

Rabbi Lucy HF Dinner
Rosh HaShanah, 5777

Temple Beth Or
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Hearing the Bat Kol

It is no secret I am an unfettered optimist. My very first memory is jumping on the bed with my brothers when a hurricane was barreling down on New Orleans. Hurricane outside, pajama party inside.

Yet, even I find reason to pause in face of the scathing rhetoric that has overtaken civilized society. From the presidential race, to the uncensored bullying many of our youth face on social media, and everything in between. What not too long ago we labeled as pockets of “mean girls” or wrote off as the overblown rancor of politics, has infiltrated mainstream, everyday life on the streets. The vehemence of the acrimony across generational, racial, regional, and economic levels of American society, has begun to feel more like a cultural shift than a flash-in-the-pan trend.

A couple of weeks ago in conversation with a few members over the shocking loss of respect, someone asked when are we going back to the way things used to be? Go back, oh but if we could go back? Yet, can we ever put this enmity-quotient genie back in the bottle?

Rosh HaShanah delivers mixed news on that question. One of the Hebrew roots of the word Shanah is change. Change is the condition of existence through time. Try as we might there is no recapturing the past. Ushering in the New Year we acknowledge that we are a part of a constantly changing, evolving, world that stubbornly refuses to remain on stasis. **Rosh Hashanah asks us to assess with seriousness, forethought, and integrity what role we will take in the change that lies ahead.**

The Jewish New Year offers a path of hope. The Days of Awe give us the choice, in the words of the cliché: “to be the change we want to see.” It reminds us of the miracle of being created in God’s image: we can embrace that image, we can make that image of God’s goodness the center of how we communicate, even when so much of the world seems to be careening into the abyss of boorishness. Tikkun Olam healing of the world, starts right here, right now, in the faithful healing work we do on ourselves during the Yomim Noraaim.

Many push back against the philosophy that humans can change, and that together the change we bring can transform our world. This summer, while American election central was warming up for perhaps the ugliest presidential election in US history, my faith in the possibility

of change was renewed on the Progressive Rabbi's Trip to Israel I took with AIPAC's educational foundation. While I had always considered Israeli culture as vastly more explosive and volatile than American culture, this summer it was the Israelis who appeared civilized while on this side of the ocean our world seemed out of control.

It is as if a "Bat Kol" has been issued and Israel's ethos is changing, turning away from its hard edge. The "Bat Kol" is a device used in the Talmud indicating God's voice intervening to settle an argument among the sages. At one time the Schools of Shamai and of Hillel had been arguing a point of Jewish law for three years. The Bat Kol, the voice of God, descended upon the yeshiva declaring: "The teachings of both are the words of the living God, but the law follows the ruling of Hillel. Since both are the words of the living God, what entitled Beth Hillel to have the final say on the law?" The Talmud teaches: "Because **they were kindly and modest, they studied their own rulings and those of Beth Shammai, and were even so humble as to mention the action of Beth Shammai before theirs.**" (BT Eirubin 13b)

They were kindly and humble, they listened to the opposing party, and even mentioned their rulings before their own. The School of Shamai adamantly reiterated their point, over and over again hammering down on the primacy of their opinion. The School of Hillel, on the other hand, engaged in dialogue; they honored the ideas of their fellow. The House of Hillel knew that finding the right answer is about much more than just being right. The Bat Kol did not distinguish between the right and the wrong decision, instead God declared this one and this one are both right. The Bat Kol's ruling focused beyond the law, on the right way to treat one's fellow, and the right way to support the greater community in seeking the many possible right answers.

So many Israelis I met on the trip reminded me of the wisdom of the Bat Kol. Tonight I want to introduce you to four individuals who live out those Bat Kol values;

who embrace kindness and modesty,

who listen to the voices of their opponent,

who refuse to get stuck in an endless loop of I'm right and you are wrong,

who know that preserving the dignity of others is the path to advancing what is ultimately right for the community.

These are change makers, who are creating a **greater, quieter, gentler, more livable, Middle East.**



This is Yehuda Glick. He is a Temple Mount Jew, dedicated to rebuilding the Jewish Holy Temple in Jerusalem at a sensitive site sacred to Jews, Muslims and Christians worldwide. Today Muslims control the Temple Mount encompassing their holy sites of the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. The controversy over the Temple Mount has triggered violent and prolonged conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians.

Yehuda Glick until recently chaired the Temple Mount Heritage Foundation, the not-for-profit organization he founded that is an umbrella group for other Temple Mount advocacy groups. Before becoming a Knesset Member Glick had gone to the Temple Mount to pray multiple times, an act banned by the Muslim authorities. In August 2014 Glick was arrested for allegedly pushing a member of the Muslim women's guard at the Temple Mount. In October of 2014 Glick survived an assassination attempt, shot in the chest four times by a Palestinian militant.

Last May Yehuda Glick was sworn in to the Israeli Knesset as a member of the ruling Likud party. Glick came to talk to our group of progressive rabbis about his goals for the Knesset and for Israel. I was fully prepared to listen politely, while sure I would be cringing at his lack of regard for Muslims, women rabbis, and progressive Jews.

And, yet, Glick is known in many circles as a liberal, civil rights advocate. His focus on human rights gained notoriety when he criticized an Israeli army medic's killing of a wounded Palestinian in Hebron.

MK Glick told us that he believes in a one state solution for Israelis and Palestinians. Then he added that he advocates for full citizenship for all Jewish or non-Jewish residents who are not involved in terrorism. He espouses respect for all minorities. He states that the

Palestinians are a peaceful people, who have not been able to overcome the preference of their leaders for inciting violence over seeking peace.

Glick believes that Israel is truly a Holy Land and people of all faiths should be able to pray at the Temple Mount, the holiest place in the Holy Land. Glick said he would be happy to start with letting Jews pray there five days a year.

Member of Knesset Glick is concerned about more than the religious rights of Temple Mount Jews. He advocates for people of all religions and cultures to share Israel's holy sites. Glick supports the rights of the Women of the Wall, the group I prayed with this summer, while other Orthodox rabbis instructed children to steal a copy of the Women of the Wall prayer book so they could desecrate it during our service. And, against the stance of the Orthodox Israeli authorities who do everything they can to deny progressive rabbis any share in Israel's treasures of our heritage, Glick says he supports full rights for Reform and Conservative rabbis in Israel.

Yehudah Glick has heeded the voice of the Bat Kol, humbly advocating for the rights of others alongside his own. Though he believes strongly in the spiritual importance of the Temple Mount for Jews, he freely admits the sites sacred claim for all humanity. In hearing the Bat Kol, Glick sees right in all who want to express their spiritual identity on the Temple Mount. He says: these Muslims are right and we Jews are right as well. Though he is an Ultra-Orthodox Jew he does not shy away from opposing the oppressive rulings and actions of Israel's chief rabbinate. Though he was the victim of a vicious assassination attempt he advocates for Palestinian rights. Yehudah **Glick hears the voice of the Bat Kol. He listens to the perspective of the other:** Jewish, Christian or Muslim. And he advocates for their rights as he does for his own.



Samer Atamni is the second remarkable harbinger of change I want to tell you about. Atamni is the Co-Director of the Education Department of the Givat Haviva Institute. He is the one in the middle in the picture.

Givat Haviva aims “to build an inclusive, *socially cohesive society by engaging divided communities in collective action for a sustainable, thriving Israeli democracy based on mutual responsibility, civic equality and a shared vision of the future.*”



That is a mouthful to describe one of the most successful programs in Israel that bring Arabs and Jews of all ages together for education, culture, sports, and dialogue, for the ultimate goal of building shared communities in a shared society.

Atamni is an Arab Israeli who on paper has full citizenship in Israel. He struggles with the discrimination he has faced his whole life as an Arab Israeli citizen. He told us about a recent incident at the airport with his wife and young children. After the humiliating security pat down of the whole family, they found out that their plane was delayed six hours. With the needs of their young children they ended up having to go back to the other side of security for food and other services several times. Though Atamni explained the delay issue to the guard, each time the same guard pulled the whole family out of line and interrogated them one by one. What could Samer say when his son asked, “why is he doing this to us over and over again?”

Atamni, a pocket historian, quoted one of Israel’s founders Jabotinsky to us, reminding us of Israel’s vision for a place where all citizens of Israel no matter nationality, gender, or religion shall be treated equally. Justice for all, one law for all. And, yet, Atamni pointed out huge gaps that persist between Jabotinsky’s ideal and the day to day life for Arab Israelis.

When Atamni was young his Mom always told him not to talk politics or go to demonstrations. Atamni honors his mother’s wishes and still has found a way to bridge the painful gaps between his and other Israeli Arab family’s citizenship and their rights. Instead of becoming bitter or jaded Atamni has poured his life into building the society that achieves Jabotinsky’s vision. At Givat Haviva he educates Israeli Jews and Arabs to nurture one on one relationships; and to foster communities where Jews and Arabs live in the same village sending their kids to school together and honoring one another’s holidays. **He heeds the voice of the**

Bat Kol. He brings Israelis from all walks of life together to educate them and acculturate them to the change true equality will bring to Israel.



This is Imri Kalman. Kalman is a nightclub owner/event promoter and full time LGBT activist in Tel Aviv. Kalman co-chairs the Israel National LGBT Task Force. He recently suggested that the Tel Aviv Pride Parade be transformed into a demonstration, protesting the millions of dollars that Israel spends encouraging Gay tourism to Israel verses almost nothing invested in support of Israel's LGBT community.

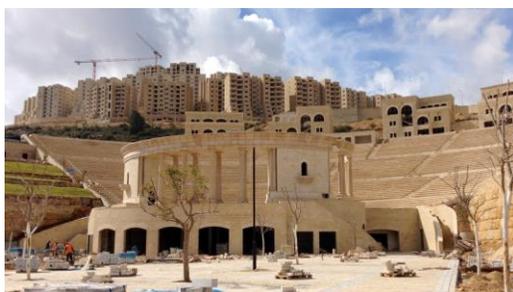
We met him the day after Beit Shemesh's Gay Pride parade. Two days before the parade Israel's Attorney General had altered the parade map, refusing to allow the marchers their preferred route down main street. While Kalman had sought and lost an injunction in court to restore the original parade map, he was celebrating as if the ruling had been in his favor.

"So we didn't march down main street," he said. Maybe it is too much to ask to march down main street the very first year of the parade. We should be happy that Beit Shemesh got to hold its Pride Parade. We don't need to rub it in their face on main street. A few years from now maybe they will be ready for us to march down main street; this year it is enough just to march."

Listening to Imri Kalman sent my head spinning. I wonder if I could be that gracious if an American court ruled that others could march on Main Street but Jews, or Blacks, or Gays, could only march on side streets. Kalman has heeded the voice of the Bat Kol. For the sake of the greater community he is willing to say the other may be right today, even while advocating for change for tomorrow.



Finally, I want to share the remarkable meeting we had with Bashar Masri. He is the visionary who heard the Bat Kol calling for a solution for the Palestinians that didn't depend on Israel or on the Palestinian Authority's government. He is a Palestinian born in the West Bank, a financier and developer who is creating new modern cities in the West Bank. In order to build his first Palestinian city Rawabi, he is navigating through the Palestinian Authority to get building permits, and negotiating with Israel for water rights and roads.



This is Rawabi, the first city Masri has built to be self-sustaining so that Palestinians can work, live, and thrive in their own territory, without depending on Israel. He built the city with a temporary road leading in and out of it because the Israelis and Palestinian Authority could not agree on a path for the road which crosses partially through Israeli territory. Masri signed a contract saying he will destroy the temporary road even if an agreement for a new road cannot be reached. With the city's first 500 units occupied and more Palestinians moving in, the date agreed for dismantling the road is fast approaching. Masri refuses to be deterred. He has gotten 100 Israeli companies to bring the best of technology and engineering to the Rawabi project, and he got them to help advocate for the water rights for the city. No doubt he will garner the Israeli companies' support to broker permanent roads to Rawabi.

Bashar Masri responded to the Bat Kol, rising above who is right and who is wrong in the Palestinian Israeli standoff. He is a proud Palestinian, who is fed up with Israel's heavy hand of control and with the Palestinian Authority's inertia and corruption. While they are arguing he is creating the future that will sustain Palestinians.

These four remarkable people have a lot to teach us in our age of continuing cycles of police shootings and riots, inflated rhetoric, and glorification of xenophobia. Yehuda Glick, Samra Atamni, Imri Kalman, and Bashar Masri under equally or arguably more intractable conditions are changing the face of Israel and the Palestinian territory. They are listening to the other and finding avenues that respect the other while maintaining their own integrity.

Next summer I will be leading a Temple Beth Or trip to Israel, where we will explore the land, and meet with remarkable Israelis who have found a way to rise above conflict and create new paths of understanding. We will attend services at Congregation Or Hadash in Haifa, Beth Or's new sister congregation. Afterwards will host us for Shabbat dinner in their homes. We will visit the Western Wall, float in the Dead Sea, and descend in cable cars over rock grottoes, at the shore, of Rosh Hanikra. We will pray at the Western Wall with the Women of the Wall, and meet with members of Israel's Religious Action Center. And, God willing, we will see the ways the Bat Kol has begun to make an impact on how Israel solves its dilemmas.

We have whispers of the Bat Kol in our community too.



In our partnership with the Union for Reform Judaism and the NAACP in project NITZAVIM launched for the nation at Temple Beth Or, to assure every American citizen has unhindered access to vote.

We have heard whispers of the Bat Kol in the National Moral Revival bringing together Sisters on the Bus, the Civil Rights Activists Dr. James Forbes, Rev. William Barber, and our Reform Movement in a moral revolution to foster the values of love, justice, and mercy in the public square, also launched nationally from our sanctuary.

These two national events attest to the voice of the Bat Kol flowing from the Temple Beth Or Social Action Committee and Carolina Jews for Justice, and to the significant efforts of so many of our members. They testify to our commitment to the rights of all members of society.

And in Charlotte these last weeks, the Bat Kol was present amidst the unrest. A coalition of interfaith clergy, including Charlotte's Reform rabbis, held vigil every day and every night between protesters and the police, turning vitriol into acknowledgement of the other, and eventually changing the protestors and police so that they were shaking hands and exchanging hugs with one another.

In our own lives too, may we hear the voice of the Bat Kol. May we listen to the voice of the other with a heart of kindness. May we release the endless loop of right versus wrong, and replace it with right and right. May we restore dignity to humanity and to our own lives.

AMEN