailments from around the world. To date more than 5,000 children from 59 countries, including many from the West Bank and Gaza and Syria, have been treated, and their lives have been saved, by Israeli doctors.

How do I know about it? A young woman who grew up in our shul, Mia Schon, was hired by Save a Child's Heart. Here is why. The hospital not only treats these children for free, but also puts up their parents and family members indefinitely, for weeks at a time, also for free. The hospital wants the accommodations for these family members to be as homey and hopeful as possible. Mia, a mosaic artist, was hired to create a big and beautiful mosaic that would comfort worried parents. Israel is not only saving the lives of children one heart at a time, but also worrying about, and attending to, the feelings of family members. This is literally true, and it is a story we seldom hear.

When it comes to our loved ones, we can see the best in them when we stop judging them for who we want them to be and start seeing them for who they are. The same is true for the two centers of world Jewry today.

American Jews and Israeli Jews are not in the same place, but we are part of the same people. Our fates are inextricably tied together. It is time to put the jacket away. It is time to

dance. When we dance, we can see the beauty of our partner in a whole new way. Shabbat
Shalom.