



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday June 7, 2024 ~ Parshat BaMidbar

Dear JCCP/CBT Family,

A Tale of Two Parades

Last Sunday, members of our synagogue, along with members of Congregation B'nai Sholom/Fair Lawn Jewish Center and Temple Israel of Ridgewood marched in the *Celebrate Israel Parade*. That is the regular name for the parade. Years ago, it was called the *Israel Day Parade*. With all that has happened since October 7, and the attention given to Israeli hostages held by Hamas in Gaza, the parade this year was simply called *Israel Day on Fifth Avenue*.

I have to tell you. The parade was amazing this year. It was great to be with so many Jews and Israel supporters marching together in an amazing display of support and unity. It was great to see the full diversity of the Jewish community coming together to demonstrate their love and commitment to Israel, and her people. By every metric, the parade was an unqualified success.

Organizers originally hoped for 30,000 - 40,000 thousand marchers. Yet 45,000 showed up.

Organizers wondered about the spectators. Yet crowds lined the east side of 5th avenue from 57th street to 72nd street. Thousands of people, often 4 or 5 or even 6 deep, cheered on the marchers.

There was (sadly) an extraordinarily large police and security presence, but there were virtually no incidents.

The Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, who organizes the parade each year, said this may have been the largest parade in the 60-year history of this event.

But you wouldn't have known about the success of this event by reading some of the coverage of it. Indicative of the trend to downplay the significance of the Jewish community gathering together in large numbers in support of Israel was the article about the parade in the *New York Times* the following [day](#). The article misrepresented the number of participants, and chose to focus its attention on minor incidents, like the heckling of Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer while ignoring the warm reception given to dozens of elected officials like Mayor Eric Adams, Governor Kathy Hochul, New York Attorney General Letitia James and others. According to their own reporting, "At least one person shouted" at Senator Schumer. (I get more criticism every time I give a sermon in the synagogue). It's amazing to me that approximately 100,000 people attended the parade, yet the *Times* chose to highlight the absolute meaningless jeering of literally a handful of parade goers.

The *New York Post*, a fervent supporter of Israel and the Jewish community, also couldn't help itself. Although anti-Israel protests have been a feature of the parade for years, normally limited to the area between 59th and 60th street, this year there were no protesters along the parade route. But the *Post* highlighted an incident beyond the parade route between anti-Israel and pro-Israel supporters which had no effect on the parade or the thousands who participated.

Sadly, Israel has ceased to be a unifying force in Jewish life, and divisions often have often surfaced at the parade. Many of you may recall a letter I wrote in the *Jewish Standard* years ago criticizing several right-wing Jewish organizations for trying to prevent the New Israel Fund from participating. As I reminded the community at the time, I am not a member of that organization, do not agree with that organization, and do not contribute to that organization. But just because their vision for Israel is different than mine did not mean that they should be prevented from demonstrating their love and commitment to Israel along with every other group. I mention this story because there were a few difficult moments at the parade that I didn't actually see but heard and read about afterward. There was some opposition from Israelis

living in New York regarding the participation of certain Israeli government officials. But none of them had any real impact on the parade, or the spirit of those who marched and lined 5th avenue that day. Mark Treyger, CEO of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York called the parade “an affirmation of our unwavering commitment and pride in our Jewish identity, our love for our heritage, our support for Israel. I could not agree more.

As I thought about the parade, read the various accounts about it in the days that followed, and spoke about it with the other members of our synagogue who participated, I sometimes felt that there were 2 parades. There was the parade (or at least aspects of it) that certain media outlets wrote about. And then there was the one that we attended. And that was the real one, the one I want you to think about this Shabbat.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner