

ימי הפורים האלה לא יעברו מתוך היהודים

*The Eternal Memory of Purim and Confronting Ilhan Omar*

Pekudei

3 Adar II 5779

Dear Friends,

It was but three weeks ago that I stood at this very pulpit, and, with a sense of resolve and determination, but, admittedly, a heavy heart, I spoke of a new scourge of antisemitism rearing its head in this great nation, the haven of the remnant of our people.

In particular, I spoke of the formation of an unholy alliance between the ultranationalist right, they of the Charlottesville torches and the Pittsburgh massacre at Tree of Life, and the radical left, embodied by a Representative from Minnesota's Fifth Congressional District, Ilhan Omar.

Representative Omar, I noted then, had spoken of Israel's hypnotic powers over the world as she dared to defend her citizens against the ceaseless onslaught of rockets during *Mivtza Amud Anan*. In response to criticism from New York Times columnist Bari Weiss, a friend and classmate of mine, Representative Omar thanked Ms. Weiss for helping to educate her regarding the classic anti semitic trope of Jewish mind control.

Representative Omar, I noted then, had called into question the sincerity of any apology by subsequently noting that American Jews were using money, the now infamous “Benjamins”, in corrupting public elected officials into support of Israel.

Once again, after a severe rebuking from her party leadership, Representative Omar claimed to be learning about the history of antisemitism, and apologized “unequivocally” for peddling that other classic anti-semitic trope, of the corrupting power of Jewish capitol.

And so, I noted, while I did not claim to be a mind reader, I do know something about baseball, and Representative Omar had two strikes against her.

My friends, in her comments made last week in a Washington DC area bookstore, regarding American supporters of Israel having an allegiance to a foreign nation, peddling the most vicious anti semitic trope of all, that of the disloyal Jew, Ms. Omar has struck out.

Our tradition notes **הוִי דֵן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת**, judge each person favorably in a case, of doubt, but, there can be no doubt. You do not need me to remind you of the pernicious nature of the charge of the disloyal Jew; in Ancient Egypt, Pharaoh justified the infanticide and enslavement of the Jews based on this very claim, noting that the Jews, who had saved his country from utter disaster, were a fifth column,

prepared to destroy the regime from within in time of war, והיה כי, תקרונה מלחמה ונוסף גם הוא על שונאינו ונלחם בנו ועלה מן הארץ; Haman himself, some two thousands five hundred years ago, claimed that a disloyal people should be marked for annihilation, עם אחד מפוזר, ומפורד בין העמים...ואת דתי המלך אינם עושים ולמלך אין שווה להניחם; in late 19th century France, it was Captain Dreyfuss betraying the French republic for her arch-enemy, Germany; in this country, it most often took the form of the Bolshevik sympathizer; in the Soviet Union, of course, it was just the opposite, the Jewish financier, the class enemy; in Nazi Germany, it was, of course, the Jews who had betrayed the Fatherland in the First World War, and brought forth defeat from the very jaws of victory in 1918.

The first amendment enshrines Representative Omar's right to espouse any policy view which she wishes to maintain, to be critical of any policy of the Israeli government which she wishes to criticize.

And yet, she is not entitled to, in a career spanning less than three months in Congress, peddle the three great antisemitic canards of world history, the Jewish mind controller, the corruption of Jewish money, and the disloyal Jew, and then claim that she is being singled out for criticism because of her faith, her gender, or her race.

Representative Omar, you are not being singled out for criticism because of your faith, your gender, or your race. You are being singled out for criticism because of your hate.

Or, more precisely, you should be singled out for criticism, but you were not. Just three week ago, in response to Representative Omar's comments regarding the corrupting powers of Jewish money, Speaker Pelosi and the Democratic leadership were forceful and direct. They named the source of the problem and demanded an apology, "Congresswoman Omar's use of anti-Semitic tropes and prejudicial accusations about Israel's supporters is deeply offensive... We condemn these remarks and we call upon Congresswoman Omar to immediately apologize for these hurtful comments."

Some were justifiably upset that the leadership had permitted the Congresswoman to remain on the foreign affairs committee. After all, Representative Steve King of Iowa had been stripped of all of his committee assignments by his party leadership on account of racist and anti-semitic remarks he made regarding White Supremacy and White nationalism.

And yet, I thought it was a strong statement of condemnation on the part of Speaker Pelosi, and in particular, I was heartened by its opening lines, "antisemitism must be called out, confronted, and condemned, wherever it is encountered, without exception."

My friends, these words were sent forth less than one month ago. "Confronted and condemned" has become excused and justified. What was "deeply offensive" less than one month ago was now unintentional, certainly not meant to be hurtful, the product of a simple

misunderstanding. “Without exception” has become, to my great pain, with shocking exception.

