

# The Physical and Spiritual Importance of Israel Through the Ages



## Ancient Times (1200BCE – 70CE)

The connecting point between Earth and Heaven and the center of all Jewish life – religious, political and military.

## Exile (70CE – 1948CE)

Yearning to return.

## The Modern State (1948 – today)

A safe haven, military power and a complex democratic state.

# Ancient Times

## Archaeology

The history of ancient Israel and Judah begins in the Southern Levant region of Western Asia during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. The earliest known reference to "Israel" as a people or tribal confederation (see Israelites) is in the Merneptah Stele, an inscription from ancient Egypt that dates to about 1208 BCE, but the people group may be older. According to modern archaeology, ancient Israelite culture developed as an outgrowth from the pre-existing Canaanite civilization. Two related Israelite polities known as the Kingdom of Israel (Samaria) and the Kingdom of Judah had emerged in the region by Iron Age II.

According to the Hebrew Bible, a "United Monarchy" (consisting of Israel and Judah) existed as early as the 11th century BCE, under the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon; the country later split into two kingdoms: Israel, containing the cities of Shechem and Samaria in the north, and Judah (containing Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple) in the south. The historicity of the United Monarchy is debated—as there are no archaeological remains of it that are accepted as consensus—but historians and archaeologists agree that Israel and Judah existed as separate kingdoms by c. 900 BCE: 169–195 and c. 850 BCE, respectively.

The Kingdom of Israel was consolidated as an important regional power by the first half of the 9th century BCE, before falling to the Neo-Assyrian Empire in 722 BCE, and the Kingdom of Judah began to flourish in the second half of the 9th century BCE.

The Kingdom of Israel was destroyed around 720 BCE, when it was conquered by the Neo-Assyrian Empire. While the Kingdom of Judah remained intact during this time, it became a client state of first the Neo-Assyrian Empire and then the Neo-Babylonian Empire. However, Jewish revolts against the Babylonians led to the destruction of Judah in 586 BCE, under the rule of Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II. According to the biblical account, the armies of Nebuchadnezzar II besieged Jerusalem between 589–586 BCE, which led to the destruction of Solomon's Temple and the exile of the Jews to Babylon; this event was also recorded in the Babylonian Chronicles. The exilic period, saw the development of the Israelite religion (Yahwism) towards the monotheistic Judaism.

This ended with the fall of Babylon to the Achaemenid Persian Empire around 538 BCE. Subsequently, Persian king Cyrus the Great issued a proclamation known as the Edict of Cyrus, which authorized and encouraged exiled Jews to return to Judah. Cyrus' proclamation began the exiles' return to Zion, inaugurating the formative period in which a more distinctive Jewish identity developed in the Persian province of Yehud. During this time, the destroyed Solomon's Temple was replaced by the Second Temple, marking the beginning of the Second Temple period.

In *The Bible Unearthed* (2001), Finkelstein and Silberman summarized recent studies. They described how, up until 1967, the Israelite heartland in the highlands of western Palestine was virtually an archaeological terra incognita. Since then, intensive surveys have examined the traditional territories of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh. These surveys have revealed the sudden emergence of a new culture contrasting with the Philistine and Canaanite societies existing in Canaan in the Iron Age. This new culture is characterized by a lack of pork remains (whereas pork formed 20% of the Philistine diet in places), by an abandonment of the Philistine/Canaanite custom of having highly decorated pottery, and by the practice of circumcision.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_ancient\\_Israel\\_and\\_Judah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_ancient_Israel_and_Judah)

## Biblical and Rabbinic texts

### Living in the Land

And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.' (Gen. 17:8)

