**YOM KIPPUR 2015
The Cutting Room Floor**

**Inspired by my friend Rabbi Ed Farber, whose idea about the cutting room floor was in turn inspired by RABBI MITCHELL WOHLBERG
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**It is becoming commonplace for movies or TV shows to show some of the material that was edited out of the show. For whatever reasons – bloopers, the scene didn’t work, etc. these scenes were left by the editor on the so-called cutting room floor. That’s perfectly understandable in the world of show-business. Sadly, these days Jews and all positive Jewish events are increasing left on the cutting room floor and that is only understandable in the context of a world that is extremely fearful of growing anti-Semitism and radical Islamist extremism. I would like to relate several powerful examples of this phenomenon.**

**On January 11 of this year Miss Israel, Deron Matalon, took a picture of herself – a selfie - in Miami where beauties from around the world had gathered for the Miss Universe Pageant.  Standing next to her was Miss Lebanon, along with Miss Slovenia and Miss Japan.  Four beautiful women – four different religions and cultures – four completely different looks reminding us of what beauty and richness there is when we have such variety in God’s world. When the picture began circulating on social media – with the word “Israel” prominently displayed on Ms. Matalon’s tee shirt – the Arab world went into an uproar.  Many commentators demanded that Miss Lebanon be dethroned.  Miss Lebanon defended herself by claiming that Miss Israel had taken the photo without asking.  She wrote, “Since the first day of my arrival to participate in Miss Universe, I was very cautious to avoid being in any photo or communication with Miss Israel.  I was having a photo with Miss Japan, Miss Slovenia and myself and suddenly Miss Israel jumped in, took a selfie and put it on her social media.”  Ultimately, Miss Lebanon posted a new version of the photo, with Miss Israel photo-shopped out … “left on the cutting room floor.”
            It is a sad commentary on the state of the Arab/Muslim world when you come under harsh criticism just for being in the presence of an Israeli.  What makes this even sadder is the fact that this is not simply an isolated occurrence, but very much a part of the very fabric of the Muslim world, which makes hope for an Arab/Israeli peace so difficult.**

**Along the same lines, Rabbi Salomon Gruenwald from Denver relates a story about a trip he took to Israel with 19 other rabbis**. One of the last places they visited was Ziv Medical Center near Tzfat. Ziv is a teaching hospital serving the Upper Galilee, just 30 minute from the border with Syria. For the last couple of years, the hospital has been quietly taking in hundreds of casualties from the Syrian civil war. He writes: “We met with Dr. Tal Salomon, a combat-trained surgeon responsible for treating the wounded. He told us that the injured come from all sides of the conflict – some combatants, but mostly civilians. No one is quite sure how they get there, but someone is bringing these people to the border and just leaving them there, knowing that the IDF will pick them up. They come with limbs in tourniquets, shattered bones, and shredded blood vessels. Dr. Salomon and the medical staff care for the injured, providing them with the state-of-the-art trauma surgery that Israelis are sadly so expert in. Under any other circumstances, the Syrians would be the enemy – people who hate Jews; people we should fear. But the power of tzedakah to transform fear transcends that. The staff of Ziv Hospital look beyond fear and hatred to do what is right, what is human, what God expects of us, to perform the mitzvah of Tikun Olam – fixing the world. They see in the people they help to mend the same trace of God that is in all of us. Tzedakah is to face down the things that frighten us – the evils in this world – and do what is right and good anyway. During our visit to the hospital we met one very special patient: a three year old boy who had been brought to the border by his father. The doctors performed multiple surgeries on this boy to restore his leg, which had been shattered by a bomb. Now on the road to recovery, the boy was happy and mischievous, like any three year-old. Through a translator, his young father spoke to us about how much he appreciated the kindness and mercy of the Israeli doctors and nurses. He was raised to hate Jews, but the experience had changed his mind about Israel and Jewish people. It was heart-warming and filled me with hope. Perhaps this man can be a catalyst for change, a seed for peace. Perhaps his son will grow up differently – not hating Jews. But, then the father explained: his son doesn’t know he is in Israel. No one must tell him. Now I saw the fear in the father’s eyes. They told the boy that he is in a different part of Syria where they speak a strange dialect of Arabic. Why? Because no one can ever know that this man and his son were in Israel. He will never speak of it, he can never tell anyone. He is afraid – terrified – that he would be seen as a traitor for seeking help from Jews.”

