



Apparently there may soon be more charges against individuals who didn't speak up. But even without the justice system, we are left to wonder about the lack of empathy. Where was the Moses – willing to stand up to injustice, to take on someone else's problem as his or her own?

The late New York Times columnist A.M. Rosenthal wrote a book called *Thirty-Eight Witnesses* about the murder in 1964 of a woman named Kitty Genovese. It turns out that 38 residents of a nearby apartment heard the victim's screams; some turned on lights in their apartments and opened windows to watch. But they didn't call police. They didn't rush to help. As one witness explained, "I didn't want to get involved."

It is that kind of extreme individualism that enabled the Egyptian servitude to last 400 years. Did the Egyptians not know that people were suffering? They knew but they weren't bothered. They went about their lives until one person, Moses, looked out from the palace and determined that this just wasn't right.

We know about the problem of the supposedly innocent bystander from the Holocaust as well. How could people not know what was happening? But the world – from our own State Department to the pope to the Germans and Poles who could literally see the camps from their windows – the world stayed silent.

Like many of you, I am intrigued by the stories about Pope Francis I, who appears intent on shifting the focus of the church away from rulings on social issues about what Catholics cannot do and towards the positive responsibilities that believers accept towards the Other. His speech at his installation mass included a pledge to serve "the poorest, the weakest, the least important" members of society. He has been characterized by a "radical humility", and a desire not to get caught up in many of the trappings of the office. His only book is structured as a conversation between himself and Rabbi Abraham Skorka of the Seminario Rabbinico LatinoAmericano (our Conservative seminary in Argentina), in which he speaks about the silence of Pius XII and calls upon the Vatican to allow for an investigation into the records of his activities during the Holocaust. The then cardinal acknowledges that the church could have and should have spoken out.

The Pope's own record during Chile's dirty war under Augusto Pinochet calls out for further investigation, but he was praised for speaking out after the 1994 bombing of the Jewish community center in Argentina. His message about our responsibility towards the Other is important in a world that tends to focus so much on the sanctity of the individual, mass consumption, and self-indulgence.

It is a Jewish message, a Passover message. As the Torah says repeatedly: We have these responsibilities because we know what it was like to have been slaves in Egypt.

Earlier this month, Yossi Klein Halevi – a scholar at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem – wrote an article in which he compared two different kinds of Jews. There are Purim Jews and there are Pesach Jews. Purim Jews are motivated by the story of overcoming Haman; they are vigilant in the face of threats against our community. Pesach Jews, on the other hand, are motivated by the message of our liberation and its essential command towards the stranger: Do not be brutal.

Klein Halevi argues that both kinds of Jews are essential, which is what makes the Palestinian issue so difficult. In his words, “The stranger in our midst is represented by a national movement that wants to usurp us.” It’s a matter of body and soul. You can’t endanger the body, you can’t leave citizens vulnerable in the name of idealistic values of justice and peace. But you can’t protect the body, you can’t justify any action in the name of security if it means sacrificing the soul, the moral underpinnings of our Jewish national identity. And

That’s my takeaway from President Obama’s visit to Israel and especially his speech in Jerusalem. Palestinians were upset that the President of the United States is unwilling to impose an “agreement” (impose an agreement – I think that’s an oxymoron) or force Israel to act. There is a recognition and an understanding of the Purim instinct that says you can’t make peace without a partner. In the words of the Talmud, “If someone comes to kill you, kill him first.”

But alongside Purim, the president urged that we not lose sight of the Passover instinct. No matter how impossible the situation, no matter how intractable the Palestinian leadership, we cannot ignore the suffering of the Palestinian people. The current situation is intolerable not only because of the threats that we face. Our enemies are also suffering and we have a responsibility to recognize that as well.

I love the teaching from Pirkei Avot that there are four types of people:

- One who says “What’s mine is yours and what’s yours is yours” – that person is a saint.
- What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is mine – that person is wicked.
- What’s mine is yours and what’s yours is mine – that person is naïve.
- And what’s mine is mine and what’s yours is yours? At first the text says this is the intermediate, ordinary position. But then it adds: “Some say this is the attribute of Sodom.” The epitome of evil is the feeling that I only have to worry about myself.

That is the message of Passover. Practically the first words of the seder are “Let those who are hungry come and eat, כל דכפין ייתי ויכול”, because freedom is not just about history. It’s not just about us. That is the legacy of Moses. We must have empathy. We must recognize the suffering of the Other because we were once the Other in Egypt. Shabbat Shalom and an early Hag Sameah.