The Rabbis taught: A person should always live in the Land of Israel, even in a city of which the majority are idolaters, and not live outside of the Land of Israel, even in a city where the majority is Jewish. For whoever lives in the Land of Israel, it is as if he has a God. And whoever lives outside of the Land of Israel, it is as if he has no God. For it is said (Leviticus 25:38): "to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God." And whoever does not live in the Land has no God? Rather, to tell you, Whoever lives outside of the Land of Israel, it is as if he is an idolater. For it is said by David (I Samuel 26:19): "for they have driven me out this day that I should not cleave unto the inheritance of the LORD, saying: Go, serve other gods." And did they really say to him "Go serve other gods"? Rather, to tell you, Whoever lives outside of the Land of Israel, it is as if he is an idolater. Rabbi Zeira evaded Rav Yehuda when he wanted to go up to the Land of Israel. For Rav Yehuda said: Whoever goes up from Babylonia to the Land of Israel, *violates a positive prohibition...* for it says (in Jeremiah 27:22), "*They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be, until the day that I remember them, says the Lord.*" (Babylonian Talmud: Ketubot 110b)

“You shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have assigned the land for you to possess”: In my opinion, this is a positive commandment. God commands them to settle in the land and inherit it; God gave it to them and they should not abhor God’s inheritance. And if it should enter their minds to go and conquer the land of Shinar or the land of Ashur [Assyria] or to settle in some other place, they would be transgressing God’s commandment. And our rabbis have stressed (Ketubot 110b) the commandment to settle in the Land of Israel and forbade leaving it; they judged a woman rebellious for not wanting to ascend with her husband to the Land of Israel, and vice-versa for a man. It is from here that this commandment [of settling in the land of Israel] has been commanded to us, as this verse is a positive commandment. It is a commandment that recurs in many places [in the Torah]; e.g., "go in and possess the land" (Deuteronomy 1:8). Rashi, however, interprets "And you shall take possession of the land" to mean that you shall take possession of it from those who have settled it, and then you will settle in it and be able to survive in it; and if you don't, you wouldn't be able to survive in it (Rashi on Numbers 33:53). But what we interpret is the central point of the verse.

(Nachmanides on Numbers 33:53)

The Sages relate: “The Almighty created the world in the same manner as a child is formed in its mother’s womb. Just as a child begins to grow from its navel and then develops into its full form, so the world began from its central point and then developed in all directions. The “navel” of the world is Jerusalem, and its core is the great altar in the Holy Temple. (Kohelet Rabbah)

### **Connecting Heaven and Earth**

Rav Nachman said to Rabbi Yitzchak, “What is the meaning of “It is sacred in your midst but I will not enter the city” (Hosea 11:9)? Because it is sacred in your midst, will God not enter the city?” Rabbi Yitzchak replied that Rabbi Yochanan said that it means: The Holy Blessed One said, “I shall not enter Jerusalem above until I enter Jerusalem below.” Is there Jerusalem above? Yes, as it is written, “Jerusalem built up, a city unified together.” (Ps. 122:3) (Talmud: Ta’anit 5a)

*Zevul* is the location of the heavenly Jerusalem and the heavenly Temple, and there the heavenly altar is built, and the angel Michael, the great minister, stands and sacrifices an offering upon it, as it is said, “I have surely built a house of *Zevul* for You, a place for You to dwell forever (I Kings 8:13). And from where do we derive that *Zevul* is called heaven? As it is written, “Look down from heaven and see, from Your holy abode and glorious abode [*Zevul*]” (Is. 63:15) (Talmud: Chagigah 12b)

## Exile from the Land

Three things were given conditionally: the Land of Israel, the Temple, and the Kingship of the House of David. But the Torah and the Covenant of Aaron were given unconditionally. From where do we know this about the Land of Israel? It says (in Deut. 11:16), "*Take care, lest your heart be seduced to serve other gods and bow to them. For then the anger of the Lord will flare up against you....*" (Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, Yitro, Amalek)

Alas! Lonely sits the city once great with people! She that was great among nations has become like a widow; the princess among states has become a thrall. (Lamentations 1:1)

## Return to the Land

A pilgrim song. *When God restored the exiles to Zion it seemed like a dream.* Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with joyful song. Then they said among the nations: "God has done great things for them." Yes, God is doing great things for us, and we are joyful. Restore our fortunes, O God, as streams revive the desert. Then those who have sown in tears shall reap in joy. Those who go forth weeping, carrying bags of seeds, shall come home with shouts of joy, bearing their sheaves. (Ps. 126: 1-6)

