

YOM KIPPUR MORNING 5778

October 1, 1967: there I sat on my friend Mark's bedroom floor, watching as our Detroit Tigers lost 8–5 to the California Angels in the 163rd game of the 1967 baseball season. That loss handed the American League pennant to some team from Boston.

1967 was a very long time ago. Today I am a rabbi starting to think about retirement. Back then, I wasn't even a Bar Mitzvah. Today, everyone has hundreds of channels at their command. In 1967, color TV was brand new and the average cost of a new house was about \$14,000. Beth Am Temple was four years old, Paula Groupp was Temple president, while Lyndon Johnson was the President of the United States.

The Yankees two top pitchers, Mel Stottlemyer and Al Downing each earned under \$30,000. The toll on the George Washington Bridge was fifty cents and the Green Bay Packers defeated the Kansas City Chiefs in Super Bowl I.

Hard to believe, but true. We understand that much of what happens in the world is subject to interpretation, but there are actual facts. Certain statements are just true, no matter who or how many people choose to deny them and deny they will.

After all, 8% of people think Elvis is still alive, 6% of people think the moon landings were fake. 20% of Americans believe that former President Obama is a Muslim and many others believe that 9/11 was a plot organized by either Israel or America. There is no shortage of Holocaust deniers and other sick minds claim that the murder of Connecticut school children in Sandy Hook never happened.

So, it's pretty much impossible to convince everyone of anything. And yet, on this fiftieth anniversary of the Six Day War, a war that began and ended with Israel as the hero of almost the entire world, we note that somehow the narrative has changed.

As a student of history, I find it distressing how so many people today, aided by social media, make increasingly quick judgments, often based upon very minimal information.

We all remember about a month ago when all of the Confederate statues began coming down. I was very troubled, not necessarily with the decision, but rather with the speed at which it was made.

Rational people had real arguments to present in favor and in opposition of keeping those statues up. My argument is not with the decision, but

rather with the process. Mob mentality is dangerous, whether the mob is on our side or not.

So today, I want to go back and remind us all of what actually happened fifty years ago. The events of June, 1967 were actually very concrete. It was, in many ways, a much simpler world.

Israel was still a teenager, just nineteen years old. Her Arab neighbors never forgave Israel for defeating them in the 1948 War of Independence.

That war was supposed to be as lopsided a battle as the predictions were for the fight between Floyd Mayweather and Colin McGregor. Israel had about a million people, a large percentage of them post Holocaust, European refugees. By contrast, the Arab nations had close to one hundred million. The Arab weaponry was sophisticated, Israel's was antiquated.

Still, Israel won. 1967 was the chance to even the score and more. Egyptian president Nasser closed the Straits of Tiran and amassed its troops after kicking out United Nations observers. Even before the internet, the entire world knew that it was not a matter of "if," but "when" Egypt, Syria and their allies would attack Israel and fulfill their promise to drive the Jews into the sea.

Israel's Prime Minister Levi Eshkol decided not to react to an attack. Instead he launched a surprise air attack on the Egyptian air forces, which were still on the ground, sitting ducks. Israel captured thousands of enemy troops and devastated the Arab armies.

However, it was 1967; communication was far more primitive than it is today. By the third day of the war, Israel had largely defeated Egypt and Syria. However then, as now, political leaders often have a way of exaggerating their accomplishments. The leaders of Egypt and Syria convinced Jordan's King Hussein that the defeat of the Jews was imminent. They urged him, like a con man looking to get more people into a supposed investment, to join with them and he would have all of Jerusalem.

The Israelis were also in touch with King Hussein, pleading with him that the Arab leaders were lying. They told him that Israel had essentially won the war already. In the worst decision of his life, King Hussein believed the lies of his fellow Arab leaders. In a matter of hours, he had lost East Jerusalem, with all of the Jewish holy sites he had desecrated since 1948, Hebron, Jericho and the entire West Bank.

The war ended with the city of Jerusalem being reunited amidst emotional exhilaration and pride from Jews and other supporters of Israel around the world. Israel was the world's darling. It had been threatened by the big bully with destruction and had fought back and won an overwhelming victory.

But what was little Israel going to do with all of that land? The no brainer of a decision was to reunify Jerusalem. And so, the no-man's land which separated East and West Jerusalem, complete with barbed wire and snipers on barriers, like in Berlin, came down. Today, fifty years later, that no-man's land is the home to one of Israel's most popular outdoor malls, Mamilla!

On June 19, 1967, just nine days after the end of The Six Day War, Israel's unity government unanimously voted to return the Sinai to Egypt and the Golan Heights to Syria, in exchange for a peace agreement. However, the leaders of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, Kuwait and Sudan responded in September with their infamous "three no's:" no negotiations, no recognition and no peace.

The end of the Six Day War gave Israel control over the lives of more than one million Arabs who would come to be known as Palestinians. For fifty

years, Israeli leaders of different political parties have reached out, some more than others, to make peace with Palestinian and Arab leaders who have refused to renounce “The Three No’s.” They have refused to swear off violence, they have refused to recognize Israel and most of them have refused to make peace.

The trademark of the Palestinian people for half a century has been violent terror attacks against civilians, whether on airlines, in synagogues, schools, restaurants or elsewhere. Somehow, this was supposed to bring legitimacy to their cause.

By contrast, in the past fifty years, Israel has accomplished a true miracle, building an incredible oasis in the Middle East, while constantly under military, political and economic threat. The idealist in me used to believe in the concept of “land for peace,” but after fifty years I have to say “Enough is enough!”

We are all familiar with the definition of insanity as “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.” I believe that the time has come to stop criticizing Israeli control over the West Bank and Golan Heights. Instead, it is time to support the policy, de facto or de jure of Israel retaining the territories as long as it can . . . until peace, real peace, is achieved.

I love Israel. Like everything and everyone I love, it is imperfect, just like me. However, I'm tired of beating up Israel. I'm tired of other people who are not committed to Israel beating up on Israel. If we are not for ourselves, then who will be?

One state solution, two state solution, three state solution, if the Arab world and the Palestinian leadership is not committed to negotiating with Israel, recognizing Israel and making peace with Israel, there will be no peace in the Middle East, regardless of whether our president's name is Obama, Trump, Sanders, Clinton or Pence.

This summer, our Temple will take its tenth trip to Israel in the last twenty three years. It will be Israel's seventieth anniversary and we will be there to share in the celebration.

Unlike Jordan, who ruled over formerly Jewish holy sites from 1948 – 1967, Israel has protected the sanctity of Muslim and Christian holy sites, even granting the Muslim religious authority sovereignty over Judaism's holiest site, the Temple Mount.

With Egypt, Jordan and even Lebanon until it was overrun by Syria, the State of Israel has demonstrated that it is ready, willing and able to make peace with its Arab neighbors, as soon as they are ready.

As for the rest? I think that fifty years is more than enough time to wait. Rather than joining with her adversaries, as so many have done for so long, let us now acknowledge the reality that Israel's neighbors do not seem to be ready to make peace with Israel.

I stand proudly with Israel. Until her neighbors clearly and unambiguously declare that they want to make peace, I will protest the government of Israel's policies on religious pluralism. However, I will support Israel's right to hold on to lands it won in a defensive war fifty years ago.

There has been more than enough talk, more than enough time, but little in the way of action from most of the Arab world. Land for peace has not worked for fifty years. It's time for a change. AMEN