



PAS Home · Rabbi Cosgrove Speaks at Knesset Conference on Israel and Diaspora

Relations

## Rabbi Cosgrove Speaks at Knesset Conference on Israel and Diaspora Relations

2016-12-27

On Tuesday, December 27, Rabbi Cosgrove spoke at a conference on Israel-Diaspora relations, held at the Knesset in Jerusalem. Read his remarks below; the first paragraph of the English is a translation of the Hebrew.



חברת הכנסת לביא, חבר הכנסת שטרן, תודה על הכבוד שהענקתם לי לשתף בנושא כה בסיסי ומהותי שאני עוסק בו בתפקידי כרב – היחסים בין ישראל ליהדות התפוצות

כמו שכתוב בפרשת השבוע שקראנו בשבוע שעבר אני מתחיל בקריאה של יוסף: "את אחי אני מבקש"

בשנה שעברה, לקהילה שלי, שמונה מעל לאלף ושבע מאות משפחות, בית הכנסת הקונסרבטיבי הגדול ביותר בניו יורק, היתה הזכות לארח את חבר הכנסת יאיר לפיד, ושנה קודם לכן, את נשיא המדינה דאז, מר שמעון פרס, ז"ל, בנאומו האחרון ליהדות התפוצות

אני עמל יום ולילה, ללא לאות, על יצירת קהילה יהודית חיה, תוססת, מחוייבת ומלאת רגש – שמרכזה החיבור לישראל

לימוד על ישראל, תמיכה בישראל, ביקורים בישראל (רק אתמול סיימנו ביקור של 70 חברי הקהילה), יצירת מנגנון של הסברה על ישראל והכי חשוב – אהבת ישראל – כל אלה לא רק מרכיבים את המהות של בית הכנסת שלי, אלא מרכיבים את המהות של הזהות שלי בתור רב ובתור יהודי

MK Lavie, MK Stern, thank you for the honor of sharing remarks on a subject at the core of everything I do as a rabbi: the relationship between Israel and diaspora Jewry.

Quoting from last week's parashah, I begin with the cry of Joseph: *Et a<sub>h</sub>ai ani m'vakesh*, "I seek my brethren." Last year, my community of 1700 families, the largest Conservative synagogue in New York, was honored to host MK Yair Lapid, and the summer before, to host the final public address to diaspora Jewry by President Peres, z"l. Day and night, I labor to create a vibrant, passion-filled, committed Jewish

community, a Jewish community with Israel at its center. To learn about Israel, to support Israel, to travel to Israel (just yesterday, I concluded a trip with 70 congregants), to make aliyah to Israel, to advocate on behalf of Israel and most importantly, to love Israel. This is not just at the heart of my synagogue, this is at the heart of who I am as a rabbi and as a Jew.

Far too often, however, far too many American Jews are left to wonder whether Israel loves us as much as we love Israel. We see an Israel that does not recognize the Judaism we practice. An Israel that does not recognize the marriages or conversions of American rabbis. An Israel that has allowed the symbol of Jewish unity – the Kotel – to become ground zero for fanaticism and intolerance. An Israel that funds hundreds of millions of shekels to Orthodox institutions and none to non-Orthodox expressions of Jewish life. An Israel in which Conservative and Reform synagogues have been subjected to vandalism. An Israel that is entertaining legislation that would criminalize a woman wearing a *tallit* – the bitter irony of a world in which Israel becomes the one country in which a Jew does not have the freedom to express his or her Judaism. With every piece of legislation in which Israel declares itself hostile to religious pluralism, hostile to the Judaism we practice in the States, in synagogues like my own, is it at all surprising that American Jews should find themselves increasingly alienated from the Jewish state?

As a Conservative rabbi and as an American Jew, I find the situation deeply distressing. But it is not just my problem, rather, it is our problem; it is a crisis we share together. The majority of American Jews are Conservative or Reform. Fifty percent of Jews who attend the AIPAC policy conference are Conservative Jews. More than 60 percent of the leadership of the Jewish Federation are Conservative Jews. In other words, those American Jews who are most engaged with Israel – Israel's strongest advocates in the halls of Congress and on the world stage – are being told, explicitly and implicitly, that neither they nor their children or grandchildren are viewed as legitimate by the very country they so bravely support.

It should not be lost on any of us that today's caucus is taking place in the shadow of very worrisome developments at the UN. It would be a mistake to attribute the news of last week's UN resolution solely to the behavior of an outgoing American President, to differences of policy or personality between the Obama and Netanyahu administrations. When future historians look back on this moment, the gap they will discuss will not just be the one between America and Israel, but the one between American Jewry and Israel. I do believe that somewhere in all the political calculations, the American administration understood that a gap exists between the vast majority of American Jewry and the actions of Israel. American Jews are not citizens of Israel. It is not our place to tell Israelis how to govern their own country. But there is a moment, a moment in which we are living right now, that American Jewry's historic reflexive support of Israel will no longer be a given. An American Jewry that is not able to reconcile the dream of Israel as a liberal democracy and the death of the two-state solution. An American Jewry that is unable or unwilling to defend Israeli actions in the court of world or campus opinion. God help the person who criticizes a member of my family whom I love and who loves me unconditionally. But someone whose love for me is in question, well, that person – or in this case, that country – will have to learn to fend for themselves.

Now is the time for Israel and American Jewry to work together, taking steps, both substantive and symbolic, towards healing our relationship. As we near the one-year mark since the Kotel agreement, now is the time to show leadership, courage, and determination to make sure the decision of the Israeli government is brought to completion. On the question of funding, on marriage and personal status, on *mikvaot* and especially conversions, any and every step Israel can take towards cultivating a sense of *areivut*, of shared destiny, will send a powerful message. It is a contradiction of Israel's most basic premise and promise to allow Jewish identity to be defined by the most extreme segment of Israeli society. It is insulting to American Jewry when Mosaic, Israel's bold initiative to bolster Jewish identity in the diaspora, is overseen by an Education ministry that opposes the recognition of Reform and Conservative Judaism. Seeds must be planted. If Israel is truly interested in the future of world

Jewry, now is the time to include an understanding of all religious streams in Israeli curricula, to build bridges between Israeli and diaspora Jews in *mifgashim*, in *mechina* programs, in visits by Israeli MKs, mayors, and thought leaders to Conservative and Reform congregations, and otherwise. The dialogue between Israel and diaspora Jewry must be inclusive, collaborative, transparent, and done in a spirit of cooperation and pursuit of the collective welfare of the Jewish people.

As Jews, we are defined by our ability to see the world through the eyes of another and act accordingly. Ethically, in the words of Hillel, *d'ali snei, l'haverekh lo ta'veid*, That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. As a people, we are defined by our ability to see a Jew anywhere in the world, and say: *Atah yakholta l'hiyot ani, va-ani yakholti l'hiyot atah*, “I could be you, and you could be me.”

The relationship between American Jewry and Israel will heal when and only when we begin to act upon the mutual obligations that come with *ahavat Yisrael*, love of Israel. Like two strings on a violin, American Jewry and Israel, though separated by a distance, when touched by a bow, can make a beautiful sound. *Am ehad im lev ehad*, one people with one heart; in dialogue and partnership, passionate stakeholders in a shared destiny.

Tag(s): [Our Community](#)