Israel on My Mind--Thoughts from Rabbi Marc D. Angel

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The Talmud (Hagiga 12b) records an enigmatic statement by Rabbi Yosei: “Woe unto people, who see but do not know what they see; who stand, but do not know on what they stand.”

This passage came to mind as we observe the 75th anniversary of the State of Israel.

We often see Israel without realizing what we are actually seeing. The State of Israel is an amazing historical phenomenon. It is the unique story of the Jewish People, robbed of sovereignty, plundered and exiled by the Romans nearly 2000 years ago. It is the story of a people who never gave up hope of return to their historic homeland. It is the story of faith and heroism rarely if ever matched in human history. Many people see Israel but don’t know what they are seeing: the State of Israel is a modern day miracle.

We often stand for Israel but don’t know on what we stand. The State of Israel stands on foundations established in the Bible, in God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants. Israel stands on the prayers of millions of Jews in hundreds of lands spanning twenty centuries. Many people see Israel as just another country; they do not know the foundations upon which Israel stands.

In its 75 years of statehood, Israel has absorbed millions of new immigrants from around the world; it has become a first rate power in culture, science, agriculture, medicine, the arts, the military and so much more. It has created a dynamic, vibrant democracy. It has accomplished really amazing things in spite of ongoing Palestinian terrorism, boycotts, threats from Iran etc. It has forged ahead with remarkable diplomatic achievements in the Arab world, in Africa, and with many

nations throughout the world.

And yet, in spite all these many reasons to feel joy and pride on Israel's 75th anniversary, we also feel uneasy. The ugly divisions within Israeli society have been rocking the country. Animosity between the extremes on the left and right has been seething. Tensions between religious and secular extremists are heart-breaking. The situation has become so volatile, that the Prime Minister of Israel felt compelled to pull out of a speaking engagement in Tel Aviv, sponsored by the Jewish Federations of North America. Fears of demonstrations and rowdiness cast a pall on the occasion.

As Israeli society tears itself apart, its enemies are heartened. The Palestinian terrorists become emboldened. Iran makes ominous threats and works to arm Israel's enemies. Anti-Israel media rejoice in slandering Israel in every possible way. Anti-Israel politicians add their hatred and lies to the ongoing campaign to vilify and isolate Israel.

Many people—Jews and non-Jews alike—see Israel, but don't know what they are seeing. They make stands for or against Israel without knowing upon what Israel stands. When Israel is viewed through the lenses of vitriol, extremism, hatred, idealization or self-righteousness, the real Israel is not seen. When the historic and spiritual foundations of Israel are not understood and respected, then the State of Israel is not properly appreciated.

Everyone needs to calm down, take a step back, and realize what is at stake for the State of Israel. Hatred and extremism are our real enemies and we must confront them with wisdom and courage.

We have confidence that the State of Israel will overcome the many challenges it faces. It is an amazingly creative and resilient nation.

"Woe unto people, who see but do not know what they see; who stand, but do not know on what they stand." Blessed are those who see the greatness and promise of Israel, who see clearly and stand firmly with the State of Israel.

"When the Lord turned back the captivity of Zion we were as in a dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with joyous song" (Psalm 126).