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## **A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner**

February 6, 2026 ~ Parshat: Yitro

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

### **Not Truth or Peace, but Truth and Peace: Lessons from Tovaangar**

Earlier this week, I received an email from a dear [friend](#) and colleague, one of the most prominent and influential Rabbis in the United States. It's always wonderful to see the men and women with whom I studied during my years in Rabbinical school succeed in their careers, and lead their communities with such distinction.

It is not uncommon for Rabbis and professional colleagues, or even your colleagues, associates, and friends to append their professional titles, accreditations, and the like to the bottom of their emails. Some add a graphic of some sort as well. Some people like to add a meaningful quote. More and more, I see many people adding *he/him/his* or *she/her/hers* as a symbol of respect and solidarity to the LBGTQ community. But appended to the very bottom of this email was the following sentence:

***Mindful of the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples as the first caretakers of Tovaangar (Los Angeles basin, South Channel Islands)***

Wait ... what? What was that all about? I needed to learn more about this, and also why this brilliant colleague was so compelled to add it to his email.

It turns out that the Tongva people are the indigenous people native to the Los Angeles region. Tongva is the people's own name for themselves, whereas Gabrielino is a name given during the era of Spanish colonization. They lived in what is now Los Angeles, Orange County and the southern Channel Islands. The sentence appended to the bottom of the email is an acknowledgment that the land on which my colleague lives and works is part of the

ancestral homeland of the Tongva people who lived there long before the cities or governments we know today. Adding it to the email is what is known as a “land acknowledgment,” a statement that recognizes the indigenous peoples who originally inhabited a place, and an awareness that indigenous communities were often displaced through colonization, racism, and government policy. The purpose of a land acknowledgment is to promote historical awareness, respect and responsibility. I further learned that they are often used or expressed publicly at the beginning of events or meetings, on university or organizational websites, and in email signatures.

It's not like I never heard of a land acknowledgment before (though to be fair, I never saw one in an email). I've heard some debates about their merits, as well as the common critique of them as often more [performative](#) than actually doing anything meaningful or significant to improve the plight of indigenous peoples, an act more self-congratulatory than an actual commitment to learning or action. So seeing it in this email really made me think, and motivated me to learn a little bit more about the Tongva people, a group of Native Americans, who, if we're being honest, I never heard of before. Maybe that was the point — to encourage us to learn more about the original inhabitants of this region.

As (I hope!!!) you know, I recently began teaching my winter adult education series *A History Of The Jews Of Australia*. It is the 30th year in a row that I'm teaching Jewish history during our winter adult education semester, which has nothing to do with this message, but I'm still very proud of it! While researching the history of Australian Jewry, I came across some amazing historical documents from the National Archives of Australia. Interestingly, when you go to that website, the first thing that pops up on the screen is the following:

***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that the national archives website and collection contain the names, images and voices of people who have died .***

***Some records include terms and views that are not appropriate today. They reflect the period which they were created and are not the views of the national archives.***

While not a land acknowledgment per se, this sentence is a real demonstration of awareness of the aboriginal people of Australia, and sensitivity to their history, as well as their often terrible experiences under British colonialism and Australian expansionism. In further research into historical records and national archives, I found other examples of actual land acknowledgments. As a result, I took the time to look into some of the histories of these aboriginal communities that I never had thought about that existed for thousands of years before the British Empire arrived. I've been thinking about this idea of land acknowledgements a great deal for the last several days since I received this email. They are actually very important. Yet the more I thought about them, the more I thought of this issue from a specifically Jewish and Zionist point of view. One of the most dangerous and insidiously evil aspects of the Palestinian national movement has been its obsessive desire to not only demonize Jews, but to sever the connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. One can only imagine what might be the future of Jewish/Palestinian coexistence were it not for the hatred of Judaism, and the constant nurturing of the idea that Jews are foreign invaders and colonizers that animates both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority.

The idea of a land acknowledgment would be a worthy addition to the moral grammar that guides discussions about Zionism as well as the Palestinian national movement. It would not mean that if Palestinians would just admit the Jews had lived there for thousands of years, then everything would be solved. Far from it. But at the same time, such an acknowledgement would acknowledge that a future State of Palestine could not be built on the negation of another people's history. It would acknowledge Jewish legitimacy, even absent an actual political agreement. Difficult negotiations over borders, resources, and 100 other issues could still take place, while at the same time recognizing Jewish history as ancient and continuous, not a colonial invention, and most importantly, it could lead to an end to the framing of Jews as foreign usurpers with no legitimate roots. Such an acknowledgement would call neither for an endorsement of Zionism or an acceptance of Israeli policy, and certainly would not

require an abandonment of Palestinian national claims. But it would represent a profound shift in moral language, and a real opportunity for a new relationship between Israel and all its neighbors, with respect for narratives and histories all the people of the regions, and point the way to a better and peaceful future.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner