My friends, the Jewish community is besieged in ways I have not seen in my many years of rabbinic service. I wish to give you some history, some facts about today and finally what we need to do to address the current crisis.

If you have a one-dollar bill on you, please take it out and look at it. Turn it over to the side that doesn’t have George Washington’s picture on it. In the middle, in very large print, is the word “ONE.” In a circle on the left is a pyramid. In a circle on the right is an eagle. Above the eagle’s head is a circle of stars, thirteen stars, one for each of the original thirteen colonies. Now look carefully at the shape the stars are arranged in. Do you see that the stars are in the shape of a Star of David? Let me offer an explanation.

In 1740 a man named Haim Solomon whose father was probably a Rabbi, was born in Leszno, Poland to a family of Portuguese Jews. His parents had been driven out by the Spanish Inquisition and settled in Poland. However, the Jewish villages in the area were often the victims of vicious pogroms, one of which sent Solomon fleeing to Holland. By 1775 he ended up in New York City, fluent in several languages, knowledgeable in finance, fervently Jewish and passionately devoted to the Patriots in their attempt to break free of British domination. He was arrested as a spy by the English, tortured, but pardoned after 18 months so he could be used as a translator for the Hessian mercenaries. Instead, he tried to get the Hessians to defect, and used his position to help free prisoners. Solomon was arrested again and sentenced to death, but managed to escape and flee with his family to the rebel capital, Philadelphia.

Here, he became chief broker to the revolution, raising huge sums to finance supplies, salaries, and everything else that was needed to keep the fledgling rebellion going against the spectacularly wealthy British Empire. Even past the end of the war he continued to arrange for money for the debt-ridden colonial government. He lent much of the money at below market rates and never demanded repayment. It is estimated that he was owed $800,000, which would have been more than $40 billion at today’s rates. Included in that sum was much of his personal wealth, so much so that he died a pauper, his estate not being enough to cover his debts.
Legend has it that in recognition of his efforts, the stars on the one-dollar bill are arranged in the shape of a Jewish star in honor of the Jewish broker who played such a crucial part in financing the Revolution.

Ah, if only that were the case, but there is no concrete evidence to prove it. What we do know is heartbreaking. His heirs attempted to obtain some recognition and compensation, but the government contended that the papers concerning their claims were destroyed when the British burned government buildings in DC during the War of 1812. Solomon’s youngest child, Haim Jr., met with President John Tyler in the early 1840s and gave him a sheaf of papers concerning the claim. That too, somehow disappeared. When he was in his late seventies, Haim Jr., offered to settle his family’s claims for $100,000, a fraction of what was owed. The committee with which he spoke agreed, but Congress failed to approve the expenditure.

The family seems to have given up any thought of recompense. Instead, in 1893, they asked Congress to strike a commemorative medal in Solomon’s honor at a cost of $250. The request was rejected. Future president Woodrow Wilson sat on a committee in 1911 charged with founding a university in Solomon’s honor, but the onset of WWI scuttled that project.

Finally, in 1941, Solomon was depicted on a memorial sculpture in Chicago along with George Washington and Robert Morris, another important revolutionary financier. The inscription reads: “Symbol of American tolerance and unity and of the cooperation of people of all races and creeds in the upbuilding of the United States.” Later on, the Post Office issued a stamp in his honor.

What the Solomon family received was a shared statue, a postage stamp and relative anonymity. Here in Philly, all that tells us that he was here is a privately held cemetery that is named in his memory.

There is little doubt that he was treated with such disdain because he was a Jew. Like his fellow Jews, he was at the mercy of the non-Jewish world.

There was no strong Jewish community to speak of in that era, no powerful group that “had his back”, as the current phrase goes. In 1790, five years after Solomon’s death, there were only about 2,500 Jews in the entire US. In 1820, thirty-five years after Solomon’s death, there were about 10,000 and still only 150,000 by the time of the Civil War.

Not only was there no strong Jewish community here at the time of Haim Solomon’s death, had things gone just a bit differently, there might have been no Jewish community here at all. Let me take you 86 years earlier than the revolution. In 1654, 23 Jews, fleeing the Portuguese Inquisition, left their Brazilian city of Recife and landed in New Amsterdam.
This first group of Jewish settlers in North America had the misfortune of being received by the governor of New Amsterdam, Peter Stuyvesant, an arch anti-Semite. One historian writes:

When the ship landed in New Amsterdam, [the Captain] filed suit against his passengers for failure to pay the balance of their passage. Stuyvesant seized the Jews’ meager possessions and ordered them sold at auction. When this failed to raise enough to meet their debts, he jailed two members of the group and wrote to the Dutch West India Company in Amsterdam, asking permission to expel the Jews.