Thus said the Eternal of Hosts, the God of Israel, to the whole community which I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon: (5) *Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit.* (6) *Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there, do not decrease.* (7) *And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the Eternal in its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper.* (8) For thus said the Eternal of Hosts, the God of Israel: Let not the prophets and diviners in your midst deceive you, and pay no heed to the dreams they dream. (9) For they prophesy to you in My name falsely; I did not send them—declares the Eternal. (10) For thus said the Eternal: *When Babylon's seventy years are over, I will take note of you, and I will fulfill to you My promise of favor—to bring you back to this place.* (11) For I am mindful of the plans I have made concerning you—declares the Eternal—plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a hopeful future. (12) When you call Me, and come and pray to Me, I will give heed to you. (13) You will search for Me and find Me, if only you seek Me wholeheartedly. (14) I will be at hand for you—declares the Eternal—and I will restore your fortunes. And I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places to which I have banished you—declares the Eternal—and I will bring you back to the place from which I have exiled you. (Jeremiah 29: 5-14)

## Exile and the Hope of Return

The siege of Jerusalem of 70 CE was the decisive event of the First Jewish–Roman War (66–73 CE), in which the Roman army led by future emperor Titus besieged Jerusalem, the center of Jewish rebel resistance in the Roman province of Judaea. Following a five-month siege, the Romans destroyed the city and the Second Jewish Temple. On Tisha B'Av, 70 CE (August 30), Roman forces overwhelmed the defenders and set fire to the Temple. Resistance continued for another month, but eventually the upper and lower parts of the city were taken as well, and the city was burned to the ground. Titus spared only the three towers of the Herodian citadel as a testimony to the city's former might. The siege had a major toll on human life, with many people being killed and enslaved, and large parts of the city destroyed. This victory gave the Flavian dynasty legitimacy to claim control over the empire. A triumph was held in Rome to celebrate the conquest of Jerusalem, and two triumphal arches were built to commemorate it. The treasures looted from the Temple were put on display.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple marked a major turning point in Jewish history. The loss of mother-city and temple necessitated a reshaping of Jewish culture to ensure its survival. Judaism's Temple-based sects, including the priesthood and the Sadducees, diminished in importance. A new form of Judaism that became known as Rabbinic Judaism developed out of Pharisaic school and eventually became the mainstream form of the religion. Many followers of Jesus of Nazareth also survived the city's destruction. They spread his teachings across the Roman Empire, giving rise to the new religion of Christianity. After the war had ended, a military camp of Legio X Fretensis was established on the city's ruins. Jerusalem was later re-founded as the Roman colony of Aelia Capitolina. Foreign cults were introduced and Jews were forbidden entry. This event is often considered one of the catalysts for the Bar Kokhba revolt.

[Although some deny the historicity of some of his account] Josephus wrote that 1.1 million people, the majority of them Jewish, were killed during the siege – a death toll he attributes to the celebration of Passover. Josephus goes on to report that after the Romans killed the armed and elderly people, 97,000 were enslaved. Josephus records that many people were sold into slavery, and that of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, 40,000 individuals survived, and the emperor let them to go wherever they chose.

After the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the city and its temple, there were still a few Judean strongholds in which the rebels continued holding out, at Herodium, Machaerus, and Masada. Both Herodium and Machaerus fell to the Roman army within the next two years, with Masada remaining as the final stronghold of the Judean rebels. In 73 CE, the Romans breached the walls of Masada and captured the fortress, with Josephus claiming that nearly all of the Jewish defenders had committed mass suicide prior to the entry of the Romans. With the fall of Masada, the First Jewish–Roman War came to an end.

