

Around the Community



Peace Shalom Salaam the Abraham Accords *By Marc Sommer*

On Motzei Shabbat, Saturday evening Sep 12th, I received an email invitation from the President of the United States to join him at the White House for the signing of the Abraham Accords, to take place on Tuesday Sep 15th. I have worked my entire life, both in business and in philanthropic causes, to support and strengthen the American Israel alliance. Despite the corona virus and having to make last minute schedule changes that affected many people, I just could not pass up going to such a significant event.

It was the first time I flew since early March. The airport was quite different. There are virtually no lines. It only takes seconds to get through security. You can walk down the concourse without getting jostled. There is always a seat at the gate. People are amazing, practicing social distancing while waiting to board and disembark. The hotels are doing everything to make you feel comfortable. The TV remote in the room is wrapped and sealed in plastic. There is an ample supply of individually wrapped sanitizing wipes. Everybody is required to wear a mask in all public areas of the hotel.

Speaking of masks, upon entering the White House grounds there is a sign requesting everyone to wear a mask and social distance. There are signs on the ground in both the screening area before entrance and the security check to stand six feet apart. Most of the invited guests to the signing were wearing masks. On the other hand, there were probably a hundred plus media reporters, cameramen and support staff and only a few were wearing masks. Many of the invited dignitaries Senators, Congressman, Ambassadors, and other special guests were not wearing masks.

Many Jewish community leaders were in attendance. One could see Chassidim wearing kappatols alongside non-affiliated Jews; there were Liberal Jews and Conservative Jews. However, it was troubling that there were some diehard Democrat Jews



and some extreme right-wing Republican Jews who could not accept that this was truly a remarkable achievement for Israel and did not attend.

While waiting for the ceremony to begin, I had the pleasure to spend a few minutes with the President of the OU, and with the Executive Director, Chairman of the Board, and current and past President of AIPAC. I also met the President of Coalition for Jewish Values. Many non-Jewish leaders were in attendance. Just to name a few, Pastor Pasqual Urrabazo from the Latinos Coalition for Israel and Penny Nance the President and CEO of Concerned Women of America, a group of Evangelical Women who support Israel.

All these people and the hundreds of other guests came from near and far to be at this historic event because of its uniqueness. Israel declared its Independence in 1948, it took 31 years and three wars before the first Peace Treaty with Egypt in 1979. It was another 15 years until Israel finally entered its second Peace Treaty with Jordan in 1994. Both of those treaties were treaties of convenience and would be better called Non-Belligerence agreements. Both required Israel to return land that it won in a defensive war in 1967. There was little interaction between the populations and even to this day there are many groups

in Egypt and Jordan who refuse and forbid their members to interact with Israelis.

However, the Abraham Accords with the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Bahrain, coming 41 years after the first treaty and 26 years after the second treaty, are warm treaties. They establish Diplomatic Relations without concessions. These treaties and accords are mutually beneficial exchanges of people, science, technology, and tourism. They represent a paradigm shift from Peace for Land to Peace for Peace and that is why they are so important. They also provide a path for Arab and predominantly Muslim states to seek peace with Israel without the requirement of concluding a peace with the Palestinians. These are tectonic shifts in the Arab world.

Immediately after the announcement of the agreement, the Palestinians called for an emergency meeting of the League of Arab States. This request was denied, and they were told they would have to wait until the next regular scheduled meeting. At that meeting on Sep. 9th the Palestinians presented a resolution condemning the UAE and it was soundly defeated! On Sep 22nd President Abbas resigned his po-



sition as current chair of the Arab League meetings. The days of the Khartoum three no's; "no peace no recognition no negotiations" are over. With the Maximum Pressure Campaign on Iran, a real existential threat to a large part of the Arab world, and with the assistance of the US many of these countries are lining up to join the Abraham Accords.

We end every *Shemonai Esrah* by saying "oseh shalom bem'romav hu yah-sah shalom alenu v'al kol Yisroel v'im-ru amen". "He who makes Peace in the heights may he make Peace upon us and upon all Israel, now respond amen". As we recite this prayer we take three steps back. Some commentaries say for Peace we may retreat. For the Abraham Accords we did not have to take any steps back and it is my fervent optimistic hope that these Accords will flourish and bring Peace to all of Israel.

Marc Sommer is the Chairman of To Protect Our Heritage PAC and a member of AIPAC National Council.