

Jewish Identity – On the Rise
A Page from a 2050 History Book
Yom Kippur Morning Sermon – Makom NY
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The year is 2048. The world is an interesting place. The environment is a mess. The waters have shrunk. Hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis and earthquakes open the morning news, and populations in the middle of the country have grown significantly. People are finally realizing that we need to take care of the government, and hopefully our great-grandchildren will be able to thank us for that. The political systems in many countries reached such far extremes on both sides that many countries literally burst and people found their way back to the middles.

The iPhone 36 is given out to every kindergartener. It is small and fits in a small pocket, and it no longer has apps and functions like a computer. The designers of smart phones also realized that it was ruining society, children couldn't solve basic problems, people were getting killed regularly as they were looking down while walking and driving, causing more fatal accidents than the companies could handle, and they simply stopped production, so people could return to some sense of 1950's normalcy. AI is a regular part of every business and though it put people out of work, the designers found a balance of how to use it without abusing it.

Food looks and tastes different – so much better than 25 years ago. Farmers are respected and supported by governments. There were so many law suits that all production of foods with chemicals was ended, and only natural ingredients are allowed. People are healthier, living longer lives.

News is shared on TV and radio, and it too has changed tremendously over the past 25 years. People stopped watching programs called 'news' that shared lies or opinions, and all news channels were canceled for some time. When they resumed, it was only 'old school news', people watched once a day, before you went to work, and rarely is there 'breaking news' anymore. People no longer sit glued to their TV's. Music also did a 180, returning to the classics of the 70's, 80's and 90's – wow there was some incredible stuff written during those decades! Record players are found once again in every household, and they cost only \$18!

Anyone who wants a secondary education or beyond can receive one, and it works just like high school used to work at the beginning of the century. People can choose their own path, all of which are respected and subsidized, and all professions now have professional organizations that support them in their work life.

Travel has become easy and less expensive. There are no gas stations – everything is electric. Companies now require a minimum vacation time, a 4-day work week and when you begin a family, you are required to take one year to spend time with your child. Medical care has finally been solved, and all medical care around the globe is free, of high quality, paid for by governments. Treatments have even been found for the main health concerns from 25 years ago, and diagnoses are made much early, with preventative care being the highest priority.

It is one hundred years after the State of Israel was created. The world finally realized that the Jewish State was never going anywhere, and with the help of the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Ukraine and a number of other key countries, Israel has become a beacon of strength and fortitude in the region, a friend to many, a guide to others, and a light to the nations around them.

Israel now uses every inch of her precious land for incredible agricultural advances, revolutionary technology that is healthy and smart and useful, and medical advances that are beyond comprehension and understanding – something people 25 years ago could not even have dreamed about. Israel is the most forward-thinking on issues of the environment, and Israel has their 7th Israeli astronaut on the moon right now.

The Black Shabbat War ended just over a year after it began, and within a few years, and with the support of many countries around the world, Iran's leadership of the early century was wiped out, their place on the world stage removed, and their citizens demanded and received new, healthy leadership that has returned their country to the people. The same has happened in Russia and China.

The world, in partnership with Israel, helped the Palestinian people to create a homeland that can grow and flourish, with real educational and professional systems created, with leadership that support them and leaders who care about their people. They learn from Israelis about the creation of a vibrant society that is no longer a threat to Israel. Hamas and Hezbollah are organizations from history that have not been heard of in more than two decades.

And what about the Jews? The Jews are still here, as Mark Twain predicted they would be, thriving and flourishing, as leaders and creators and inventors in every pocket of the earth, in every aspect of society. You see, that Black Shabbat 25 years ago – it changed everything. Today we refer to it as 'before' and 'after' that Black Shabbat.

A quick reminder of what 'Before Black Shabbat' looked like. Many Jews had become assimilated, acculturated. Being an American and fitting in within society was much more important to most Jews. Many would show up once a year, on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – schools and work gave them off, so what else could they do? But it didn't mean anything, not for most.

They sent their children to Hebrew school, or found them a tutor, so they could 'have' a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, but I ended there. There was no real connection to the history, to the journey, to the ritual, to the pride. The immigrant experience of the Jew became a distant memory, and all that they had worked for, strived for, fought for, was no longer about being Jewish, with few exceptions.

And then 2023 happened. The worst day, the worst year for the Jews since the Holocaust one hundred years ago. Antisemitism and anti-Zionism exploded. Jews fought, cried, mourned, persevered, through literal blood, sweat and tears. And it DID something to the Jew.

All of a sudden, a sense of Jewish pride and strength came over each and every Jew, one-by-one, from America and throughout the world. In the year following that Black Shabbat, Jews around the world shared with Israelis in their fear and their shock. Jews cried with their Israeli brothers and sisters, Jews supported the IDF, Jews held up the hostage families, and modern-day Jews learned to fight for their Israel like they had never done before. For the first time since the creation of the State of Israel, most Jews around the globe felt the magical, invisible string that tied them to Eretz Yisrael, to THEIR Israel.

In the face of antisemitism, Jews didn't shy away from identifying as Jews; instead, they ran straight into the fire. They felt that only as a community of Jews could they fight for the Jewish spirit, the collective spirit. Together they fought for the future of their people, and they won. You know that old saying – you are only as happy as your most unhappy child? Well, the Jewish people realized – that they were only as safe and secure as the least safe Jew, and so the shift began.