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege\\_of\\_Jerusalem\\_\(70\\_CE\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_(70_CE)))

## **In Texts**

The Eternal will scatter you among all the peoples from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone, whom neither you nor your ancestors have experienced. (Deut. 28:64)

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither;  
let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you,  
if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour. (Ps. 137: 5-6)

And Rabbi Elazar said: The Holy Blessed One exiled Israel among the nations only so that converts would join them, as it is stated: “And I will sow her to Me in the land” (Hosea 2:25). Does a person sow a *se’a* of grain for any reason other than to bring in several *kor* of grain during the harvest? So too, the exile is to enable converts from the nations to join the Jewish people. (Talmud: Pesachim 87b)

Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will merit and see her future joy, and whoever does not mourn for Jerusalem will not see her future joy. (Talmud: Ta’anit 30b)

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says that Rabbi Yehoshua testified: From the day the Temple was destroyed there is no day that does not include some form of curse. (Talmud: Sotah 48a)

In the merit of the Jewish people’s Torah study they will return to the Holy Land and be ingathered from the exile. (Zohar, Va’etchanan 31)

It is taught in a *baraita*: Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai says: Come and see how beloved the Jewish people are before the Holy Blessed One. As every place they were exiled, the Divine Presence went with them. They were exiled to Egypt, and the Divine Presence went with them, as it is stated: “Did I reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt?” (I Samuel 2:27). They were exiled to Babylonia, and the Divine Presence went with them, as it is stated: “For your sake I have sent to Babylonia” (Isaiah 43:14). So too, when, in the future, they will be redeemed, the Divine Presence will be with them, as it is stated: “Then the Eternal your God will return with your captivity” (Deuteronomy 30:3). It does not state: God will bring back, i.e., God will cause the Jewish people to return, but rather it says: “God will return,” which teaches that the Holy Blessed One will return together with them from among the various exiles. (Talmud: Megillah 29a)

For *Malchut* (One emanation of the Divine Presence, otherwise known as *Shechinah*) is the one who is expelled with us, ascending with us and descending with us. She is redeemed with us and exiled with us. She is the one connected to us always, never separated from us under any circumstance. She dwells with us. Our deeds cause her union or separation or mercy. (Moshe Cordovero, 16th c. Tzfat Kabbalist, Ein Yaakov)

Thus says The Eternal: A voice is heard in Ramah [or: on a height]—wailing, bitter weeping—Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.” Thus says The Eternal, "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears; For your work will be rewarded," declares The Eternal, "And they will return from the land of the enemy. "There is hope for your future," declares The Eternal, "And your children will return to their own territory. (Jeremiah 31: 14-16)

"Better is a dry morsel and a quietness therewith, than a house full of feasting with strife" (Prov. 17:1). R. Yochanan said, "Better is a dry morsel" -- the Land of Israel, where even if day after day a man eats no more than a morsel with salt, yet because he lives in the Land he gains the world-to-come; "than a house full of feasting with strife" - than living outside the Land, where acts of violence and robbery are rife. (Midrash Mishlei 17:1)



Artwork by Alex Levin, Israel.



### **In Liturgy (Wherever they are in the world, all Jews face Jerusalem when they pray)**

"...and to Jerusalem your city may you return....Blessed are you, builder of Jerusalem."

(Weekday T'fillah)

"...may our eyes behold your return to Zion...Blessed are you, who restores his presence to Zion."

(Weekday T'fillah)

"...because of our sins we have been exiled from our land and sent far from our soil...Draw our scattered ones near from among the nations, and bring in our dispersions from the ends of the earth. Bring us to Zion your city in glad song, and to Jerusalem home of your sanctuary in eternal joy."

(Traditional Musaf)

"...have mercy Eternal One, our God...on Jerusalem Your city, on Zion the resting place of Your glory..." and "Rebuild Jerusalem, the holy city, soon in our days. Blessed are you God who rebuilds Jerusalem in His mercy, Amen."

(Grace After Meals Including Bread)

"...have mercy, Eternal One, our God...on Jerusalem, Your city; and on Zion, the resting place of Your glory... Rebuild Jerusalem, the city of holiness, speedily in our days. Bring us up into it and gladden us in its rebuilding and let us eat from its fruit and be satisfied with its goodness and bless You upon it in holiness and purity."

(Grace After Meals, Light Meal)

"...may the son of David, Your servant, come and redeem us... May the Temple be rebuilt; and the City of Zion [i.e. Jerusalem] will be – filled again - with people singing a new song..."

