

Rabbi's Message

Dear Friends,

On the Sunday morning of Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend (January 14), I stood before the congregation of Mt. Pisgah AME Church for the 8th year in a row (including COVID) and said to them:

“Friends: Today is a day none of us ever wanted to see. Today is the 100th day of continuing captivity for 132 of the original 240 hostages who were stolen from their homes in southern Israel and the Supernova open-air music festival near the Gaza border on October 7.

To my dear friends here today, and I use that appellation with absolute love and respect, I feel compelled to share, in case you've not noticed, that your Jewish friends are hurting, and have been hurting in unprecedented ways for the past 100 days, ever since that barbaric and murderous surprise attack from Hamas, during which almost 1,300 innocent Israelis were massacred and 240, some of them already dead, were abducted into underground captivity. Yes, your Jewish friends have been living in a daze of national trauma ever since that day, the day when more Jews were murdered than have ever been murdered in one day since the Holocaust itself.

But as if the memory of that day weren't enough, the trauma we've been suffering every day ever since then has only been compounding – every time another person or organization that we had thought were our friends has, at best, turned a blind eye to the atrocities, and at worst, blamed the Jews for our own victimhood.”

Indeed, even as we've seen antisemitism growing more and more acute over the past decade, these past four-months since October 7 have been the single most painful period for our global Jewish family since the Holocaust itself. And if you don't believe me, just try googling, “Jewish Issues Today,” where you will find the results to be overwhelmingly focused on antisemitism. Yes, hatred of our people has indeed taken center stage.

Obviously, I understand the feeling. I feel it, too – enough to focus my MLK Unity Weekend sermon at Mt. Pisgah AME Church about it. But I also caution against allowing antisemitism to become our sole Jewish concern, or even our main Jewish concern today. Because if we spend more effort pushing back against those who hate us, and less time celebrating the joy and beauty of who we are, of what it means to be Jewish, then we have already lost the battle. No, if we want to preserve that which is good and true and uplifting and sacred about our experience of Judaism so that our children, and our children's children will have the same opportunity to benefit from our rich history as we have, I suggest we focus on why we love being Jewish more than why we remain the ongoing target of the “world's oldest hatred.”

So, with that in mind, I took a moment (actually, a little bit longer than a moment) to sit and write down the first 100 treasures of Judaism that came to mind. So, without further ado here they are, 100 reasons/feelings/experiences that stir unadulterated love and gratitude in my heart for being part of the Jewish people (in no particular order).

- The excitement of children reading their first Hebrew words
- The respect we afford our elders

- The expectation that we should ask questions
- The value we place on “community”
- Our focus on “this world’ rather than the ‘next world”
- Mel Brooks
- A fresh warm bagel and schmear
- When Elijah (my brother in a sheet) visits my family seder with presents for the children
- Finding myself in Torah
- Singing in Hebrew
- Falafel
- The afikomen
- Barbara Streisand
- Ice cream sundaes for Shavuot
- Lifting the wedding couple high into the air on chairs
- Our resiliency
- Our love of the written word
- Tikkun Olam
- Flooding our sanctuary with family menorahs on Chanukah
- The squeaky voice of a bar mitzvah boy
- We can laugh at ourselves
- Every human being is created in the image of God
- Rosalind Franklin
- Chinese food on Christmas
- The warmth of a loving God
- Rugelach (cinnamon, not chocolate, as controversial as that may be)
- Bob Dylan
- Smelling challah in the oven
- The peace and quiet of Jerusalem on Shabbat
- The Prince of Egypt
- Saving a single person is equal to saving the entire world
- Carole King
- The cherry tomato (invented in Israel)
- The eruption of applause every time an El Al plane lands in Israel
- Jonas Salk
- Yitzhak Rabin’s peace efforts
- Challah French toast
- The calming effects of prayer
- Jewish summer camp
- Leonard Cohen
- Jewish Geography
- The feminine Shechinah
- Bark Mitzvah
- Bamba
- Every generation reinterprets Judaism so as to keep it relevant
- The sounds of shofar
- Billy Crystal
- Children in Purim costumes
- Fauda
- Recharging my inner battery on Shabbat

- Tzedakah
- Judy Blume
- Dancing with the Torahs on Simchat Torah
- HaTikva means “The Hope”
- Wherever I go, there’s always someone Jewish
- Chanukah gelt
- Every Jew is responsible for each other
- Our 3000-year chain of history
- Sandy Koufax
- Floating on the Dead Sea
- What Jews do is more important than what Jews believe
- With two Jews, we get three opinions
- Israeli rescue workers being dispatched to every corner of the world when disaster strikes
- Welcoming the stranger
- Matzah Ball Soup
- Red Auerbach
- Trees have birthdays
- A really crunchy pickle
- Neil Simon
- The pride a teenager feels when wearing a Maccabee Beer t-shirt
- The Purim Spiel
- Traditional Torah study is done in partnership
- God listens to Abraham
- Torah is timeless
- The Gershwin brothers
- Jewish expectations about philanthropy
- Abraham Joshua Heschel’s “radical amazement”
- Our collective pride when Jewish athletes go pro
- Albert Einstein
- Singing the bedtime Shema with my children
- Claiming to hate Manischewitz (while secretly loving it)
- That feeling when the gates of repentance begin to close in on me during the late afternoon of Yom Kippur, yet simultaneously knowing that repentance, prayer and tzedakah will temper the severe decree
- The (at least) 214 Jewish Nobel Prize Laureates
- Even with all the different ways to be Jewish, we remain a single Jewish People
- Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin shaking hands with Jimmy Carter
- Barbara Streisand
- The Talmud always preserves minority positions
- We celebrate Jews-by-Choice, but we don’t proselytize
- Hanging decorations in the Sukkah
- Our ability to grow from misfortune
- Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman
- A particularly good spin of the dreidel
- Discovering new things in the same Torah portions year after year
- “Mitzvah goreret mitzvah” (one mitzvah leads to another)
- The tradition that God speaks to us in our own voice
- A beautiful Yemenite wedding costume

- The understanding that we were all there together at Mt. Sinai
- The honor we give to those who came before us
- Kugel
- A Shabbat nap

So there you have it. My list of 100 (though there are thousands more). What's on your list?

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Dubin