

RANDI WEINGARTEN
PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
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Beset on all sides by adversaries. Threatened by those who seek to wipe it from the map. A place where elected leaders can be vilified for seeking to do nothing more than representing their own people, and whose people only want a life with dignity and security. But enough about the American Federation of Teachers.

Now some of you might be wondering: Why are we listening to the head of a trade union?

Like all of you, I have a deep personal connection to Israel. It is a product of my Jewish identity and life experience—including the fact that I come home to a partner who happens to be a brilliant and compassionate rabbi.

My own passion for Israel. The faith in activism, individual voices raised together, and in movements that advance social and economic justice and democracy. The recognition that these values are timeless, but must be transformed to action. The understanding that anything worthwhile takes struggle and that “no change rolls in on the wheels of inevitability.” And the belief that democracies are responsive, but that people of conscience must insist they do respond. These are the tenets that underpin the labor movement and explain its endurance. And these are the elements that will allow the pro-Israel, pro-peace movement to endure, even after last week’s election results.

It’s no secret that American Jewry is among the most dynamic and successful diasporas in the world. There’s no shortage of theories to explain the success. But I would argue that perhaps nothing has been more essential to the success of American Jews than our historic commitment to education—specifically, public education.

Take a look at one high school in Brooklyn, James Madison High School—a couple of miles from where I taught, at Clara Barton. Here’s a small sampling of its graduates: Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg; Sens. Bernie Sanders and Chuck Schumer; Nobel Prize-winners Gary Becker, Stanley Cohen, Martin Lewis Perl and Robert Solow. Not to mention my predecessor, and a great champion of civil rights, Sandy Feldman.

America’s public education system was and is essential to the thriving Jewish diaspora that we have today.

That’s why, in the face of budget cuts and privatization efforts, Jewish grass-roots activists battle every day to protect our public schools, to provide a public education that teaches democratic values and promotes pluralism, and to ensure the opportunity for each and every child to both dream and achieve his or her dreams.

And that's why we can't pull up the ladder of opportunity after we've climbed it. Instead, we have to continue the struggle for educational opportunity—both here and in Israel.

There's another understanding we share. If you love and cherish Israel and want to secure it from generation to generation, a two-state solution is the only answer.

This is a difficult moment for those of us who believe in the ideal of Jews and Palestinians living side by side, in two states, with real rights, and with security. In a last-ditch effort to retain power, Benjamin Netanyahu played on the Israeli people's worst fears. It was both painful and pitiful—just days after thousands of us went to Selma to honor those brutally beaten fighting to exercise the right to vote—to watch Netanyahu renounce the two-state solution and demonize Israel's Arab citizens for exercising their basic democratic rights. (And let's not ignore the 4 million Palestinians living under Israeli occupation who don't even have the right to vote for the government that controls their lives.)

It was gut-wrenching to see his Nixonian tactics rewarded by the Israeli right wing. But one of the tenets of the organization I lead is that we don't sacrifice our ideals or abandon our goals based on who occupies power at any given moment. We don't declare victory or concede defeat based on the outcome of elections, because we know that while political leaders may reflect our voices, the election of an ally is not the same as the advancement of an agenda. And the converse is also true: Electoral defeat, or the election of an adversary, does not defeat an agenda.

So that means we don't waiver in our support for Israel, but we fight for a secure Israel that lives up to its founding declaration's promise of "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex."

And we recognize that real security requires a two-state solution that ends the occupation.

We respect Israel's democracy, but as we do in America, we use the outcome of elections—especially when we disagree with them—to inspire us to renew the struggle for a better future. Now more than ever, when the challenge is the greatest, we have to rise up and speak out.

That's why J Street exists—to keep the ideal of two states for two peoples alive when others are ready to pronounce it dead. To continue the struggle for peace when others are readying for war. To fight the politics of fear by offering hope.

The only way to achieve these goals is to build a strong movement that demands change and forces leaders to act. Because for politicians, the status quo is frequently the safest option—and fear is the easiest call to action. But the status quo means the vast chasm between those who believe: Israel, right or wrong, and never mind the occupation or democracy, and those who believe: Israel is evil and doesn't have a right to exist, which then justifies BDS, or worse, violence or terrorism. This is a zero-sum game in which the Israel that we love never wins. Status quo means literally "in the same state." But staying in the same state threatens the

future of the state of Israel.

As Jeremy mentioned, I recently traveled to Israel and the West Bank with a delegation from the AFT and J Street. We talked with Israeli and Palestinian teachers and union activists; representatives of the IDF and the PLO; the mayor of a Jewish settlement in the West Bank and Yitzhak Rabin's daughter Dalia; women who live on the Israel-Gaza border and former Israeli soldiers turned activists for Palestinian civil rights.

And while we heard a variety of perspectives, they all shared a common theme: the conflict between hope and despair. Hope—because Israelis and Palestinians long for peace. But also despair—because they fear it will never come.

