

We in the Jewish professional world have just spent the last few months trying to get everyone into the synagogue—renew your membership, get your tickets, come back to shul! And now, here comes Sukkot and we're kicking you all out again!

The Jews are rightly confused—do we want you in or out? Inside or outside?

I'm joking, of course; we want everyone to be connected with the shul and synagogue life; the Jewish community is in dire need of everyone's support right now, and in turn, individual Jews need community. But the climate in which we find ourselves is one of unease and even suspicion. Who belongs in our synagogue? Who gets to sit in our sukkah? Who has a place around our table? Sadly, this suspicion now extends even to our fellow Jews.

The CJN recently ran a controversial cover that garnered a lot of heated discussion online. It depicted a family's holiday table with all the family members gathered around it—some looking more or less religious than others; but conspicuously at the table sat a young woman wrapped in a keffiyeh and wearing watermelon earrings—the red-green-black-and-white fruit being a symbol of Palestinian identity, if you weren't aware.

The comments I saw were almost all in agreement that this person has no place at our table—she should be invited to be removed or to remove herself. One person asked rhetorically, “[are we] so blinded by “inclusivity” that we need to give representation to the 2% of self-hating Jewish people who would like nothing more than the destruction of us as a people and a revisionist version of history that breaks all our ties to our ancient homeland?” The chair of the CJN board, for his part, commented that he was open to a conversation about the feature and why a healthy Jewish community needs a vibrant and diverse Jewish press—not really addressing the criticism, but at least opening the door to discussion about why the CJN felt it was a wise decision to cover this issue. If it was to spark conversation, then it succeeded.

I want to use this time to invite those keffiyeh-wearing Jews into our sukkah. And back into our communities. Hear me out. Because I'm also going to ask them to reconsider some aspects of how they are representing themselves to the community and to the world.

There is another 8-day festival, let's all remember, where we have several different kinds of people, or children, sitting around our table. We have normalised that. We know that the Jewish community is not monolithic. The Haggadah tells us of the child called “rasha.” Usually translated as “wicked,” the rasha in fact refers to one who chooses to stand

outside the Jewish community asking, “What does this ceremony mean to *you*?” We answer that child with pointed language that excludes them from our story. We say, “Because of this the Eternal acted for **me** when **I** came out of Egypt.” And the narrator of the Haggadah explains further: “For me,” and not for *him*; had he been there he would not have been redeemed.”

What’s interesting to me is that this rasha is at our table at all. What is she doing there? It’s important to note also that the Haggadah does not have us ex-communicate this child. It rebukes the child’s perspective, but does not kick them out from the table or from the community. The only rational explanation for her presence at our table and in our sukkah, as it were, is that she still wants to be part of the Jewish community. And we don’t expel this child, because at the end of the day, we also want them to remain on the inside. She still considers herself Jewish, though some aspects of what that means are objectionable to her. And likewise—we still consider her Jewish, though her opinions or the way she expresses them are objectionable to us.

So let’s focus for a moment on what we share. Tikkun olam. Many so-called antizionists will argue that their sense of tikkun olam—the responsibility of Jews to improve the world and to repair it—necessitates their opposition to the war against Hamas because it is causing more destruction than progress. Images of broken bodies, broken families, and broken buildings clash with their understanding of Judaism’s emphasis on loving others as we love ourselves and having compassion for those less fortunate and more vulnerable than we. They insist “never again” is universal—not applying to Jews alone, but to all human beings. This is very Jewish.

If I had some of these Jewish antizionists, most of whom are of university student age, here in shul in front of me, this is what I would like to say to them:

Your sense of Judaism and who you are as Jews is ingrained in you. You feel deeply the call to tikkun olam, to repairing this world. You empathise with people a world away in a place you have never visited, nor would you be safe doing so. Your empathy is admirable. I share it. My heart aches for every Palestinian child who has been killed, injured, orphaned, and displaced because of this war. I could go on to explain to you why responsibility for their situation rests firmly with the leaders of their people who deliberately put them in harm’s way; who have refused every offer at peace extended by Israel; who have invested the billions of dollars in aid given to the Palestinian people from well-meaning people like you and countries around the world into a machine of terror rather than investing it in the future of their people—building a vast underground city made of concrete rather than investing in

schools, education, infrastructure for the people, and training their people to be doctors, teachers, artists and entrepreneurs rather than warriors and agents of terror.

I could argue against your claim that Jews can be Jews without Zion, without Israel. That we are in the promised land in North America—why do we need to fight for a sliver of desert in the Middle East? Sure, we can do Judaism without Israel—we have for centuries before 1948—but make no mistake—after being expelled from every country in the world, Israel is a necessity now more than ever. It is easy to make your claims from the relative comfort of the Diaspora, but half of the world’s Jewish population lives in Israel having come there as refugees when no other country including Canada would take them!

But those arguments will fall on deaf ears.

Instead, what I will say to you is this: consider why you remain at our table. Why you haven’t renounced your Judaism and left us entirely. I think it is because deep down, your Judaism is fundamental to who you are; its ancient beliefs and practices resonate with you; this is your identity. I firmly believe that you care about the future of the Jewish people and that is why you fight. We only fight with those whom we love and care for—if we didn’t care, we’d leave. But you stay. At least nominally. And that’s not nothing.

So here is my message to you: we want you at our table. We want you in our sukkah. We want to engage in conversation and hear each other’s points of view and share in each other’s pain. I implore you—please remove the keffiyeh and do this from inside the sukkah. Standing outside and yelling at us is ineffective. Remember that the sukkah has walls. Standing outside the sukkah, means talking to the walls. We don’t hear you, and you don’t hear us. It’s futile. So come inside. Come out of your tents and into our sukkah. We will stand at the sukkah door to welcome you in.

Hear me when I say: Representing yourselves as Jews in the way that you do is hurting the Jewish community. Protesting with those who want to do us harm—who chant “Globalize the Intifada” and “From the River to the Sea”—hurts you just as much as it hurts the mainstream Jewish institutions and the people who support them. And most of all, it’s not helping the Palestinian people for whom you claim to care. Because make no mistake—those demonstrators are not speaking in metaphor. The Middle East they envision literally is Judenrein—rid of all Jews.

Challenge Jewish norms. Yes, that is what Jews do. We are Yisrael—the ones who strive and argue. Disagree with the Israeli government—that is what concerned citizens and

lovers of Israel do—but do it from the inside. Please don't give fuel to the fire of those who genuinely hate us. They are using you. Because at the end of the day you are Jewish—remember that's why you stay. Your Jewish family will never use you. We will hear you, though we might disagree. Family members can disagree and still remain a family, as long as the relationship is not abusive. Donning a keffiyeh and allowing the genuine haters to hold you up as an exemplary Jew is abusive to your Jewish family.

There is room in our sukkah for all Jews no matter their beliefs—atheist Jews, agnostic Jews, non-practicing Jews, even Orthodox Jews! We just have to be prepared to connect with each other on common ground—our love for our people and our heritage; our calling as Jews to tikkun olam.

This year when we say the blessing for sitting in the sukkah—*leshev basukkah*—let us do it together, as one people, one community, with all of our differences and disagreements. Then that brachah will truly be a blessing.

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