The text of the letter Stuyvesant wrote to his employers in Holland read:

The Jews who have arrived would nearly all like to remain here, but learning that they (with their customary usury and deceitful trading with the Christians) were very repugnant...also fearing that owing to their present indigence they might become a charge in the coming winter, we have... deemed it useful to require them in a friendly way to depart... praying... that the deceitful race – such hateful enemies and blasphemers of the name of Christ – be not allowed to further infect and trouble this new colony...

The Jewish refugees turned to influential Jewish shareholders of the West India Company in Holland for help. As a result of their intercession, Company officials wrote this letter ordering Stuyvesant to let the Jews remain in New Amsterdam:

We would have liked to... fulfill your wishes and request that the new territories should no more be allowed to be infected by people of the Jewish nation... but after having further weighed and considered the matter, we observe that this would be somewhat unreasonable and unfair... because of the large amount of capital which they have invested in the shares of this company. Therefore, after many deliberations we have finally decided... that these people may travel and trade to and in New Netherland and live and remain there, provided the poor among them shall not become a burden to the company or to the community, but be supported by their own nation. You will now govern yourself accordingly.

In 1654, we had strong allies to defend us, so we were allowed to remain here and build a life. Following American independence, our community had less influence, and so the work of Haim Solomon goes mostly unrecognized or uncompensated. Why is this history so important today?

We have seen a pattern since the beginning of Jewish history of our facing antisemitism to one degree or another, and our surviving, even thriving, but only where we have strong Jewish communities. Only when we had allies at home or abroad and we confronted anti-Semitism, were we able to rise above it. Only when we open our mouths and stood up for our rights and had the allies to support us, were we able not only to confront oppression but build despite it.

In the modern state of Israel, we have the strongest Jewish community that the world has ever known. In Israel, we have an army, an air force, sophisticated weaponry, and in one of the worst kept
state secrets of modern times, nuclear weapons. Israel protects diaspora Jews all over the world. Yet, for all of that, Israel would be in great difficulty without the backing of a strong American Jewish community. Each helps the other survive.

My daughter, who is living in a small town in Texas goes to a tiny synagogue of just 50 families. They have little impact on the community and have even less political power. There is no Federation, ADL, JCRC or other synagogues with which they can partner. They have little impact on the community and have even less political power.

While these small Jewish communities are important and provide support to those within them, they are not a powerful force against anti-Semitism more globally.

In contrast, living primarily in the PA suburbs, we are blessed to be in one of the largest Jewish communities. Our strength is in our numbers. But are we acting strongly enough?

Are we protecting Jews in our community? Are we protecting Jews in weaker communities? Are we helping Israel in its protection of itself and of all of us?

I am concerned that the answer to these questions may be “no” and this brings me to the main point of my sermon this morning. We need to do what the generation of Haim Solomon could not do. We need to act as the powerful Dutch Jewish community did do. We need to speak out, stand up and protect our communities.

Some Jews stand up to antisemitism only when it is on the other side of the political divide. To ignore antisemitism on your side of the political divide is to condone it.

On the hard right, we see why supremacists who wear swastikas, praise Hitler and/or spew anti-Semitic venom with pride. As we saw with the Tree of Life and Poway, California Massacre in 2018, we are dealing not only with words but also murder.

On the hard left, we see a different kind of anti-Semitism. It may be less lethal than the hate flowing from the hard right, but it is more ubiquitous.

Here at home, serving on the Wissahickon racial equity task force, I have condemned the anti-Semitism coming from the Ambler head of the NAACP, and asked for his expulsion from an inclusion committee following Facebook posts comparing Jews to Nazis. A student of Beth Or at a local school was subjected to social stigmatization and singled out as a hater when she clearly is not. She was socially isolated, attached for being a Jew and received no support from her privately funded school. This was outrageous. Yes, she is proud Jew and a lover of Israel, but that doesn’t make her a racist.

We must fight racism. But we must do so, not by being more hateful. We must stand up to those who suggest that somehow Jews have a particularly pernicious brand of white privilege.
Of course, we must speak out when we disagree with the policies of Israel. But to be silent on injustices in China, Nigeria, Myanmar, Syria and other countries at a minimum provides cover to those who believe Israel has no right to exist.

If it’s wrong to turn against Chinese Americans because of the corona virus, and it is, it is wrong to turn against Jews because of some of the policies of Israel. If it’s wrong to turn against Muslims because of the terror that some inflict on citizenry, and it is, then it’s wrong to turn against Jews because of some of the policies of Israel. If it was wrong to turn against Japanese during WWII, and it was, then it’s wrong to turn against Jews today. As we stand in solidarity with Asian Americans, Muslim Americans and others of color, we must stand up for ourselves and ask others to stand with us.