As Netanyahu's campaign showed, it is easy to appeal to despair and fear. Hope has to be cultivated over time.

And, sometimes, you have to look hard to find it. I found it on a visit to the Max Rayne Hand in Hand School in Jerusalem, where Jewish and Arab children learn together and, just as importantly, grow up together.

The school is like other great schools—bursting with joy, bustling with activity, and brimming with artifacts of student work. But when you look closely, the integration of religions and cultures is everywhere. Children study in Hebrew and Arabic; they learn each other's history; they share each other's experiences; they honor each other's holidays. The five Hand in Hand campuses are more than just schools where 1,000 children are currently enrolled. They are hope personified.

But this is what that beautiful, vibrant school looked like last November: torched by right-wing Israeli Jews; walls with graffiti saying things like: "You can't coexist with cancer." Is this the future? Is this our inheritance and our legacy?

And that's why what happened in the aftermath of that arson was an even more powerful statement. Residents of the nearby working-class Jewish neighborhood of Patt, a place where you might suspect there would be some sympathy for the attackers, posted a sign saying, "We are ashamed of racism and violence, and glad you are here." Players from a professional soccer team showed up to play soccer with the kids. Thousands of people rallied by their sides, and Israeli President Reuven Rivlin invited the students to the president's home to play in the yard. Their message was clear: The hope for a better future is more powerful than the fear of those who perpetrate violence from the shadows.

So look to the school. Yad b'yad. Hand in hand. That's what my union is doing—we've started an ongoing partnership with Yad b'yad.

We can't be bystanders in the struggle for peace. We have to engage and foster dialogue. Dialogue is not everything, but only honest and open discourse—over and over and over

again—will help individual Israelis and Palestinians see their shared humanity.

In East Jerusalem, we had dinner with a Palestinian businesswoman whose father was in an Israeli prison when she was growing up. She told us that she hated Israelis and wouldn't have cared if they were all dead—until she started working with them to develop the new planned Palestinian city of Rawabi. She explained that she could hate Israeli Jews—perhaps all Jews—because she knew none. It was only when she started to work with Israeli Jews that her opinions changed. That's the power of engagement and dialogue.

We heard the same message from mothers who live on the Gazan border, and from labor activists fighting for fair wages and decent housing. Engagement helps build a constituency for peace.

I won't pretend I can tell you the exact contours of a two-state solution that would guarantee self-determination, basic rights, and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike. And I'm well aware that "diplomatic" is not an adjective that is regularly applied to me. So while I'm not a diplomat, I am a negotiator.

Negotiation, done right, is engagement. And years of complicated labor negotiations have taught me something about what it takes to reach an agreement. For negotiations to succeed, both sides have to feel like they won. Neither side can feel like they were crushed.

But too often, Israeli and Palestinian leaders seem to treat negotiations as a zero-sum game. And instead of allowing both sides to claim victory, everybody loses.

We have the responsibility to help change that dynamic. Whether it's years spent fighting for great public schools, voting rights, living wages, immigrants' dignity or LGBT equality, our experience shows that even against great odds, the righteous make progress. And as Martin Luther King said, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

But it takes struggle—constant struggle—and that's what people who believe in a two-state solution must do now.

I've always found it powerful that our founders here in the United States didn't seek to establish a perfect union, but rather a "more perfect union"—as if they understood that their vision would require continual work, continual struggle. We have been doing that work for more than 200 years, so it should surprise nobody that Israel is still evolving just 67 years into its existence. And just as it has in the United States, it will take continual work and struggle to fully realize the dream of an Israeli democracy rooted in "freedom, justice and peace."

I've been talking about counterpoints all night: Faith in democracy, and the need to work to bring out the best in it. Individuals and institutions. Hope and fear. And I want to leave you with two more: Dayenu and Hineni.

For our ancestors, if we had said: There will be a Jewish state—for the 6 million who died in the Shoah, there is now a homeland where more than 6 million Jews live—they would have said, “Dayenu.” A state with a powerful military. Dayenu. A vigorous economy. Dayenu. A proud democracy. Dayenu.

And yet none of those things alone—the economy, the military, the democracy—is enough to secure that future. Unless we act.

That is why we must answer a new series of calls with the words of the prophet Isaiah: “Hineni. Shelacheyni.” “Here I am. Send me.”

Israel needs its leaders to recognize that there are real choices. A voice for some is not democracy. Security for some is not peace.

Lasting peace and security will only come from two states, where *all* residents have a voice and opportunity. Israelis need peace and want prosperity—a land free of rockets and tunnels. The Palestinian people demand justice, equality, full human rights and a state of their own. Hineni. Here I am. Shelacheyni. Send me.

And to achieve these goals, all of us need to make our own choice to engage in the struggle for Israel’s future: a vibrant state, a righteous state, a lasting institution. *Hineni. Shelacheyni.* Here we are. Send us.

Let us recommit to the work ahead, for the values we hold, for the land we love. Thank you.