

B'Khol Dor v'Dor Omdim Aleinu L'Khalotenu:

Combating the New Anti-Semitism

By: Rabbi Daniel Fridman

For each one of us, it is surely true that, as Jefferson wrote nearly two and a half centuries ago, there are certain truths we hold to be self-evident. As happens in life, in the course of human events, as Jefferson referred to it, our experiences will, on occasion, affirm these truths, and on others, show them to be deficient, to be, in fact, not truths at all, but falsehoods. And sometimes, these falsehoods are small, innocuous things, and sometimes, these falsehoods are anything but harmless. They are, in fact, dangerous.

For me, one such truth was that anti-semitism, somewhat dormant in the years following the Holocaust, not, of course, in the Soviet Union, or in large parts of the Arab world, but in the West, in Europe, in the United States of America, would stay dormant as long as Holocaust survivors lived. The shame, the guilt, the horror of Auschwitz and Sobibor, of Buchenwald and Birkenau, of Maidonek and Mauthausen- as long as those who were starved and enslaved there, who were driven to the very edge of human existence, those who did not need great feats of the imagination to fulfill the rabbinic dictum which we read last night that each one of us must conceive of ourselves as if we too had been personally released from bondage- as long as they dwelled on this Earth, I was sure, that the West would be quiet.

In this conception, I imagined to myself, the battle for memory of the Holocaust, for truth, would be waged by the children and the grandchildren of these survivors. I was certain, as certain as the air we breathe, that the Rabbinic statement which we read last night, seared into our national consciousness, בכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותינו, in every generation they will arise to destroy us, was absolutely true, but I believed, as far as the West war concerned, that there was time.

The brutal murder of Mureille Knoll, a child survivor of the Holocaust, in Paris, in a clear and indisputable act of anti-semitism, demonstrates not only the falsehood of my conception, but the danger of such an idea.

Failure to understand that history has not waited, that even as survivors live out their eighties and nineties, that anti-semitism has returned, in Europe, in the most barbaric fashion, and increasingly in the United States- a surge of 57% in the United States in 2017 alone, to a level unseen in a generation- can only leave us unprepared to face the world as it is, and perhaps, not as we would wish it to be.

A case in point: in the previous murder of a Jewish woman in Paris, named Sarah Halimi, in April 2017, despite the obvious circumstances of anti-semitism surrounding her brutal murder and defenestration, accompanied to shouts of *allahu akhbar*, the French authorities took nearly a year of deliberation before indeed, anti-semitism was formally listed as a motivating factor in the crime, just over a month ago. With all due respect for thoroughness and respect for facts in building a case, there is no reasonable explanation of this if not for a reluctance to name and confront anti-semitism.

My intent this morning is not to issue a call for circling the wagons, for panic, for any kind of extremism. We have many friends in this world beyond our faith fraternity, and we do well to recognize and to appreciate that. The very story of our redemption from Egypt begins with a righteous woman amongst the gentiles, the daughter of Pharaoh, who had compassion upon a baby boy who would have surely drowned in the Nile. Our national story is inextricably linked with the righteous from other nations. We do well not to overlook that fact.

I wish only to raise our collective consciousness, and to definitively state that visions of a new, post-Holocaust world, governed by enlightened institutions such as the United Nations, the International Criminal Court in the Hague, the Council for Human Rights, have been greatly exaggerated. Children are still being gassed to death in Syria, autocracies have been greatly emboldened from Russia to China, and just last summer, in a scene that could easily have passed

for Nuremberg of 1935, a torchlight march passed through the streets of Charlottesville to the chant of “Jews will not replace us.”

We are not helpless, and I would like to take this sacred day when we remember the very birth of our Nation, the emergence of *Kahal Adat Yisrael*, to highlight three sacred obligations, in light of this most unfortunate reality that we simply do not have the right to avoid.

I. To Remember

First, we need to remember. I am not the only one who has remarked on dwindling crowds at our local Holocaust memorial in recent years, but, with few, very few, exceptions, there is no reason for anyone in this town not to be there this coming April 11th, the Wednesday following Pesach. If we are apathetic to our own history, the world will be as well. No survivor should be left wondering today whether her story will be remembered tomorrow, and let us resolve to do just that.

We need to remember in broad strokes, and we need to remember the particulars. We need to remember each community, and as best as we can, each person. We need to remember the stories, both large and small. We told our children a story last night at the Seder, a story of unspeakable suffering and oppression, of resilience and perseverance, and ultimately, with Divine Providence, a story of survival. That story did not end on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan in Egypt of 3330 years ago, but, on the contrary, it was only the beginning. The story has repeated itself so many times since that day.

When we do not remember, and when we do not fight for truth, there is a price. Just yesterday, we marked the 75th anniversary of the Hebrew date of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. This year, we saw the Polish government introduce legislation, that, while recognizing that Poles certainly suffered during the Holocaust, both at the hands of the Soviets and the Nazis, and for decades thereafter, the fact remains that Poles, and not just isolated individuals, were instrumental to the implementation of the Final solution. Any law that threatens the historical record is both an offense to those martyrs who can no longer tell

their own stories, and also a threat to future generations. As such, we need to remember, and we need to fight for memory.

