Sometimes a song takes up residence in your brain. When that happens, we call it an ear worm. I have an ear worm - it is the song Ein Li Eretz Acheret.

Let me give you translation:

“I have no other country,

Even if my land is aflame

Just a word in Hebrew

Pierces my veins and my soul -

With a painful body, with a hungry heart,

Here is my home.

I will not stay silent

Because my country changed her face…”

This song was written by Ehud Manor in 1982 as a late response to his younger brother’s death during the Six-Day War, but the words resonate today with the current situation in Israel even though in the mid-80s, when this song was first performed by Gali Atari, it became the rallying cry against the First Lebanon War.

I imagine that some of you have been critical of Israel since the Judicial Reform first circulated in the news. You may have, rightfully so, expressed your disapproval - either among your friends and family - or even on your social media accounts.

Your response, like that of many other fellow American Jews, is probably a reaction to the fact that your sense of justice has been challenged. You may resent that the one thing that you have always been proud of, the one thing no one could deny, that Israel is a strong democratic county, is no longer beyond doubt. No matter what criticism was leveled against the country, you could always rally behind the certainty that the nation of Israel served as a beacon of democracy that had a positive impact around the world. In the past, you could always argue against those who had negative things to say, but now it might feel to you like defending Israel is no longer reasonable.

“Outrageous,” some of you will say, “It is like the “Handmaiden’s Tale” - a story in which women have few rights – if in Israel women are not allowed on the bus!”

Others of you may shout: “Israel is becoming a totalitarian regime!”

So many American Jews have recently felt compelled to offer their opinion on Israel, even those who could not have cared less about Israel in the past. It is very disheartening to me to witness American Jews, maybe even some of you, who are angry at the Israeli government, but are directing their criticism at the whole country instead of targeting the political leaders.

What I think American Jews are asking themselves is this: “What kind of country is Israel? Perhaps, the non-Jews who have been so critical of Israel over the years are right. I am embarrassed for Israel.” And so, at best they all keep quiet when members of Congress not only criticize, but attack, Israel.

Time and time again we find Israel under more scrutiny than any other country. The behavior of the Israelis is examined and magnified around the world. For example, think of how many times we Americans have taken our protests to the streets in the last few years alone. Does this mean that as Americans, we have stopped supporting the United States? No – it simply means we are in disagreement with a policy decision and we are exercising our right to express our opinions in a public forum.

But when this happens in Israel, the country and the people are ostracized. For months now thousands of people have taken to the streets with Israeli flags to stand up for what they believe.

Those protests are peaceful. When the protesters on both sides meet, they frequently exchange friendly greetings, especially when they recognize a family member or a friend from an army unit. But still Israel struggles with a bad reputation when its citizens vocalize their concerns.

I have recently heard that the current situation in Israel is being compared to the historic time of the destruction of the Temple. This rebuke is followed by the prediction that Israel will be destroyed and no longer exist as a sovereign State.

I don’t believe that prophecy.

Just as our own country’s history lessons have taught us, this is not the first time, and it probably is not the last time, that Israelis are speaking out against government decisions.

In his book, “The Genius of Israel,” Dan Senor relates many stories of conflicts between the Israeli people and the Israeli government. He recalls the following circumstances that are especially important now as we reflect on past objections: “Toxic political debates over government decisions to accept Holocaust reparations from West Germany in 1952; to launch a controversial war in Lebanon in 1982; to uproot and forcibly relocate Jewish settlement communities in 2005;…Israeli society appeared the most divided, if not irreparably broken, immediately before and after the assassination of a prime minister by a fellow citizen in 1995.” And yet, as divided as it was then and is now, Israelis still remain *am echad* - one nation.

It is a good reminder that this has happened before, and the state continues to hold strong.

Do you need further proof?

Well, you know that Israelis are known to be aggressive drivers. They will never let anyone cut them off. They are notorious for driving in a way that ensures they are ahead of the traffic.

As a matter of fact, there is a well-known joke about this attitude. It goes like this: “In physics it is proven that light is faster than sound. Well, Israelis have proved it otherwise. How? In Israel, before the traffic light turns green, the cars already start honking. Definitely sound travels faster than light in this country!”

And so imagine all this crazy traffic with cars, horns constantly honking and drivers trying to overtake one another when all of a sudden there is the sound of siren - not the one that warns of missiles, but the one on Yom HaShoah (The Holocaust Remembrance Day) and Yom Hazikaron (Memorial Day).

