There are some things you just don’t say! It’s as simple as that! Donald Sterling knows exactly what I mean. Born to Jewish parents named Tokowitz, Sterling was the owner of the Los Angeles Clippers basketball team. He was caught on tape telling his girlfriend not to come to basketball games with black people. It didn’t matter at all that what he said was “off the record,” or that it was said in a private conversation. It doesn’t matter that he was to be honored by the NAACP for his support of Black causes. What mattered is that he is a racist and needs to be condemned for his hateful words. He has lost so much because of his words.

This morning, I’d like to talk about the power of words and how they can be misused. First, I’d like to talk about the misuse of the word Holocaust. Have you noticed that more and more people are misusing that word? Once a group of seals swam ashore from the north Atlantic and died. Conservationists referred to that as a “Holocaust.” Friends of PETA
have referred to animal testing as a “Holocaust.” Well I’m here to say that you can’t do that. You cheapen the meaning of the word. The murder of 6 million people – a million and a half of whom were children – shooting them, gassing them, cremating them, all because they were Jews … that was a Holocaust. Not everything that goes wrong is a Holocaust. As Jews, we that know this truth, and it’s up to us and us alone to explain this to others.

Apartheid is another misused word. It is immediately associated with South Africa of the 1960’s, 70’s and 80’s. In South Africa, if you were white - you were “somebody.” If you were black – you were “nobody.” The world, rightly, condemned South Africa, cut off relations. What the South Africans were doing was ugly, unacceptable, and universally condemned. But claiming that Israel is an apartheid state is totally unacceptable.

Over the summer, Secretary of State, John Kerry, is on record as saying that if Israel does not soon come to a two state solution with the Palestinians, Israel will become an apartheid state. He has since, back tracked on his use of that word but it never should have come out of his mouth. We were critical of Jimmy Carter when he called Israel an apartheid state and we should be critical of John Kerry as well. Calling Israel an apartheid state is part of the Arab effort to delegitimize Israel.
Israel has a free press, Arab citizens have equal rights, gays and women have 100% equal rights, twelve members of the Knesset, Israel’s parliament are Arabs and the Palestinian Authority governs most of the Arabs living in the disputed territories. It is no apartheid. As Jews, we know this truth and its up to us to explain this to others.

Saudi Arabia has a whole city – Mecca – that is off limits to all but Muslims. The highway leading to Mecca is segregated between Muslims and non-Muslims. Did you ever hear anyone say “apartheid?” What about when Palestinian President Abbas keeps saying that not one Jew will be allowed to live in Palestine? Anyone talk about apartheid? Sanctions, boycott, divest, apartheid … of all the countries in the world, those words are used most often when it comes to Israel. Why? Because anti-Semitism in the form of anti-Zionism is gaining traction all around the world.

On the streets of Philadelphia, pro Hamas protesters held up signs as the Jewish community peacefully rallied to support Israel. The sign said, “Stop the Israeli genocide.” Really? Genocide. That word is misused all the time. All civilian deaths are tragic, but the ratio of civilian to combatants in the recent war in Gaza was 1 to 1. That is 1,000 Hamas terrorists died and 1000 civilians also sadly perished. But it is no genocide. Since 1948, the Palestinian population in Israel and the Disputed territories has increased
over 600%. Using the word genocide is an affront to decency and an outright lie. The population of Gaza has grown from 300,000 in 1967 to over a million and a half. Saying that Israel is waging genocide there is laughable. We should know that. In Iraq, 10,000 Kurdish, Yazidis, Turkish and Christian civilians have been brutally murdered by ISIS in the past several weeks. They have posted on YouTube that Christians either have to convert to Islam or be killed. School children in Syria are taught that minority religions cannot be tolerated on Muslim lands. Beheadings are becoming commonplace. ISIS has even stated that they intend to kill all non-believers, and the world speaks out condemning Israeli genocide? Ironic at best…anti-Semitic at the least.

Turkey’s president, Erdogan has accused Israel of “Hitler-like fascism” and of genocide against the Palestinian people. That’s the pot calling the kettle black. In fact, the word genocide was introduced into our vocabulary by Raphael Lempkin following the Turkish genocidal murder of 1.5 million Armenians during WWI. Lempkin stated, “I became interested in genocide because it happened so many times … it happened to the Armenians, and after the Armenians, Hitler took action.”

Here’s another phrase that is horrendous and completely misused when describing Israel’s conflict with the Palestinians. The media
routinely referred to the Gaza conflict as a morally neutral “cycle of violence.” What an absurd choice of words. What possible interest could Israel have had in cross-border fighting? What did Israel get by having half of its population running to bomb shelters, millions of vacationers cancel their trips and airlines cancelling their flights? There was no cycle of violence. The responsibility for the violence over the summer rests with Hamas who launched thousands of missiles at Israel in order to draw Israel’s fire and the condemnation of the world. ISIS by the way is doing the same thing by beheading westerners. They were attempting and now have successfully drawn us into battle, which will precipitate more beheadings, and bring on a world conflict. But is this a cycle of violence? No. It is the logical response to hatred, brutality and bellicosity.

How about the word, “occupation.” Hamas stated that their attacks were designed to end the occupation and the blockade. I need to say this clearly. There is no occupation of Gaza. When Hamas speaks of fighting to end the occupation, they are referring to Israel’s occupation of Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem. Less than ten years ago, and I witnessed this, Israeli soldiers and settlers withdrew from Gaza. I met with the families that were uprooted from their homes. They were angry with the government, and that they were going to be resettled in areas close to Gaza. And what did they
get for their resettlement … air raids, bomb shelters and traumatized families.

Not one soldier, not one settler, not one Israeli remains in Gaza…and yet Hamas still calls for the end to the occupation.

There are many that are fighting Israel’s blockade of Gaza. Another Flotilla is planned to go from Turkey to Israel. But let me be clear. While there is a blockade now, there was no blockade when Israel withdrew from Gaza. Charles Krauthammer wrote, “Israel wanted this new Palestinian state to succeed. To help the Gaza economy, Israel withdrew from Gaza nine years ago and gave the Palestinians its 3000 greenhouses that had produced fruit and flowers for export. It opened border crossings and encouraged commerce. The whole idea was to establish the model for two states living peacefully and productively side by side.” And how did the Gaza Palestinians react to being granted by the Israelis what no previous ruler, neither Egyptian, nor British, nor Turkish, had ever given them — an independent territory? First, they demolished the greenhouses. Then they elected Hamas. And instead of building a state with its political and economic institutions, they spent the better part of a decade turning Gaza into a massive military base, brimming with weapons hidden in hospitals and tunnels for the purpose of cross border terror raids.

Krauthammer continues, “Where are the roads and rail, the industry
and infrastructure of the new Palestinian state? Nowhere. Instead, they built mile upon mile of underground tunnels to hide their weapons and, when the going gets tough, their military commanders. They spent millions importing and producing rockets, launchers, mortars, small arms, even drones. They deliberately placed them in schools, hospitals, mosques and private homes to better expose their own civilians. And from which they fire rockets at Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.”

The blockade is real, but it was instituted AFTER Hamas started launching rockets at Israel.

Israel’s famous writer, Amos Oz, in an interview with a German newspaper, raised the following questions: “What would you do if your neighbor crosses the street, sits down on the balcony, puts his little boy on his lap and starts shooting machine gun fire into your nursery? What would you do if your neighbor across the street digs a tunnel from his nursery to your nursery in order to blow up your home or in order to kidnap your family?” No one I know came up with an answer to these questions that was different from that of Israel’s.

Even the word to define the newest Islamic terror group is changing to reflect it’s true character and mission. ISIS, which makes Al Queida look moderate, is now referring to itself as ISIL, which stands for the Islamic
State in Iraq and the Levant. The Arabic word for the Levant is Shem, which stands for the lands of the Semites, which interestingly stands for Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. In other words, words matter….ISIL, which now is on the Golan Heights and had recently captured 40-50 UN peacekeepers are now setting their sights on Israel. ISIL is steadily de-emphasizing national boundaries in accord with its pan-Islamic ideology, which considers the divisions of the Muslim world into separate national states a subversion of Islamic goals.

Words matter. What we say should be measured and express who we are. So what does Hamas’ charter says. “Our struggle against the Jews is very great and very serious. It needs all sincere efforts …. Hamas is but one squadron that should be supported by more and more squadrons from this vast Arab and Islamic world, until the enemy is vanquished and Allah’s victory is realized.” It goes on to say that “the Prophet commands every Muslim to kill every Jew, everywhere in the world.” Mufti Muhammad Hussein, the chief Imam recently wrote, “Palestine in its entirety is a revolution… continuing today, and until the End of Days.” He quotes the Koran, "The Hour of Resurrection will not come until you fight the Jews. The Jew will hide behind stones or trees. Then the stones or trees will call: 'Oh Muslim, servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.'”
Now I know that there are moderate, forward thinking Muslim leaders. And I know that the chief Imam does not speak for every Muslim, just as I know that a chief rabbi does not speak for every Jew. But I also know the dangerous implications of making these inflammatory statements, and I think we can all agree that there are some things that you just don’t say. And when they are, we need to condemn them.

I grew up in the shadow of the Holocaust. I grew up being shown movies in religious school called “Night and Fog.” These were disturbing movies with graphic images of death and bodies pilled up in heaps. They are seared in my consciousness. I remember my Rabbi in the early 70’s standing up and being critical of American Jews of the 1930s who were not more proactive in speaking out against the rising anti-Semitism in Europe. Hitler was using his words to redefine good and evil. He was transforming the world with the most outlandish lies, and we couldn’t and didn’t stop him until it was too late. I remember my Rabbi being critical of our parent’s generation who sat by idly while enemies, first with words and then with guns rose up to destroy our people and almost the entire free world.

Fifty years from now a Rabbi will ascend a pulpit on Yom Kippur and he or she will talk about what American Jewry – what you and I did while the world is getting darker for Jews and all civilized people, all around the
world. What will that Rabbi in 50 years say about what we did when the world was standing by and letting Iran go nuclear? While the world is focusing on ISIS, which is good, we cannot ignore the threat from Iran. Fifty years from now, a rabbi will ask, what did we say, when others were saying the most outrageous things about us, and doing the most evil things? Now is the time to use our words to speak out in support of Israel. Now is the time to confront the plague of Islamic extremism, and the arming of Iran, which threatens our Western way of life. During WWII we went begging to the head of the Catholic Church and to an American President for help for European Jewry. We went quietly behind the scenes because we had no power, we had no influence and we were rebuffed. Today we need not go quietly. We can go proudly and we go loudly and we can rally good people to our side and demand that Israel be given the right and the means and the political coverage to protect herself. We are not the Jews of Masada, we are not the Jews of Warsaw, we are not the Jews of Russia in the 1st 60 years of the 20th century. We are the most powerful and influential Jewish community in history. The Jews of Israel are not hiding behind rocks waiting to be killed. They are standing up and defending themselves. And we must do the same. We can and must use our influence to support Israel, Jewish communities around the world and our own democratic values and
heritage here in the U.S.

There is no time to rest – failure is not an option. A Jewish world which has created the State of Israel – rescued Soviet, Ethiopian, Iranian and Syrian Jewry – a Jewish world which has produced more than 20% of all the Nobel prize winners and contributed to medicine, science, technology, literature, art and music far beyond our miniscule percentage of the world’s population dare not at this moment in history let it’s guard down when it comes to the survival of western values and the Jewish State.

These are the challenges that are in front of us – these challenges can and must be met. “Who knows?” asked Mordechai of Queen Esther, “Perhaps you have attained to this position of power for just such a crisis.” Esther answered the call and saved the Jewish people.

We know what to do, as well. We know about the importance of Israel Bonds, AIPAC, and the Federation. I don’t need to tell you that. We know of the importance of being politically engaged, of writing to our representatives, our newspapers and our friends.

There are some things you shouldn’t say, and there are some things we must say. We must not turn away and remain silent. We must peacefully and respectfully confront the lies that people say about us and Israel. We must not remain indifferent and tell ourselves that this will not
affect me. It **will** affect us and our children. We can and must speak the truth. We can and must stand up for tolerance, respect, strength and peace. We can and must take a Yom Kippur oath that cannot be nullified till next Yom Kippur. Let us take a God given oath to confront the misuse of words. Let us use our words to speak truth to power.

Words create reality. Our silence allows others to create it for us.