

Introduction to Prayer for Israel

First Day of Rosh Hashanah – September 25th, 2014

Before we recite the Prayer for the State of Israel, I would like to share some brief personal thoughts with you about Israel and the relationship with have as Diaspora Jews with Israel today. I know from years past that whenever I say anything about Israel in this congregation, my words are evaluated and I am judged by what I have to say. I am often told afterwards that people agree with me or disagree with me. People tell me that they like what I say or do not like what I say. This year, I ask that you not judge me on this topic. It is after all Rosh Hashanah and I suggest we leave the judging today to God. Instead I ask you to listen to my words and allow them to provide a perspective on our personal relationship with Israel, especially in these challenging days for the Jewish homeland.

As a Jew – as an American – as a Zionist – I stand with Israel.

When Israel faces the threat of thousands of missiles fired indiscriminately at its people and when Israel chooses to defend itself from the threat of Hamas, an organization whose sole objective is to destroy the Jewish State – I stand with Israel.

When Israel goes out of its way to avoid civilian casualties as it fights the war with Hamas, as Israel sends various warnings to the citizens of Gaza to avoid areas so that they will not be injured, I stand with Israel.

When Israel fights a war for the first time against an enemy who sees the benefit to its own citizens dying in the conflict, who fire missiles at Israel from schools and hospitals and mosques, where hundreds of children lost their lives because they were forced to be human shields and when Israel discovers the intense network of tunnels built with cement reinforcement and which contained handcuffs and tranquilizers so that they could be used to kidnap Israeli soldiers – I stand with Israel.

When Israel recognizes that it is not perfect and when it comes to military battle, things do not always go as planned and as Israel takes the time to investigate its own actions now that the conflict is over and they have the time to reflect on the challenges of the war and admit when mistakes are made – I stand with Israel.

When Israel continues to talk with Palestinian leaders who are willing to make peace and recognize Israel as a sovereign Jewish State, who may be willing to follow the example of other Arab leaders who have achieved peace with Israel – I stand with Israel.

When Israel continues to develop stronger relationships with a number of Arab nations, many of whom are quite happy that Israel is fighting Hamas even though they could never publically state their support for the Jewish State – I stand with Israel.

When Israel continues to welcome Palestinians who are injured in their hospitals, as Israel continues to provide opportunities for Palestinians to earn a living within Israel's borders – I stand with Israel.

When Israel remains a strong friend to the United States, shares military intelligence and other critical information, continues to be the most loyal friend the US has in the Middle East and when Israel works with the United States to develop incredible technology that can produce the Iron Dome that shot down thousands of missiles that saved countless lives – I stand with Israel

When Israel continues to struggle with many social issues, as Israel allows its citizens to voice their opinion and influence major social change for all of its citizens, and when Israel struggles with the role of

religion in the Jewish State and who has the ultimate authority to make critical religious decisions that affect every Jew in the world and every Jewish family living in Israel – I stand with Israel.

When Israel continues to struggle to determine the role of women in Israeli society, the role of gays and lesbians in Israeli society and the rights and opportunities for all minorities including a growing number of immigrants and when Israel continues to remain a democracy, where every citizen has a voice and a vote to elect a government and where the opposition parties in Israel's parliamentary system are allowed to influence the government – I stand with Israel.

When Israel continues to be held to a double standard by the world, the one country that is attacked more often by the United Nations and other international organizations that direct more of their bigotry and hatred at the one Jewish State, as the anti-Semitism of yesteryear has become the anti-Zionism of today – I stand with Israel.

As citizens of the United States who have so many ways of supporting Israel and who have countless organizations that allow us to learn more about the challenges Israel faces today and allow us to support the causes and concerns that mean the most to us – I stand with Israel.

As Israel continues to be the Jewish State – the homeland of our people – the home of our Biblical ancestors and a place where the language of our people is spoken on the streets, where Jewish values influence the people in countless ways, where the greatest heroes in Jewish history are studied and respected and allowed to continue to influence our people – I stand with Israel

And as Israel continues to strive to be a place that represents what our ancestors hoped for and so many gave their lives to defend, a place where any Jew in crisis, any victim of anti-Semitism, any one persecuted because of their Jewish religious beliefs has a home and a sanctuary – I stand with Israel.

My dear friends, Israel is far from perfect, and I do not agree with every decision the government of Israel makes, but I will always stand with Israel and I will always pray for the wellbeing and safety of the citizens of the Jewish State. As we pray for Israel today, we pray for peace for Israel and all of her neighbors, we pray for the people of the region to have respect and trust and vision and hope, so conversations and negotiations will prevent future military conflicts, so that all the citizens of the region will be able to build their homes, their land and their lives so that they can have the opportunities to live peaceful, productive lives, and we pray for strong individuals to lead everyone out of the recent turmoil and into a better day, so that children can go to school and play in playgrounds without the threat of missiles, so that people can live in peace and security, so that everyone can travel to their jobs and schools and homes in safety, so that everyone in the region can accept the fact that they need to learn to live together, without fighting and without blaming and without attacking.

I always stand with Israel and today I ask us all to rise as we recite together the Prayer for the State of Israel, *Tefillah L'Shlom HaMidinah*, found in our Machzor on Page 117, led in Hebrew by _____, and in English by _____.