Everything stops as soon as the siren is heard. People get out of their cars and stand for two minutes in silence. The entire country comes to an immediate halt. If the siren was to sound off during the street protests, everyone would stop immediately. They would stand still and observe a respectful moment of silence (and you know - it takes a lot to silence an Israeli).

This past Yom HaShoah, President Isaac Herzog appealed for national unity. He said: “Let us leave these sacred days…above all dispute…Let us all come together, as always, in partnership, in grief, in remembrance.”

On July 19, President Herzog addressed the House of Representatives in celebration of Israel’s 75th anniversary of Independence and to reaffirm strong ties between United States and Israel.

I was incredibly lucky to be invited by Congressman Tom Kean Jr. to attend the 461st Congressional joint session.

When the President entered the Chamber, the House erupted with a standing ovation! It was clear that the energy in the room was celebratory and uplifting, which perfectly reflected the purpose of Herzog’s appearance. After all, this was to be a speech reaffirming strong ties between United States and Israel on the heels of Israel’s 75th anniversary of Independence.

President Herzog said: “In the Jewish tradition this is a somber period in which we mourn the loss of our sovereignty. Jewish communities all over the world lament the beginning of our national exile, where throughout two millennia, we continuously expressed a spiritual connection to our ancestral Holy Land and a longing to return home and regain our independence.

Yet today, at this moment in my people's history, gathering on Capitol Hill to celebrate 75 years of Israeli independence with our greatest partner and friend, the United States of America, my soul is overflowing with pride and joy.”

And what a celebration it was! The speech was received in the best spirit of bipartisanship. On this day Democrats and Republicans were united and moved by the poignant and heartfelt speech. Almost each phrase was followed by a standing ovation. (I counted 45 in total as I, too, got a good workout that day!)

But for us Jews, as with any celebration, there is always a bitter memory in the air. And this day was no exception. The recent expression of antisemitism that had come from a Congressional member just a few days earlier clouded the spirit in the room and brought reality to the celebratory atmosphere.

The incident I am referencing took place on the previous weekend when Congresswoman from Seattle, Pramila Jayapal, spoke during a conference for the progressive Net-roots Nation to a group that was holding up Palestinian flags, saying;

“I want you to know that we have been fighting to make it clear that Israel is a racist state.”

While she offered an apology after her statement, let’s be realistic. Her words were far from sincere. As proof, she was among those progressives, such as Reps. Rashida Tlaib, Ilan Omar, Alexandra Cortez, and Jamaal Bowman, who boycotted President Herzog’s address.

What we always hope though, is that good outcomes can result from bad actions.

As it was, following the outrageous anti - Israel sentiment from Mrs. Jayapal, on July 18 the House voted overwhelmingly (412-9) to approve a resolution backing Israel and condemning antisemitism. While this was a symbolic gesture, it provided a much needed reaffirmation of the overall continuing tradition of our resilient U.S.- Israel relationship.

President Herzog had a strong response for Rep. Jayapal’s remarks. He said: “Mr. Speaker, I am not oblivious to criticism among friends, including some expressed by respected members of this House. I respect criticism, especially from friends, although one does not always have to accept it. But criticism of Israel must not cross the line into negation of the State of Israel’s right to exist. Questioning the Jewish people’s right to self-determination, is not legitimate diplomacy, it is antisemitism.”

Friends, antisemitism is on the rise and it is a very real threat. But I am going to tell you how we can best fight it by being united. Since the latest pretext for antisemitism had been partially triggered by the events in Israel, we have to be united in our support for the State of Israel.

By support, I don’t mean to refer to Israel as a sort of Disney World utopia. Instead, we must understand that Israel, just as any country, including the United States, finds itself in the midst of a political crisis. And as it undergoes this existential crisis, we cannot give up our support.

Friends, we all know that Israel cannot afford to be divided in the presence of enemies who surround it on many borders. In fact, attacks have increased in the last year. The majority of these have been carried out by the terrorists coming from the Palestinian territories.

In The Jerusalem Post article published on September 7, Tov Lazaroff reports that on August 24 when Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas was addressing Fatah’s Revolutionary Council, he said that, “Ashkenazi Jews stem from Europe, not the Middle East, and they were murdered during the Holocaust due to hatred against them for their historic role as money lenders.”

