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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday June 17, 2022 ~ Parsha: Beha'alotcha

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Don't Travel to Places Where They Hate You: Part 2

I pride myself on never giving the same sermon twice. The same goes for my Shabbat messages. But every once in a while, I like to revisit a sermon or a message, especially when new information or ideas may further add to our discussion and understanding.

Last December, I wrote a Shabbat message titled *Don't Travel to Places [Where They Hate You](#)*. I should tell you that this message elicited more feedback and comments than usual, with most people in agreement with my position. The sheer number of Jews who regularly travel to countries that are dangerous for Jews and hostile to Israel has always been a concern to me. I am glad to know there are others who share my misgivings.

What motivated me to write the column in December was an incident in which three Israeli tourists were unlawfully detained by Turkish authorities. Given years of hostility between the Turkish government and the State of Israel, the detention of these Israeli tourists could have turned into a real crisis. But through the intervention of Israel's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, and to be fair, Turkish authorities who realized these tourists had no malevolent intent, the tourists were quickly released. But my larger point was that given Turkey's hostility to Israel, its support of Hamas, and the major role it has played in recent years in opposing Israel in the international arena, why would any Israeli or Jew go there in the first place? It's not like anything I have just told you about Turkey is a secret.

Now fast forward to sometime between June 6th and June 10th. According to Israeli media reports, several Israelis visiting Istanbul were reportedly whisked out of Turkey last week by Israeli security officials acting on intelligence reports that indicated that these tourists were at immediate risk from Iranian assassins. According to one report, an Israeli woman visiting a market got a call from a senior Israeli official warning her not to return to her hotel because Iranian assassins were waiting there for her and her spouse. The report went on to indicate that 10 Israeli security officers escorted the couple to the airport, leaving their personal effects in the hotel and brought them directly to Israel. This incident was only reported to the Israeli public on Monday June 13th, to allow Turkish authorities and Israeli investigators to better address the situation at hand. On Monday June 13, after issuing this report to the Israeli public, Israel issued its most severe travel warning for Istanbul. Israeli citizens were ordered to leave the city immediately. Israel's Foreign Minister called on Israelis to stay away from Turkey all together.

Now you would think that with announcement, Israeli tourism to Turkey would drop dramatically. Yet despite that, *timesofIsrael.com*, Israel's leading English language daily newspaper reported that 21 flights with 3750 passengers departed Israel for Turkey on Monday. Yes, you read that correctly. On the very day that the government of Israel issued its most serious travel warning, people nonetheless went. Now while it is true that some may be simply traveling through Istanbul on their way to other destinations, it is unlikely, given the sheer number of Israelis that have traveled to Turkey in recent years, that this represents most of those passengers. Indeed, the Israeli government wants all Israelis to leave Turkey. Yet they keep going, despite the current danger that exists there. It makes no sense -- at least to me.

It's no secret to anyone that Israel and Iran are fighting a proxy war. Israel is doing its utmost to prevent Syria from becoming the Iranian stronghold that Lebanon has sadly become. At the same time, Israel has devoted much of its security and intelligence apparatus towards thwarting Iran's nuclear ambitions. It is terrible that Israeli citizens are threatened when they travel outside of Israel. Yet the danger is real and the Israeli government has not been reticent about informing its citizens as to the stakes in this dangerous game.

Yet Israeli tourists keep on going. The number of tourists traveling to Turkey on Tuesday, June 14th exceeded the number I quoted earlier from the previous day, the day the government issued its most severe travel advisory. Who knows? Maybe they know something that I don't know. After all, many people reading this message have known me for years. I'm not exactly a risk taker. But I can't help but feel that this is a terrible and irresponsible decision. Certainly, relations between Turkey and Israel have improved in recent months, but it still harbors so many organizations hostile to Israel and Jews. Its leader remains an unrepentant Islamist and an ally to some of Israel's most bitter foes. I should state that there is no reason to believe the Turkish government is behind, encouraging, or had any role in these potential attacks on Israelis. Indeed, every news report has acknowledged that Turkish and Israeli security forces have worked cooperatively to neutralize these threats. But ask yourself: Why does Iran think it can operate with such impunity in Turkey? Why would any reasonable person place themselves in such danger?

Sadly, my message in December did not have the desired effect on our brothers and sisters in Israel. I hope it will have an effect on your travel plans. Stop traveling to places where they hate you. Please!

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner