



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday December 30, 2022 ~ Parsha: VaYigash

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Jerusalem, We Have A Problem

This Shabbat message is a particularly hard one for me to write. Yet if I did not share these thoughts with you, I believe I would have failed in my responsibilities.

Yesterday, Israel's new government under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was sworn into office. And with it, we are about to enter a crisis between the new government of Israel and the American Jewish community, one that could potentially make previous periods of tension look almost silly by comparison.

Interestingly, despite the differences in political outlook and culture which always complicate Israel - Diaspora relations, few if any questioned previous governments or prime minister's commitment to the State of Israel, or its democratic traditions and institutions. And indeed, despite concerns about the members of previous governing coalitions, each of these governments had some pretty impressive achievements to their credit. Those governments always demonstrated respect for the American Jewish community as well as the concerns of our leading organizations.

To put it mildly, this new government sworn in yesterday is different in tone, temperament, and goals.

Sadly, this new government has the potential to be the most extreme in Israel's history. Israel's new government is already questionable because it contains parties as well as personalities who oppose the rule of law, who wish to discontinue Israel's protections for its Arab and LGBTQ community, and who have made it clear that they will use their office to further delegitimize non-Orthodox Judaism in Israel. Prime

Minister Netanyahu has promised to keep these ministers, like by Bezalel Smotrich of the National Religious Party, Itamar Ben Gvir of the *Otzmah Yehudit* (Jewish Power) Party, and Avraham Maoz of the *Noam* Party, from controlling the government. But given the concessions he gave to those parties, that commitment is unlikely to be maintained. Those three leaders are so bad, so dangerous, and so irresponsible that they make George [Santos](#) look like Abraham Lincoln.

I am terribly concerned about the makeup of the new government and the potential for friction with the Biden administration. But what I am truly concerned about is the potential for a serious rupture between American Jewry and Israel. And we are on a collision course. American Jewry and Israel are in a relationship, a loving and passionate relationship. Yet anyone who knows anything about relationships knows that even in the best of relationships, there is always the potential for disenchantment, disappointment, even betrayal. But as the country song goes, "... the house don't fall if the [bones](#) are good." But the house is being threatened as we speak. A loving relationship needs expressions of passion and support, as well as action in support of those tender feelings right now.

For the past several months, we have read editorials in leading newspapers and opinion pieces lamenting the decline of democracy in Israel. We've seen prominent American Jews threaten to withhold their support of Israel if it fails to uphold its democratic values. I've seen many Rabbis try to address these issues with their congregations, Rabbis who I know both love and care about Israel, yet who talk about Israel in such a way that it actually undermines their congregants' support and concern for Israel.

I too have wrestled with the question of how to address this challenge with the congregation, which is why, as I said, this message is so difficult for me to write. I have been here a long time and I doubt there is anyone who has heard me speak or read my articles and messages that does not know where I stand as far as Israel is concerned. I strongly and unequivocally support Israel. I believe that a strong Israel protects world Jewry, and a strong American Jewish community united in that support of Israel is critical for Israel's wellbeing. I believe that Israel faces unique threats and challenges

and that simple fact must never be ignored. I have criticized every attempt to subject Israel to the Republican/Democrat, conservative/liberal tensions that characterize American political life, insisting always that Israel remain a bipartisan concern. I have always insisted that petty issues take a back seat to Israel's greatest strategic threat, Iran's nuclear ambitions. And I've always believed that our communal criticisms must never jeopardize Israel's paramount responsibility to safeguard her citizens.

But Israel's new government has the potential to do grave damage to just about everything that Israel has historically stood for, and at the same time fundamentally change the relationship between the majority of American Jews and Israel. And that, we cannot allow. And I can't find the right words to explain how to proceed at this moment. How do we express our concern and at the same time maintain and even strengthen our fundamental commitment to Israel and her citizens.

Luckily, I found someone who did find the right words, someone who writes with both love and concern as well as unwavering commitment. I spend hours each day trying to stay on top of everything going on in Israel and throughout the Jewish world. But few articles are written with the clarity, insights, and understanding that the author of this one demonstrates. That article can be [found here](#). I hope that you take the time to read and think about it because we have a big problem on our hands. And we will need everyone who cares about Israel to fix it.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner