

# The Blessings of Israel - Rabbi Mark S. Golub

Speaking of “blessings,” there is one more aspect of contemporary Jewish life which should not be overlooked.

We Jews of today, live in the most amazing, exciting, time of history since the Destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in the year 70.

We are the generations who have witnessed the re-birth of Jewish sovereignty - and the flourishing - of the Modern State of Israel.

Israel has been an extraordinary source of blessing, to the world.

And Israel has been a source of inspiration, of learning, of renewed sense of Jewish identity - and pride - for millions of Jews everywhere.

And this has nothing to do with Israeli politics - nothing to do with any specific prime minister - and nothing to do with the vile and immoral “BDS” movement.

It has everything to do with who the Israeli people are - and what they have accomplished - and what they represent and stand for - as a modern Jewish political state. An Israeli people who have been at war, from the day before the State of Israel was declared on May 14, 1948.

An Israeli people who have not known a day of real peace in over 70 years - but who continue to maintain standards of justice - even toward their enemies who seek them harm - which are unparalleled in all of human history; and who are able to live - happy, productive, joy-filled lives - for themselves, and their families.

I know for many, the blessings of Israel tend to be technological - the Start Up Nation - the well-known chip in every cell phone - a camera one swallows in a pill so that doctors had better diagnosis internal ailments - or a device that gives blind people the ability to see - in color; or paraplegics the ability to stand erect and walk; the incredible advancements Israel technology has made in water desalinization and water power - helping populations in Africa and India have food to eat; or the “miraculous” app Waze - which somehow knows where every traffic jam is on every highway and back road on the planet earth - and can route drivers in the most intricate paths to avoid long waits in traffic.

All these technological achievements that have brought blessings to the world are certainly reasons for pride in Israel - as are Israel's 12



**Rabbi Mark S. Golub.**

Photo: YouTube generated.

pride in Israel - as are Israel's 12 Nobel prize winners beginning with Shmuel Yosef Agnon's winning the prize in literature in 1966.

But to me, it's not the technological contributions of Israel which reflect the real “miracle” and “blessings” of the State of Israel.

And I stress: these are the Blessings of Israel - as I see them.

To me, the blessing of Israel is its idealistic vision now 70-years and still in the making, first articulated eloquently in Israel's Declaration of Independence - which says, in part:

“Israel will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the holy places of all religions”.

The founding document goes on to state:

“We appeal - in the very midst of the onslaught launched against us now for months - to the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel - to preserve peace and participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions.”

“We extend our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighbourliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land. The State of Israel is prepared to do its share in a common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East.”

To me, the blessing of Israel is its unique embrace of democracy - which not only assumes as axiomatic - full rights of citizenship for Arab Israelis - Christians and Muslims - but is a democracy which has Arab Knesset members - with an Arab party in the Knesset - whose platform is the destruction of the Jewish State of Israel - what would

be considered sedition in any other democracy, including ours in the United States.

In the same vein, Israel is a society that permits its Arab citizens to celebrate the Nakbah - when Arab Israelis commemorate the “catastrophe” of the establishment of the State of Israel. Could we imagine the United States tolerating a Muslim celebration of 9/11?

Israel is a society where Arab college students study in universities along side Jewish students.

The blessing of Israel is the story of Nabeel Abboud-Ashkaar - an Israeli Arab who grew up in Nazareth - Israel's largest Arab Israeli city situated two hours from Tel Aviv.

Nabeel began violin studies at age 8 and after High School attended Tel Aviv University, graduating with a double major in physics and music.

After graduation, Nabeel moved for a time to Germany and pursued a successful career as a concert violinist. But in 2006, Nabeel returned to Israel to found the “Polyphony Conservatory” in Nazareth - where Arab and Jewish high school students study and perform together - taught by Jewish and Arab teachers - many of whom are musicians in the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

Nabeel Abboud-Ashkaar's “Polyphony Conservatory” currently has 130 students and produces musicians who go on to attend world-class conservatories and have wonderful careers as classical musicians.

While Lebanon forbids Palestinians to become doctors, the blessing of Israel is that Palestinians are welcome to be doctors and nurses - and where Arab and Jewish doctors and nurses work side by side at the leading Israeli hospitals - where Palestinians and Jews are patients together. And where Palestinians who murder Israeli civilians are treated in Israeli hospitals as well.

Israel is Arab Israelis who are lawyers and judges.

The blessing of Israel is Salim Joubran, a Palestinian Israeli born in Haifa in pre-state Palestine. Joubran attended Hebrew University where he earned a law degree and began a private practice in 1970. Twelve years later, Joubran became a judge in Haifa and was the first Arab Israeli to chair the Central Elections Committee - where he banned the Likud party's political advertise-



# ***“On a nightly basis, the IDF sends rescue units across the Syrian border to bring wounded Syrians into Israel for medical treatment. When the wounds are serious, Israeli soldiers carry Syrians on stretchers to Israeli rescue helicopters that fly the wounded to Israeli hospitals like the Ziv medical center.”***

ments on the grounds that they were "racist and almost certain to hurt the feelings of Arab Israelis and disrupt public order".

