

Officers of Sodom
Shabbat Hazon
Saturday, August 2, 2025
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I. Isaiah 1

1. You, People of Israel don't know Me.
2. Your sin weighs you down.
3. Your land is a wasteland.
4. I am sick of all your animal sacrifices.
5. I don't listen to your prayers.
6. Your hands are full of blood.
7. Yet, you have the power to change your ways: learn to do good, seek justice, aid the wronged, uphold the rights of the orphan, and defend the widow.
8. Zion will be redeemed through justice, those who return (repent) in righteousness.
9. The Lesson: We are responsible for the mess we are in.
10. When we feel lost, when chaos is about to overwhelm us, we look to ourselves and our past actions. We don't blame others. We take responsibility by repenting our sins, changing our ways. We ask ourselves, how can we change? What can we do differently?
11. This has been a central message of the prophets: consider Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and, of course, Isaiah. All of them rebuked the people for their sins; all of them held out the hope of repentance and renewal. None of them blamed the Assyrians, the Egyptians, or the Babylonians for their moral and spiritual crisis.
12. And the Talmudic rabbis were no different. The Temple was destroyed because of our sins, not because the Romans were so evil. Recently, I finished studying the fifth chapter of Gittin. Embedded in the chapter are pages of aggadot explaining the catastrophe of the destruction of the Second Temple. Again, they blamed their people, not the Romans. The Musaf Festival Amidah includes the line, "Because of our sins we were exiled from our land."

II. What is Our Responsibility? How are we Responsible?

1. How are we—Jews who live in the diaspora, in the United States---What is our responsibility for this war? What is our responsibility for the hostages not being released, the treatment of the Gazans, and the lack of affordable food in Gaza?
2. We have been raised on the value we are one people. A core Jewish value is that we give priority to meeting the needs of other Jewish people. We do care

about the needs of non-Jews, but the ethos of our community is that Jewish needs come first.

3. Yet we are not Israelis. We don't live there, we don't pay taxes to the Israeli government, our children and grandchildren do not serve in the IDF. We don't bear the risks and dangers of being an Israeli citizen. We don't bear the same responsibility as an Israeli does.
4. Because we are not responsible in the same way as an Israeli is, we are vulnerable in a way an Israeli is not. Since we don't live there, we can be accused of not being fully supportive of Israel. If we raise questions or criticisms about Israeli policy, we can be accused of aiding and abetting Israel's many enemies.
5. There is dissonance between Israeli Jews and American Jews. We believe that we are responsible. We feel that Israeli policies and actions have a direct effect on us. We have a vision of how a Jewish state should act. Israelis say to us, "That's nice; live here if you want to tell us what to do."
6. I always felt that if we are indeed one people and that if the needs of other Jews are supposed to be a priority, how can we not speak up? Either we are one people who believe the needs of other Jews should have priority, or we are not one people, and we should care only about our local and national Jewish community.
7. I have always felt that my task as a rabbi is to interpret Torah to Jews about how we should live. I have always felt that public policy, whether here or in Israel should be guided by Torah values, by Jewish values. My job as a rabbi is to ground my interpretations in the Torah and Jewish interpretation. In my view of Torah not creating a system of logistics to supply sufficient food to the Gazan population, which results in widespread famine, is a Hillul HaShem, a desecration of God's name. Our job as a community is to call out the K'tzenay Sdom, the captains of Sodom, who have failed in delivering ample amounts of food.
8. The War in Gaza has paralyzed our community. It has created painful hostility between those who support Israeli government policy and those who have been critical of it. Too often, we have chosen to be silent about our differences without fully and respectfully engaging with others who disagree with us. Rabbis have been reluctant to speak out about Israel out of fear of splitting their congregation. Or out of fear of losing their jobs. We need to engage; we cannot afford to be silent.
9. What is at stake is so very important. The nature of our faith is at stake. Do we still believe that God is One? Do we believe that God cares for every human being and not just Jews? Do we believe that it is a mitzvah to feed the hungry even if they are not Jewish? Even if they are Arabs? Do we believe that we are a holy people commanded to seek justice not only for the Jewish people but for others as well? Do we believe that part of our covenant with God is to seek peace?

10. There are Israeli Jews and Palestinians who want to seek peace. There are Israeli Jews and Palestinians who want to end the conflict through political compromise. Will we have the strength to fully support those who seek peace? That is what is at stake. The very future of our faith and of Judaism.