II. Activism

Second, we need to be active in defense of Israel against the new anti-semitism. Two weeks following the Holocaust memorial, we will have the opportunity to go and advocate on behalf of the state of Israel, in support of continued foreign military aid between the United States and Israel for the 2019 fiscal year. It is not a small thing to ask someone to take a day off from work, especially so close to Pesach and I will be there to represent our entire congregation.

And yet, for those who can be there, let us remember that seeking out the welfare of Jerusalem, to use the language of the Psalmist, is itself a sacred obligation. If the Almighty is “doresh tzion”, so, in light of our perpetual mandate of imitatio dei, must we.

Israel advocacy is not a partisan issue- NORPAC has been and will always remain a bipartisan organization. One need not support every policy of any particular Israeli or American administration to participate. Candidly, I have my disagreements with both current administrations. And yet, that is not what the Norpac mission is about. As always, we will lobby for continued foreign aid for military assistance, which enables Israel to maintain a qualitative military edge over its adversaries in the region. With Iran further and further entrenched on Israel’s northern border, with activities at the Gaza fence increasing in their seriousness, we are reminded of the need to continuously seek the welfare of Zion.

Over and above the direct military aid, the other three issues for which we will advocate touch directly upon anti-semitism: legislation to roll back the terrorist activities of an openly anti-semitic, and anti-American regime in Teheran; legislation to further sanction the terrorist financing structure of the virulently anti-semitic terrorist organization Hezbollah, itself an Iranian proxy, and finally, counter- BDS legislation. While it would be unfair to equate the Iranian regime and the leadership of Hezbollah with the BDS movement, that does not mean that the latter does not have both explicit and implicit anti-semitic messages. Once again, one may disagree with the policies of the Israeli government, but to

single out Israel for economic warfare, over and above Russia, China, Syria, North Korea, and so many other nations that have no regard whatsoever for human life, per se, is anti-semitism in practice, if not in theory.

III. Unity

Thus, we need to, first and foremost, remember, and fight for historical truth. We must be active on behalf of the State of Israel. And finally, we must, above all, be united.

As we all read *Dayenu* last night, a late addition to the accepted version of the Pesach seder, we recited a strange line, containing an odd sentiment: “had the Almighty brought us before Sinai, but not given us the Torah, it would have sufficed.” What was the significance of coming before Sinai without receiving the Torah? It seems to me that the answer lies in the rabbinic tradition, based on a very careful reading of the Biblical text, that the Jewish people experienced a profound unity prior to revelation at Sinai. It was, in the midrashic telling, as if we had become one person, with one heart.

Irrespective of denomination, with an eye towards the inclusive nature of the holiday that we are marking- k'negged arbah banim dibrah Torah- we must stand together in the face of our enemies.

Surely, we will not always agree with one another, even as it concerns foundational issues.

In every fiber of my being, I am a Zionist, I believe the state of Israel is the result of a partnership of Providence, incredible acts of Providence, and the heroic sacrifice of so many of our brethren, nearly 24,000 soldiers who gave their lives on behalf of the Jewish people and our sacred homeland. I will carry that belief with every step I take.

And yet, I will always know and respect that there are many who disagree with me, who doubt, sincerely, the spiritual standing of the State of Israel. Perhaps they are concerned for a Talmudic passage, though not recorded in Rambam or Shulchan Aruch, and not generally accepted as normative, which seems to

proscribe returning to Israel by military force, שלא יעלו בחומה. Perhaps they remain opposed due to the secular, and candidly, anti-religious elements who were critical to the State's founding. I disagree with them in the strongest possible terms, but, the fact remains, they are my brothers and sisters as well.

Yet, what I cannot abide, what none of us should abide, is one who goes to Beirut, to a conference sponsored by Hezbollah, to denounce the state of Israel, and its inhabitants, as thieves and murderers, as recently happened. One can choose to live one's life in Brooklyn wishing that Israel did not exist, but one cannot, under any circumstance, make common cause with those who have the blood of one's fellow Jews on their hands. Let us not forget that Hassan Nasrallah once said that there was some good in the founding of the State of Israel, in the sense that it localized Jews to a particular location, so that he did not have to spend as much time, energy, and resources killing them in different parts of the world.

And so, we must also stand united, and speak with one voice.

III. The Three Obligations

The New Anti-Semitism leaves us with a three-fold challenge, and a three-fold responsibility: to remember, to fight for historical truth; to be active in support of the State of Israel; and to stand united with our fellow Jews.

To paraphrase the great sage we spoke of last night, Rabban Gamaliel, those who do not engage in this three-fold mission have not fulfilled their obligation.

With abiding faith in the Guardian of Israel, who, even as they have arisen to destroy us in every generation, has let neither sleep nor slumber, nor apathy or inattentiveness prevent His mighty and outstretched arm from saving our people, והקדוש ברוך הוא מצילנו מידם, and with a deep resolve to partner with Him, let us take this threefold cord in our hands, the will to remember, a commitment towards activism, and a visceral commitment to work towards greater levels of Jewish unity, and move forward. In the timeless words of Kohelet, it is “the threefold cord which will not quickly be torn.”