(Tzur Mishelo)

## **The Modern State**

The Israeli Declaration of Independence, formally the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel (Hebrew: הכרזה על הקמת מדינת ישראל), was proclaimed on 14 May 1948 (5 Iyar 5708) by David Ben-Gurion, the Executive Head of the World Zionist Organization, Chairman of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, and soon to be first Prime Minister of Israel. It declared the

establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel, to be known as the State of Israel, which would come into effect on termination of the British Mandate at midnight that day. The event is celebrated annually in Israel as Independence Day, a national holiday on 5 Iyar of every year according to the Hebrew calendar.

The declaration was signed in the context of civil war between the Arab and Jewish populations of the Mandate that had started the day after the partition vote at the UN six months earlier. Neighboring Arab states and the Arab League were opposed to the vote and had declared they would intervene to prevent its implementation. In a cablegram on 15 May 1948 to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States claimed that "the Arab states find themselves compelled to intervene in order to restore law and order and to check further bloodshed".

Over the next few days after the declaration, armies of Egypt, Trans-Jordan, Iraq, and Syria engaged Israeli troops inside the area of what had just ceased to be Mandatory Palestine, thereby starting the 1948 Arab–Israeli War. A truce began on 11 June, but fighting resumed on 8 July and stopped again on 18 July, before restarting in mid-October and finally ending on 24 July 1949 with the signing of the armistice agreement with Syria. By then Israel had retained its independence and increased its land area by almost 50% compared to the 1947 UN Partition Plan.

In the three years following the 1948 Palestine war, about 700,000 Jews immigrated to Israel, residing mainly along the borders and in former Arab lands. Around 136,000 were some of the 250,000 displaced Jews of World War II. And from the 1948 Arab–Israeli War until the early 1970s, 800,000–1,000,000 Jews left, fled, or were expelled from their homes in Arab countries; 260,000 of them reached Israel between 1948 and 1951; and 600,000 by 1972.

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli\\_Declaration\\_of\\_Independence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_Declaration_of_Independence))

The land of Israel is not some external entity.  
It is not merely an external acquisition for the Jewish people.  
It is not merely a means of uniting the populace.  
It is not merely a means of strengthening our physical existence.  
It is not even merely a means of strengthening our spiritual existence.  
Rather, the land of Israel has an intrinsic meaning.

It is connected to the Jewish people with the knot of life.  
 Its very being is suffused with extraordinary qualities.  
 The extraordinary qualities of the land of Israel and the extraordinary qualities of the Jewish people are two halves of a whole.

(Rav Kook, Eretz Cheifetz I)

"Our task in the 21st century is to defend the integrity of the Jewish story of the 20th century – the return of the Jewish people home. That story is under assault from the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, or BDS, whose goal is not to end the occupation of 1967 but of 1948 – that is, ending Jewish sovereignty in any borders.

The most insidious threat of BDS is not economic but ideological. On campuses around the world the very name “Zionism” is becoming tainted. *Maddeningly, the more re-rooted we become as a people in our land, the more our indigenouness is being challenged.* The growing counter-narrative to Zionism is that a Jewish state was forced on the Arab world by a guilty Europe – *ignoring 4,000 years of Jewish connection to the land.* Increasingly, then, the Holocaust is no longer a compelling argument for Jewish statehood but the opposite, an essential part of the anti-Zionist assault that defines Israel as a white European colonialist entity..."

(Yossi Klein Halevi, American-born Israeli author and journalist)

"It is sometimes said that if there had not been a Holocaust, there would not have been a state of Israel, as if the establishment of a state can ever compensate for the murder of six million Jews, but the reality is the other way around. If there had been an Israel, there might well not have been a Holocaust or the horrors of Jewish and human history."

(Irwin Cotler, MP)

### **We Hold These Truths, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, May 20<sup>th</sup> 2021**

The current wave of violence in Israel and Gaza is a heartbreaking human tragedy. The loss of innocent life (including that of children) rends the heart, destruction of homes and endemic fear defy the peace and security in which every human being deserves to live.

We call on Israeli and Palestinian leadership to declare a ceasefire as soon as possible.