A third example: When the Israelis turned Gaza over to the Palestinians, they left intact their ultra-modern automated greenhouses which they assumed the Palestinians would use to continue their commercially successful flower business. The Palestinians promptly destroyed every greenhouse because they rejected the notion of any aid from Israel. Once again, anything which could possibly be perceived as cooperation with the Zionist entity, as Israel is euphemistically called, must be rejected out of hand, lest the recipient be seen as a traitor to the cause.

And finally, and perhaps the most hurtful of all, is that of the **British publishing giant, Harper Collins,
which recently began selling an atlas for school children to provide them – in Harper Collins words – “With in-depth coverage of the (Middle East) region and its issues,” to help children “understand the relationship between social and physical environment, the region’s challenges and its socio-economic development.”  Nice, very nice … except for one thing.  The atlas prepared for schools in the Middle East left out Israel!  There is Syria, Jordan and Gaza … but no Israel.  A subsidiary of Harper Collins explained that including Israel would have been “unacceptable” to Persian Gulf customers, and that “local preferences” had to be taken into consideration. You hear that – local preferences – not truth – not geography – not reality – not education – but local political truths. That is what Harper Collins thinks passes for education. But Harper Collins isn’t about education – it’s about money. But it does teach us something very important – a map without Israel IS the Arab “preference.”  It’s not a matter of refusing to have diplomatic relations with Israel.  It’s not a matter of refusing to recognize Israel.  It’s a matter of preferring that Israel not exist and treating it as such.  This is the only world conflict that I know of where this is the case!  North Korea and South Korea aren’t too crazy about each other, but they don’t act as if the other does not exist!  England and Northern Ireland … France and Algeria … China and Tibet … India and Pakistan … Russia and the Ukraine … all the “hot spots” across the globe, people are at war, fighting over territory, power, and/or ideology, but they don’t make believe that the enemy does not exist.  Only with the Arabs when it comes to the Jewish state!  They would like to rewrite history taking Israel out of the picture. This is what it means to leave Israel off the map of the Middle East in a text book destined for that part of the world. If the dispute is over borders – and what they want is for Israel to return to the pre-67 war borders then why not put a map of Israel as it was on June 6, 1967? Why leave Israel off the map? Why is the entire state of Israel on the cutting room floor?**

**And this phenomenon is not unique to Europe and the Middle East. Something very similar happened in the movie “Selma”.  Selma was a transformative moment in the history of the Civil Rights movement. It was a story that should have been brought to the screen many years ago. It’s almost embarrassing that it took Hollywood so long. Unfortunately the movie will be remembered more for what it left on the cutting floor than for what it put on the big screen. It did succeed at showing us the sickness of segregation and the moral fracture in the South in those days created by racism. And it did provide a picture of what a heroic and giant of a man Martin Luther King truly was.  But the movie totally distorted the role President Johnson played. He was a champion of the Civil Rights movement and the fact that he himself was a Southerner made that truth even starker. Although the truth about Johnson was not told - at least he’s in the movie. At least the producers admitted that he existed and played a role in the Civil Rights movement. Do you know who is not in the movie?  The Jewish people!  Except for a passing appearance of someone wearing a yarmulke, there are no Jews marching with Rev. King from Selma to Montgomery.  But there were!  There really were!  There is an iconic picture of that march with Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel linked arm in arm, one person removed from Rev. King.  But in the movie “Selma” he was cut from the picture!  That’s right – the producers went out of their way to cut Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel who risked career and life to march with Reverend King in Selma. His daughter and others have cried out in protest.  After all, it is estimated that one half to two thirds of the white people who were involved in the Civil Rights movement were Jews. Many southern synagogues were bombed and burned during the Civil Rights movement. Many Rabbis in the Deep South went against the directives of their Boards of Directors to stand down and remain silent. Many southern Jews were literally afraid to get involved in the Civil Rights movement. They feared for the safety of their children and their economic lives.  Many of the Rabbis defied their boards at risk of their jobs and jumped into the fray. And who were the lawyers who sacrificed so much to fight the battle in the courts? Most were Jews. But you would never know this from the movie!  The Jews were left on the cutting room floor.  We were photo shopped right out of the picture and right out of our historic role in Selma and the entire Civil Rights movement. We were left on the cutting room floor.
            That’s the way it is with the Jewish people.  And that is why we Jews have to be careful not to leave any of our fellow Jews on the cutting room floor. It’s bad enough others so often leave us on the cutting floor. We cannot afford to do it to ourselves. Yet – just the same we do it too often.  In the 1970’s when the Reform movement accepted patrilineal descent, rejecting centuries of Jewish tradition, they did it with the feeling that eventually all those “old fashioned” Orthodox Jews would disappear. Well Orthodoxy is alive and thriving. On the other hand - the behavior of many Orthodox Jews in totally isolating themselves from the non-Orthodox community, is done with the feeling that eventually the non-Orthodox will assimilate, intermarry and disappear. In Israel the non-Orthodox movements are still isolated, marginalized and prevented from performing marriages and conversions. Well - in case you haven’t noticed, nobody is disappearing! Each movement is being transformed and going through the normal throes of transition from one generation to the next – from one millennium to the next and they will be different when they come out of it – but shouldn’t they be? We in this schul are evolving and thriving. The only Jews who are disappearing are those who have either decided to photo shop themselves out of the Jewish picture or those who leave out of disgust and disappointment after being photo shopped out by their fellow Jews.
           Thank God our tradition did not photo shop Queen Esther out of the picture of Jewish history. You may not know this but there were those amongst the Rabbis in the days of the final compilation of the Bible who tried to leave Esther on the cutting floor – they tried to keep the Book of Esther out of the Bible.  But they did not prevail. So the book that describes the story of Purim carries her name – Megillat Esther – and our tradition understood that every Jew counts, every Jew has a contribution to make, every Jew is to be included in the family picture.
 Our people is not a people of selfies … ours is a family picture.  We are here not just for ourselves but for others – for our fellow Jews – for our fellow Americans and for humanity at large. Every time there is a disaster in the world Israelis are amongst the first to arrive on the scene with medical help and other expertise. And Jews around the world open their checkbooks to help people in distress who are not Jewish – they are human beings in distress so we respond. We’re not about selfies and we’re not about photo shopping others out of our picture of community and humanity and leaving them on the cutting room floor.**

