

Israelis and American Jews Coming Together

Rabbi Andy Gordon – April Chaverim 2023

A few weeks ago, I received an urgent email entitled: “An Emergency Zoomcall.” It reminded me that Israel’s democracy is threatened and that I was needed along with other local rabbis to do something! So, there I was the next day, on the emergency Zoom call. Just days later I was standing in front of the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Washington, DC, with a huge Israeli flag with hundreds of others. We protested Smotrich and his hate and rallied for, “Dem-oh-crat-ica” (that’s democracy in Hebrew!).

As you might have seen, it’s not just Americans who are marching for Israel. Thousands of Israelis, those on the left, right, and center are coming together to speak out about Israel’s threatened democracy.

So why are they protesting? Are they angered by the election results? No! They are upset with changes to existing laws that could overturn Israel’s judiciary. They are worried that if these new laws come into place, Israel will become a dictatorship, not a democracy.

As Yuval Noah Harari,ⁱ professor and bestselling author shared a few weeks ago:

“We need not focus on the details of this reform or that. The essence is not about the process for appointing judges or how many Members of Knesset can override a Supreme Court ruling, but one simple question: **What will limit the government’s power?** If, for instance, the Knesset, by way of its elected majority wants to pass a law to prevent Arab citizens from voting, or cancel the right of workers to strike – what will prevent them from doing so?”

Israelis who often think quite differently are coming together because they believe in checks and balances, they believe in this enterprise of a Jewish state that takes care of minorities and is a strong democracy. They rally, speak out, and head to the streets.

These protests are making a difference. Prime Minister Netanyahu has decided to step back from his plans and allow for a cooling off period. There has been some discussion led by President Herzog that a compromise proposal is in the works. It's because of the protestors that things are slowing down and that the different sides are talking to each other. I'm a realist, so I believe there are still many bumpy roads ahead. But let's continue to hope that hearts will be moved. May American Jews and Israelis, from right to left, continue to join together to fight for the Israel of our dreams, a country that lives up to our highest Jewish values, a Jewish home for all. Amen.

ⁱ https://arza.org/the-israeli-spring-part-ii-its-not-complicated/?utm_medium=email&utm_content=2023_3_17