Make no mistake - Palestinian leaders of Hamas and PNA (Palestinian National Authority) have no desire to make peace with Israel.

Now, please note that I am distinguishing between the Palestinian leaders and the Palestinian people, because many of the Palestinian people want to live in peace with Israel. As I learned from a Palestinian speaker we had when I attended convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in Israel this March, some even wish they could get Israeli citizenship.

Unfortunately, the Palestinian leaders have always viewed Israel as illegitimate. We know there have been so many opportunities for peaceful negotiations. But every time this occurs, the Palestinians have rejected the idea because it does not seem like a viable opportunity from their prospective. They don’t want Israel to have statehood, period. Nothing less will do for them. You should remember that any Arab country that enters into an agreement with Israel is viewed by the Palestinians as betrayers. For example, Egyptian President Anwar El-Sadat was considered a traitor when he entered peace negotiations with Israel after the Yom Kippur War.

Dr. Einat Wilf (former Israeli Knesset member and Former Policy Advisor to Vise Prime Minister Shimon Peres) spoke recently before a group of Rabbis at a virtual forum organized by AIPAC. She noted the distinct shift in the Palestinian phrase, “the cause for the fight for freedom,” which has now become, “the fight to free themselves from aggressors.”

And they succeeded in changing the way the conflict is viewed from a fight for freedom to a fight to fend off aggressors.

Through social media, through anti-Zionist protests throughout Europe and the United States, in the streets and on college campuses and universities, they were able to convince people that Israel is the cause of their suffering. Not only were they able to convince the non-Jews, but many American Jews were swayed as well. Especially among the younger generations, many now believe that Israel is an apartheid state. It pains me to watch this trend. What these young people don’t realize is that regardless of how passionately they express their opinion publicly againstIsrael, ultimately, they will be associated with Israel for one simple reason - because they are Jews.

But there has been a shift in the Reform movement in support of Israel and for establishing stronger ties between American Reform Jews and Israel.

The Stephen Wise Free Synagogue launched the initiative to revitalize support for Israel among  liberal Jewry. It was proposed by Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch due to rising concerns over increasingly hostile attitudes towards Israel.

Rabbi Hirsch said: "If we do not devote resources and tireless efforts to building liberal Jews’ Jewish identities and their affinity for Israel, the future of American Judaism could very well be compromised.”

 As a result, Amplify Israel Fellowship was formed to empower rabbinic leaders to speak for Israel and to help them develop curricula and learning tools to guide  students and their families toward a better understanding of Zionism and contextualizing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition, the goal is to provide the students with the tools to identify any manifestations of anti-Israel bias, anti-Zionism and antisemitism, whether on social media, in school or college campuses.

Friends, I am happy to share that I was one of the thirteen rabbis from US to be a part of this group. In November we will be going to Israel to study together.

I watched the recently released film “Golda.” A truly Oscar worth movie about the Yom Kippur War. It’s opening in the theaters is very timely because we are commemorating the 50th anniversary of Yom Kippur War.

This movie takes us through the horror of the events that occurred prior to the War, during the War and after the Yom Kippur War. In the movie, Golda is tormented by the decision she made to not mobilize the army despite the many warnings of an imminent attack. As the war unfolds and the Israeli Army suffers enormous losses, she is afraid that Israel will not survive. Yet, a shift in the battle happens and she becomes hopeful that not all is lost.

There is a scene in the movie, which reenacts the famous dialogue between Golda and Henry Kissinger. Kissinger: “Golda, you must remember that first, I am an American, second, I am Secretary of State, and third, I am Jewish.” To which Golda responds: “Henry, you forget that in Israel we read from right to left.”

Friends, remember that we read Torah right to left and as such we too will always first be Jewish in the eyes of the entire world and therefore, we will be also tied to Israel and its fate.

As this year we celebrate the 75th anniversary since the proclamation of Israel Independence, my hope is that you will embrace this association with pride and hold your head high even in the face of harsh disapproval. And yes, you can criticize Israel yourself, but you can never disassociate yourself from the only Jewish State.

Tomorrow we will read from the Torah portion Nitzavim, which says: “You are all standing this day before the Lord, your God.”

All of us are people of Israel and we are standing before God as it is our covenant with Him, to never turn away from Israel - not when “its aflame” and not when it “changed its face.”