 **Others might try to leave us on the cutting room floor and they have been trying to do that for over 2000 years in one form or another. They haven’t succeeded – they won’t succeed because we will not retreat from the world just because they left us out of the movie – out of the picture – or when we were there they left us on the cutting floor – photo shopped out. Palestinians can leave us out of their selfies – but we are in Israel to stay and as soon as they accept that fact they will move closer to having their own state. And if they let us in their pictures they can establish a state that will thrive economically and enter the 21st century. Imagine if they could stop killing each other what a world they could create for their children. And the Ultra Orthodox can refuse to enter this Sanctuary, they can refuse to recognize our converts and dream of our disappearance, but our synagogues will continue to welcome the vast majority of American Jews, educate most of the next generation of Jews and be new homes for the tens of thousands of Jews by Choice in this country. When they realize like we do that all of us are a vital part of the picture of American and World Jewry – and we don’t have the luxury of leaving any Jew on the cutting floor – then our community will be a stronger and more welcoming one. Leave Jews on the cutting floor – that will not be where it will stop. In many places in the Mid-East it is now the Christian world being left on the cutting floor. If we Jews photo shop each other out of the picture of the Jewish people then we will not have the strength, moral character or cohesion necessary to fight those who routinely leave Israel and Jews on the cutting floor of history.**

**What’s true for the world and for our community is also true for our families. You have a child who has moved in a different direction than you hoped for. Don’t photo shop that child out of the family – out of your lives. Remember Seder night. The wicked – or the rebellious child is still seated at the table and still has his/her place in the Haggadah. You have parents who were difficult – maybe are still difficult – don’t leave them on the cutting floor. Not everyone succeeds at it the way we hope. But they are still the reason we are here and there is still something good in the relationship. Maybe you have an old friend with whom you had a falling out. Maybe you were right and she was wrong but does it warrant photo shopping them out of the rest of your lives. Friends can have disagreement – misunderstanding and even an impasse but do we solve the problem by leaving them on the cutting floor of the next part of our lives? This is not our way. We Jews argue, we fight, we get mad but in the end we know that we are all in the same picture for we still have more that unites us than divides us and that is true for our friendships and our communities. Our pictures are pictures of at least a minyan – a group of 10 – because without each other we can’t fix God’s world. Jews are the people of the group picture – not the selfie – we are the ones that even keep the wicked – rebellious – difficult member of the family at the Seder table and argue it out each and every year learning to live with contradiction and disagreement. We can’t afford in our families, our communities or in our nation to leave anyone or any group on the cutting floor. Because in the final analysis it will ruin the movie we are making together and that movie is more important than any individual or any single group. We are all responsible for each other – am echad – lev echad – one nation – one heart – one destiny.**

 **Shanah Tovah**