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“Who will we be when we rise from the ashes?”¹

This is the question that David Grossman asked on October 10, 2023. David Grossman is an Israeli author, 71 years old, a few years younger than Israel itself. He served in the IDF in the 1970s, he raised his children in Israel. His son, Uri, was killed on the last day of the Lebanon war in 2006.

David Grossman is an unapologetic left winger, a speaker at rallies, an unrelenting critic of Bibi Netanyahu, and the actions of this government. He is as Israeli as they come. The flag on our bimah at Temple Sinai is his flag.

But if you read his writing about what is happening in Israel...before and after October 7th, you will read things that would get you kicked out of many American Jewish spaces...because he writes of the dangerous, undemocratic, messianic actions of the government, because he calls out the horrors of this war, because uses words like “occupation” and “genocide.”

The flag on our bimah is the realization of a dream...and many of us were raised with that dream. Of David triumphing over Goliath, a home for survivors and exiles, an answer to a Jewish question asked throughout the centuries, the return to a homeland where we are finally safe and secure. A story both true and incomplete.

The flag on our bimah is also the flag of a country, with a government, and an army. With a postal service and trash collection.

¹ *The Thinking Heart: On Israel and Palestine*, David Grossman. p 10.

Some of you have told us that when you see this flag, you see the flag of a modern country, a country that is responsible for the nightmare in Gaza, you see an occupation that has dragged on for 58 years. And those are painful things to see and feel in a house of prayer.

For some of us, the pain is intertwined with our Jewish identity, trying to reconcile what this flag means to us *now* as opposed to what it may have meant at other times. It is a pain rooted in not only seeing the flag as a symbol of a country that is *like* all of the other countries. But seeing the flag as a symbol of a country that we believed was exceptional, was *unlike* other countries.

David Grossman wrote, on October 10, 2023, about what he saw on his Israeli neighbors' faces. He saw "shock, numbness...Over and over again we say to each other: ...it's a nightmare beyond comparison. No words to describe it. No words to contain it."

But then he continues, "I also see a deep sense of betrayal. The betrayal of citizens by their government- by the prime minister and his destructive coalition. A betrayal of all we hold precious as citizens, and in particular as citizens of this state. A betrayal of its formative and binding idea. Of the most precious deposit of all – the Jewish people's national home – which has been handed to its leaders to safeguard, and which they should have treated with reverence. But instead, what have we seen?...What we've seen is the utter abandonment of the state in favour of petty, greedy agendas and cynical, narrow-minded, delirious politics."²

Sometimes, when I see the flag, I feel that sense of betrayal. A deposit– handed to the leaders to safeguard – and in order to preserve and consolidate power, to delay lawsuits, they built *this* coalition. With Finance Minister Betzalel Smotritch, who called the destruction in Gaza, "a real estate bonanza."³ Who called his plan for the expulsion of 2.5 million Palestinians from Gaza and their replacement with Israeli Jews: "The Gaza Riviera-

² Grossman, pp 10-11.

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y59z6rznvo>

From Vision to Reality.”⁴ National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, forbidden from serving in the IDF because his views were too extreme, is now making policy governing the behavior of Israel’s police force.⁵

Some of you see that...when you see this flag. The betrayal, the death, the destruction. Some of you have told us that this flag is not enough, that you want to see more flags here at Temple Sinai. There are times when *we* have had this discussion over the past two years, when I’ve struggled to defend the place of the flag on this bimah. But, I can’t seem to let go of the dream. Not the rose colored, incomplete version of my youth- but a dream for what Israel might be.

Now, I’m not trying to convince you to see or feel anything other than what you see and feel when you look at this flag...but for me, when I feel like the experiment has failed, that maybe I could just withdraw, it is David Grossman who brings me back. And author Etgar Keret, who sat on this bimah and spoke passionately about the humanity of Palestinians, the resilience of Israelis and his anger at this government, months before his son would be joining the IDF. And professor Dalia Marx, who came to teach us on Shabbat morning just a few weeks ago, while her phone buzzed with texts, her friends organizing themselves for their weekly protest against this war, for the return of the hostages, fighting for a different Israel. The ones who say the things that are still hard to say here. Who dream about the Israel that never was, but still might be.

“Who will we be when we rise from the ashes?”

Two years later, we don’t yet know. This seemingly endless, and expanding war continues, at least for now. Its aims are difficult to understand, the number of casualties unforgivable, and those wounded and traumatized...unfathomable.

⁴ <https://www.nif.org/blog/true-purpose-of-this-war/>

⁵ <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-09-26/ty-article/.premium/defying-ag-ben-gvir-meets-with-israeli-police-chief-on-banned-protest-policy/00000199-825a-daea-adff-bffbc59c0000>

Is there any hope? David Grossman says...maybe. Writing in March of 2024, Grossman said that perhaps, now, it is “exhaustion and despair” that will lead us to a, “reasonable, moral, human resolution.”

He concludes that piece with these words, of cautious, limited hope, “It seems we had to go through hell itself in order to get to the place from which one can see, on an exceptionally bright day, the distant edge of heaven.”⁶

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/01/opinion/israel-gaza-palestinians-hostages.html>