In a vacuum, the resolution passed on Thursday denouncing hatred of all kinds, including anti-semitism, would be a fine and noble thing. In the wake of Congresswoman Omar’s vitriol, it was a cowardly and shameful thing.

It is fitting and proper for a school principal to denounce violence in general terms. And yet, if one student pummels another, and the principal responds with some kind of general condemnation of violence, in place of a specific disciplinary action towards that student, it is a farce.

In a speech to the House of Lords this past September regarding anti-semitism, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks warned that the greatest danger any civilization faces is collective amnesia. In two stirring minutes, he delineated the three stages in which anti-semitism progresses from a fringe view to a predominant one; a rogue individual espouses anti-semitism. The political mainstream contemplates the view, and elects not to censure the person, seeing that the political cost of tolerating the antisemitism is perhaps not too great to bear. And finally, with the legitimization of the view, those who would dare cry out are silenced.

Rabbi Sacks' words are playing out in front of our eyes. Those who would dare call Representative Omar what she is, a vicious anti semite, are charged with racism and islamophobia.

We, my dearest of friends, refuse to remain silent.

As we will read the Megillah in this very room some ten days from now, we will remind ourselves of the timeless truth that Mordechai teaches the Queen, that passivity is not an option, that silence in the face of hatred is complicity, **כי אם החרש תחרישי בעת הזאת**. The young Queen learns the lesson well, and in pleading for her people, she cries out, **איככה אוכל וראיתי ברעה אשר ימצא את עמי ואיככה אוכל וראיתי באבדן מולדתי**, 'how can I sit and watch the wicked that will befall my nation, and how can I watch the destruction of those to whom I was born?'

**והימים האלה נזכרים ונעשים**, the Days of Purim are remembered and they are performed. We remember Esther's lessons quite well. Her courage, her bravery, her capacity to discover her own voice in defense of her people, and above all, her insistence that the entire Jewish people stand together as one in the face of the hatred, **לך כנוס את כל היהודים**.

So it must be with us. Ilhan Omar does not complain of Orthodox Jewish money, or Conservative or Reform or unaffiliated Jews who lack allegiance to this nation. She does not attacks Jewish conservatives or Jewish progressives, but every Jew. And so let us stand together, as in

the final words of the Book of Shemot which we completed today, כל בית ישראל, the entire House of Israel.

We welcome and bless the support of people of good faith, our dear friends, of every religion and ethnicity, but we must understand that if we do not speak up in our own defense, no one else will.

Let us take nothing for granted. The oldest and most venerable ally of our nation stands at the very precipice of turning national leadership into the hands of a man whom has called members of Hezbollah and Hamas his “friends”, and who questions Hamas’ designation as a terrorist organization. I do not wish to fearmonger, but let us not be so naive as to think that the same could not happen here.

We have come, with frightful speed, to the very crossroads. This past week, a great portion of the political establishment of this country looked straight into the darkness of anti-semitism, of hatred for the Jewish people, and, in shame, turned away. Leading presidential candidates voiced support for Representative Omar.

If there was a straight line that can be drawn from Charlottesville to Pittsburgh, as I believe there is, than there is an equally straight line that can be drawn from the legitimization of Representative Omar to a Democratic Party that will campaign for the presidency on a platform supporting the BDS movement as well as the renunciation of military aid to Israel.

We, my friends, come from a different tradition, ומרדכי לא יכרע ולא ישתחוה, Mordechai would not kneel nor would he bow, and, in confronting this sickness, this darkness, neither shall we.

For, as is stated in the Book of Esther, וימי הפורים האלה לא יעברו מתוך היהודים וזכרם לא יסוף מזרעם, these Days of Purim shall not pass from the Jewish people, nor shall their memory be expunged from their descendents. Even if all of the other holidays shall be voided, our Sages taught us, the days and lessons of Purim shall continue to guide us, in every generation.

And so, with the help of the One who saves us, as they rise in every generation to destroy us, we will remember; we will remember כי אם יחרש תחרישי, that we shall never remain silent; we shall remember, כנוס את כל היהודים, to stand together as one, to put differences aside, we shall remember, ומרדכי לא יכרע ולא ישתחוה, that we will never yield, we will never surrender, to those who wish to see us disappear.

An orphan girl turned Queen showed us the way. As she insisted upon to the rabbinic establishment of her day, כתבוני לדורות, קבעוני לדורות, include my story for all generations, mark my holiday in all generations. She understood that we would need her message, of unity, of courage, of a total devotion to the welfare of our people.

May she be our very inspiration on the challenging road ahead.