Jews started wearing and buying Jewish star necklaces, to show their Jewish pride. Jews raised their voices against antisemitism and hatred of all kinds. Un-identifying Jews wanted to connect to their heritage, to their history. Instead of hiding away from the world, Jews of all kinds, of a shapes and sizes and backgrounds and education became proud to be Jewish.

From all of the darkness, there came light. Today, in the year 2048, 25 years after that Black Shabbat, 100 years after the creation of the Modern State of Israel, the fastest growing religion in the world is this 'New Judaism'. If you were to look up New Judaism in the online Factopedia, which has replaced Wikipedia, because who ever thought it was a good idea to have an online encyclopedia that could be edited by anyone – in Factopedia what does it say under the 'New Jew'?

The New Jew has found a sense of pride, connection and importance in being Jewish. These Jews are like no other Jew throughout history. The Jew in biblical times was unsure, hesitant and somewhat weak. Their leaders Abraham and Moses had faith and conviction, but the Israelite people were regularly worried and it took a lot of convincing for them not to return to their lives as slaves in Egypt.

The Jew in rabbinic times was inquisitive, creative and committed. They were completely separated from most others in society, and the rules they wrote helped to create the Judaism that was practiced for many centuries, but those rules did not always help the Jew to live in a greater world. The Jew in the rabbinic times was prolific, and brilliant, and... somewhat insular and isolated.

The Jew in medieval times was always on the run, always looking behind them. Jews in these times had discovered that they had a knack for knowledge, finance and technology, and the world did not like the role Jews were playing, and so they felt incredible hatred and antisemitism. They ran, they hid, they were persecuted and expelled from city to city, from country to country. There was no time to create nor imagine, because they were too busy looking out for the next expulsion.

The Jew in contemporary times was very busy. Many made their way to America, and they were conflicted – do they keep their Jewish roots or live like Americans. Most chose the latter, which was not so good for the

Jewish Peoplehood. The most horrific slaying of Jews occurred in the Holocaust, but quickly Jews forgot. They forgot what it was like to be hated, despised, abused and discounted. They forgot what it was like before there was a Jewish state. They forgot what it was like to be proud to be Jewish.

They forgot the joy of Shabbat, to slow down and be with family and community. They forgot the joy of Holiday Celebrations, to go to services, to build sukkot, to make traditional holiday meals, to hold seders – not just to eat, but to remember, to remember the past as it applies to the now, and the tomorrow. They forgot to learn their history, so the bad could never repeat itself and the good could keep getting better. They forgot that l’dor vador, from generation to generation must mean more than signing up for Hebrew school and making a Mitzvah party. They forgot what it means to put being a Jew above all else, because if they don’t, no one will.

And then.... Black Shabbat happened. And... out of that dark, dark, day came the light.

And today, in the year 2048, what are the Jews like?

- Jews are connected, today more than ever.
- Jews have figured out what it means to be a people, a religion, and a culture.
- Jews can now balance being Jewish, and being a citizen of the world, and the latter does not negate the former.
- Jews are proud Zionists, truly connected to our Israeli brothers and sisters.
- Jews have made Judaism a priority; shabbat is celebrated weekly in Jewish homes, the Jewish calendar is followed, holidays are observed, Jewish history is learned, reading and questioning Jewish text is a weekly endeavor.
- Jews have a new-found sense of Jewish pride that had been nearly lost for a generation. Jews have embraced a Jewish identity in the likes of which we have never witnessed before.

And in the year 2048, there are these different models of Jewish community called Makom in nearly every city and suburb across the country. Started in 2015 on Long Island, New York, Makom has become a Jewish community people find because they are looking for, searching for a place, a place to be their Jewish home, that embraces the newness of Judaism with its antiquities, that makes the good deed mitzvot as important as the Torah mitzvot, that supports Jews to explore and recreate and reinvent while maintaining a sense of history and connectedness.

We are taught on Yom Kippur in the portion you will soon hear Rachel chant –

אַתֶּם נִצְרִים הַיּוֹם כְּלָכֶם לִפְנֵי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
רְאִשֵׁיכֶם שְׁבִטֵיכֶם זְקֻנֵיכֶם וְשִׁטְרֵיכֶם כֹּל אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

“You stand this day, all of you, before your God יהוה make this covenant, with its sanctions, not with you alone, but both with those who are standing here with us this day before our God יהוה and with those who are not with us here this day....

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—if you and your offspring would live— by loving your God יהוה, heeding God’s

commands, and holding fast to [God]. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that יהוה swore to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.”

Friends, I speak to you now from today, Yom Kippur, 5785, 2024.

We have choices to make. We can choose to let tomorrow be a continuation of yesterday.... or we can make sure that October 7th becomes the crucial changing point for the Jewish community, for the Jewish world.

There is much in this world we cannot change – we cannot necessarily change the global outlook on the environment, stop the increase of natural disasters nor impact the political landscape. We cannot alter the usage of electronics, the creation of the next phone or the influence of AI. We cannot alter the food industry, nor amend the news, or popular music. We cannot single-handedly change the education system, the travel business nor the medical industry. We cannot even change the situation in the Middle East, as much as we wish we could.

But we can change the way Jews are defined, today, tomorrow, next year and in 25 years. The ground has literally shifted beneath our feet, and we have a choice to make - we can be courageous, as Jews. We can be proud, as Jews. We can own our path, now and for the future generations.

It is our birthright. It is our obligation. It is our blessing: to be a Jew, to embrace our Jewish roots, to plan for our Jewish tomorrows.

Kein yehi ratzon.
May it be now.