The inconvenient truth for our haters is that the Jewish people are not the enemy of the workers, or of people of color, or of social justice. We are not the destroyers of commerce or of American democracy. We are not seeking to overtake the world. In fact, we are the one of the few faiths that does not proselytize or seek to convert.

Israel is a beacon of democracy. Not perfect, but it is fighting the likes of Hamas which recently publicly congratulated the Taliban of Afghanistan on regaining power and throwing out American occupiers. Israel is a light of progress economically and politically. The truth is that when the Jews finally governed themselves in Israel, after 2000 years of exile, they built the equivalent of universal health care long before the issue became a serious issue of debate in the US. The sons and daughters of the Ethiopian Jewish community, airlifted out of Africa by Israel in the 1980s, are reaching the Knesset and the Eurovision stage. LGBTQ Arabs can follow their hearts and their faith freely in Israel, and an Arab political party sits in the government, as do Arabs serve on the Supreme Court. The truth is that Hamas endangers civilians, Palestinian and Israeli, just to feed hatred. Their goal is the total eradication of the State of Israel. We hear some chant “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free.” That means no Israel. Calling Israel genocidal is the pot calling the kettle black.

And now, once again, too many of us have shamefully become the Jews of Silence. We have spoken up for every cause but our own.

It is time to shed our silence and speak with a loud voice. We may be less accepted in some political circles, but we cannot be modern-day Morranos, authentic Jews only if and to the extent it is acceptable with those whom we generally share a world view.

If we have been silent because “antisemitism could never happen here,” then take a look around. It is no longer just the Lubavitch asking “are you Jewish?” to help you do a mitzvah. Roving gangs of anti-Israel demonstrators in New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles are asking the same question. They brandish knives. They throw fists, bottles and hateful words. Recently, kippah wearing Jews at a rally in
Philadelphia were taunted verbally and physically assaulted with the vilest anti-Semitic actions. Watching videos of the confrontation made my heart shiver.

Let me share with you the words of David Harris, president of the American Jewish Committee. He wrote about our need to express outrage and stand with Israel:

- At the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, just one nation is deemed such a violator of human rights that it warrants a separate and permanent agenda item. Not China. Not Cuba. Not Iran. Not Russia. Not Syria. Only Israel, the lone liberal democracy in the Middle East. Where’s the outrage?
- Jews have been connected to the region for 3,500+ years, established Jerusalem as the center of Jewish prayer, and, even in forced exile, never stopped yearning for a return. Nonetheless, Jews are called “crusaders” and “colonizers,” rather than the indigenous people they are. Where’s the outrage?
- Israel has achieved peace and normalization with six Arab countries, withdrawn fully from Gaza, and put several two-state deals with the Palestinians on the table, yet is depicted by its nonstop critics as being unalterably opposed to peace. Where’s the outrage?
- Afghanistan and Yemen recently joined Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Sudan, and Syria as witnessing the end of ancient Jewish communities, driven out largely by intolerance and persecution. Where’s the outrage?
- A few outspoken members of Congress make a practice of libeling Israel regularly, accusing it of every nefarious deed under the sun, and, outrageously, even trying to turn a political conflict with the Palestinians into a racialized war against Arabs. Where’s the outrage?
- Pro-Israel supporters gather peacefully in the U.S. and are physically attacked by pro-Hamas supporters. Where’s the outrage?
- A Jewish university student asks a professor for a letter of recommendation, which he refuses to write when he learns she wishes to spend her junior year at an Israeli school. Where’s the outrage?
- A non-Jewish university student is harassed and ostracized because she opposes a student government resolution calling for a boycott of Israel. Where’s the outrage?
- A high-school social studies teacher refuses to include in his classroom any maps of the Middle East that show Israel. Where’s the outrage?
- A prominent CNN host has a discussion on the aftermath of Hamas’s war against Israel. Two of the three panelists are well-known for denying Israel’s very right to exist. Where’s the outrage?
• An Israeli-inspired food truck is barred from participating in a food festival in Philadelphia. Where’s the outrage?
• The latest FBI statistics indicate that 60 percent of all religiously-motivated hate crimes in the U.S. are directed at Jews, who comprise two percent of the nation’s population. Where’s the outrage?

Now is the time for us rise up and defend our rights. We are often the first to defend other oppressed people. I am proud that we have stood with the LGBTQ+ community, the African American community, the Muslim community and the Asian community. Now is time to stand up for the Jewish community.

Rabbi Hillel said: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for others, what am I? And if not now, when?” Many of us have spoken for others, and that is wise, but now we need to speak out for ourselves. If not us, who? If not now, when? Let’s end our silence and cry out for our rights and the rights of Israel to exist...to exist without trembling knees. Only by building alliances with others, that I have devoted my life to, speaking truth, and courageously confronting hate, can we turn the tide and defend our American rights to life and liberty as Hayim Solomon imagined.