It is also hard not to feel whiplash with the competing narratives of what caused this latest round of death and destruction. Too many people hold only the other side responsible while having

little or no sympathy for their suffering and pain. But we Reform Jews believe that all of these truths can and should be held together at the same time.

#### ISRAEL MUST ENSURE THE SECURITY OF ITS PEOPLE

Hamas has shot over 4,000 rockets indiscriminately at Israel and sirens have been sounding almost nonstop in certain parts of the country. No country would or should tolerate having thousands of rockets fired at their citizens without responding. We mourn the loss of life of every Israeli killed in this violence, no matter their religion or ethnicity.

Israel has the moral authority to defend its own citizens even if its military might is vastly superior to that of Hamas.

The launching of thousands of rockets at Israel's civilian population and the effectiveness of the Iron Dome in substantially reducing casualties reminds us that US support for Israel is indispensable.

#### PALESTINIANS' RIGHTS ARE ESSENTIAL

As Reform Jews, we support the human rights of Palestinians. They should be able to live in dignity and safety in their own country.

We mourn the tragic death of innocent Palestinians in Gaza.

Using stun grenades in the Al Aqsa mosque on the holiest night in the Muslim calendar harmed rather than enhanced Israel's security.

Our North American Reform Movement has long opposed the military occupation of the West Bank, which humiliates Palestinians and causes much daily suffering. So, too, we have opposed the expansion of settlements and annexation in the West Bank and the eviction/displacement of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah, elsewhere in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank. Ending the occupation through renewed negotiations between Israel and the PA is essential.

#### HAMAS'S CONTROL OF GAZA CONTINUES TO POSE A THREAT TO ISRAEL AND TO THE PALESTINIANS

Life in Gaza is oppressive for which Hamas's authoritarian rule bears significant responsibility. Hamas remains committed to Israel's destruction.

Hamas intentionally shoots rockets from within heavily populated civilian areas in Gaza, in effect making the innocent residents of those areas human shields for Hamas and endangering them.

If there were no restrictions on goods flowing into Gaza, Hamas and Islamic Jihad would have far more deadly arms to use against Israel.

Despite Hamas's brutality, the U.S., the international community and Israel must act to expeditiously ensure humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza.

#### IRAN CONTINUES TO ABET REGIONAL UNREST AND ATTACKS AGAINST ISRAEL

Iran has called for the destruction of Israel and supports military operations with Hamas, their ally in Gaza.

Iran supplies Hamas and Islamic Jihad with weapons and delights in every rocket shot at Israel and every Israeli killed.

#### FOSTERING HEALTHY DEMOCRACIES AND CURBING EXTREMISM IS ESSENTIAL

With Palestinian elections canceled, Hamas is winning the popularity vote through its deadly violence.

The rise of extremism is infecting both Israeli and Palestinian political life, increasing violence (including the emerging internecine violence in some of Israel's mixed Jewish-Arab communities) and weakening democratic norms.

Israel must ensure that perpetrators of violence, Arab and Jew alike, be held accountable and ensure at long last, an end to discrimination against Israeli Arab citizens and communities that continues in too many areas of Israeli life, including providing fully equal government services.

#### AFFIRMING TWO STATES FOR TWO PEOPLES AND COMITY BETWEEN ISRAELI JEWISH AND PALESTINIAN CITIZENS ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO A PEACEFUL FUTURE

Decades of coexistence efforts between Jewish Israelis and Palestinian citizens of Israel have been challenged but not eliminated by the recent wave of violence. We are proud of the role of many in our own Reform Jewish community who have built strong partnerships with their Arab neighbors including publicly standing together for peace and unity over these painful last days. The current round of violence between Israel and Hamas, as well as in East Jerusalem and in Israeli cities, serves only to strengthen those who oppose peaceful co-existence between a Jewish State and a Palestinian State.

All of these complex realities are true. It is also true that we have a responsibility to work toward a peaceful future for Israelis and Palestinians, rooted in two states for two peoples, as distant as that goal seems today. The realization of that future has been delayed for too long. There must be sustained resolve to address the root causes plaguing this blood-soaked corner of land. We believe that we must fight for Israel's security, the rights and dignity of Palestinians, and a peaceful future for all.

