

## May 2018 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

As many of you know, from June '09 until July '11, the Dubin family had the life-altering opportunity to live in the heart of Jerusalem. These twenty-five months were, without a doubt, the seminal defining experience for who we are as a family today.

With the JCNWJ's upcoming pilgrimage to Israel this summer, I have been reminiscing a great deal about my time in Israel (not only as a husband and father of four in '09-'10, but also as a student at [Hebrew University](#) in 1986-87, as well as my many opportunities to lead trips through the country during the intervening years). Unfortunately, some memories are more unambiguously positive and easy to comprehend than others. Case in point: *Yom Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem Day), which celebrates the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967. This modern holiday, which holds enormous sway over the Jewish Nationalist population of Israel, is celebrated on 28th day of the month of Iyyar, which this year goes from sunset on May 12 until sunset on May 13.

Allow me to share a personal memory. And please understand that any criticisms I offer come from the heart of an unambiguous lover of Israel.

It was during the Spring of 2010, a few days before *Yom Yerushalayim*. I had just returned home after a long day when Shira and Liron and Noa and Ari confronted me with a challenge I had not foreseen. As I walked through the front door, my children could hardly control their excitement as they challenged me to guess what outrageously wonderful present they had purchased for our car. My first guess – a car wash – was flat wrong.

After that, I couldn't think of much else, until, finally, they broke down and told me. On their way home from school that day they had stopped at a corner store to purchase two Israeli flags (the kind that attach at the top of a closed window) to show our family's support for Israel on *Yom Yerushalayim*.

Having raised them with an Israeli flag hanging in our home and plastered to our car in the form of a bumper sticker in the U.S., I certainly had no difficulty understanding why they were so excited. So why did I, an unequivocal Jewish supporter of the State of Israel, have such a visceral distaste for the idea of flying the flag that I love from our car in Jerusalem? Why was I eager to display the flag on my car in North Carolina, but so hesitant to do the same in Jerusalem itself? Even more importantly, how was I supposed to explain it to my young children?

After giving it a great deal of thought, and talking it over with my wife Nancy, I came to the conclusion that it was precisely because I am an unequivocal Jewish supporter of Israel that I could be simultaneously proud to display the flag on my car in the

States, but so uneasy doing the same thing on my car in Israel. The answer lies in context.

There is no comparison between waving the Israeli flag in North Carolina and waving the flag in Jerusalem. Though I maintain unequivocally that I have the right to do so in either city, neither do I doubt that the message received by the different populations who are most likely to see the display in the two cities could be so entirely different.

Regardless of intention, public displays of the Israeli flag on cars in the manner that our kids had in mind, are received by so many of the non-Jewish citizens of Jerusalem as a statement of belligerence and antagonism.

To be clear, I am not prepared to give up my right to wave the flag wherever and whenever I choose. Moreover, I have absolutely no intention of conceding my right to live as a free Jew in a secure Israel. But at the same time, I also believe it is counterproductive and antithetical to my understanding of Jewish values to go out of my way to antagonize our non-Jewish neighbors for an action that is nothing more than symbolic in nature.

I do not accept a litmus test which suggests that waving my Israeli flag makes me a good Zionist. Zionism is more complex than that. It demands so much more than putting a couple 5 Shekel flags on my car. To me, Zionism demands that I support the right of Jews to live securely in our ancestral homeland in a manner that respects and protects the well-being – physical, financial, spiritual, and emotional – of all the country's inhabitants, Jewish or not. It is precisely because I maintain such deep love for Israel, a state that I make no apologies for supporting, that I am driven to resist simplistic forms of nationalism that sometimes fail to recognize and value the sanctity of others.

After thinking about it in great detail, Nancy and I chose to keep the two 5 shekel flags on our car for a couple days. Our children had purchased them as a present with innocent intentions. At the same time, we also chose to take them down prior to *Yom Yerushalayim*, because we also wanted to teach a lesson about building bridges and waging peace with others. Our job as Zionist parents was to help them find that fine line between guarding our Jewish rights and trampling the rights of others. The challenge, of course, is that this line can be so difficult to find at times.

I readily accept that Nancy's and my parental conclusions about how best to address the complexities of Israel need not be shared by others in order for us to be equally committed Zionists. That said, as I look forward to having the sacred privilege this summer of sharing the Israel that I love so deeply with our JCNWJ Pilgrimage participants, I do so with abundant excitement that each of us, myself included, will develop new connections and understandings and perspectives on the fuller reality of Israel – both the unambiguously wonderful and the significantly more complex – and

then report back to the rest of our congregational family with stories, new perspectives of understanding, and plenty of pictures.

Stay tuned to follow our progress over the web from afar from June 24 through July 6. Instructions on how to do so will follow.

L'Shalom,  
Rabbi Dubin

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