In 2004, Salim Joubran was appointed to the Israeli Supreme Court - the second Arab Israeli to sit on Israel's highest court. And Justice Joubran was one of three Supreme Court Justices to uphold the rape conviction that sent former Israeli President, Moshe Katsav, to jail for seven years.

In 2017 Joubran - and Palestinian Israeli - was elevated to the position of Deputy Chief Justice - a position he held until his mandatory retirement at age 70.

Joubran is married and has four children, three of whom are also lawyers. His daughter, Rania, was the first Arab Israel woman to complete a cadet course in the Israeli Foreign Ministry, and served as a diplomat on behalf of the State of Israel.

Joubran refuses to sing Israel's National Anthem because it refers to the "soul of the Jew." No one makes an issue of Justice Joubran's position.

And the blessing of Israel is Mashav, the Foreign Ministry's Center for International Cooperation, which has given aid to more than 140 countries plagued by global problems of hunger, disease and poverty - including countries which refuse to have diplomatic relations with the Jewish state.

Due to the tragedies it has had to deal with on its own streets, Israel is able to dispatch search and rescue teams and erect field hospitals in foreign lands faster than any other country.

Israel was the first response team in Haiti after its devastating earthquake of 2010, helping to save thousands of lives. A year later, Israel was one of the first countries to respond to the earthquake in Japan.

Israel is IsraAid, which since its inception in 2001, has been engaged in emergency disaster relief work in 47 countries - drawing on a large roster of leading Israeli experts to assist local populations deal with natural disasters, acute poverty, discrimination and displacement.

Israel is a safe haven to refugees from Vietnam, Bosnia, Kosovo and Darfur.

And despite the ongoing enmity of the Palestinian leadership toward the Jewish State, tens of thousands



**Jews on their way to the Western Wall in Old Jerusalem for Yom Kippur service.**

Photo: YouTube generated.

of Palestinians from the West Bank are treated in Israeli hospitals every year, most for cancer or heart problems - many of them children.

And Israeli medical care even extends to the leaders of Hamas and Fatah.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh became prime minister in Gaza after Hamas won the Palestinian elections of 2006. In 2014, Haniyeh's mother-in-law was treated for cancer at a Jerusalem hospital; and Haniyeh's granddaughter also received treatment in Israel for an infection in her abdomen. (She later died in Gaza.)

On a Thursday afternoon in 2014, three Israeli teens were captured by Hamas operatives pretending to be Chasidic students. They were then murdered.

At the very same time, Mahmoud Abbas's wife, Amina Abbas, was admitted to a Tel Aviv hospital for surgery on her leg. She was operated on Friday, the day after the teens were kidnapped, and she returned to the West Bank on Sunday.

In 2015, Mahmoud Abbas's brother-in-law underwent life-saving heart surgery at the Assuta Medical Center in Israel.

And the sister of Hamas senior official Moussa Abu Mar-zouk was also treated in Israel for cancer.

Two years later, Mahmoud Abbas' 76-year old brother Abu Lawi was treated for cancer in the same Tel Aviv hospital.

And this year, the far left Israeli newspaper Haaretz ran a story about

an organization called Derech Hachlama - "The Road to Recovery" - a group of 1,400 Israeli volunteers (including retired army officers and Jewish settlers) who pick up Palestinians from West Bank and Gaza check points and drive them to Israeli hospitals for medical treatment. Established in 2006, Derech Hachlama drives 30 to 60 Palestinians to Israeli hospitals - every day, This is the blessing of Israel.

The blessing of Israel is Dr. Salman Zarka, a former colonel in the IDF medical corps, who served on the Syrian border. Dr. Zarka now serves as director of the Ziv medical centre in Tz'fat, Israel's most northern city closest to the Syrian border.

On a nightly basis, the IDF sends rescue units across the Syrian border to bring wounded Syrians into Israel for medical treatment. When the wounds are serious, Israeli soldiers carry Syrians on stretchers to Israeli rescue helicopters that fly the wounded to Israeli hospitals like the Ziv medical center.

Dr. Zarka's hospital has delivered 19 Syrian babies and sends prescriptions with patients back into Syria.

For me, the "miracle" of Israel - is the Israeli people: who they are, what they stand for; what they are in the midst of building a Jewish State.

And it goes without saying - better yet, it need not be said - that Israel is a work in progress. What country -

what society - isn't?

No one should say that Israelis "perfect" - in the Greek sense of "Perfect."

But in the Jewish sense of "perfect?"

We, as American Jews, have so much to be grateful for, each and every day.

We are blessed a million-fold.

Whatever our individual worries - and problems - and challenges - and heaven knows - there is hardly a human soul without serious problems to deal with - and on Yom Kippur, we are each especially aware of those affecting each of us - as well as those we love.

Yet still: as a Jewish community - living where we do and at this moment in history - we are all blessed.

And we are blessed most, by the people we love - and those who love us.

At the same time, as a community, we are also the recipients of the blessings of the State of Israel - what has become the center of our Jewish family - with a culture and society that enriches our lives - as it brings blessing to all humanity.

On this most holy of day, when we appreciate every blessing in our lives - and strive to find better ways in the year ahead to bring blessings to those we love - may we also appreciate the blessings bestowed upon us by the mind, heart and soul of the State of Israel - and the Israeli people.

And we all say: Amen.