Je Suis Juif

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I am tempted to deliver my sermon today in French to convey solidarity with the victims of the massacre in Paris.

People in France and around the world people have lifted up their pens and held high placards that proclaim, "Je suis Charlie", I am Charlie as an act of identification with the members of the staff of the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo who were gunned down by Islamist terrorists. They hold them high as a proud defiance of the terrorists and in support for the concept of freedom of the press.

The horrific act is a wakeup call that has aroused many to realize that Islamist fascist groups' intimidation is real and its reach is widespread. Hopefully the reaction to the violence will lead people to recognize that Islamist jihadist terrorists pose a serious threat to values democracies cherish and hold dear.   The liberties we in the free world know and take for granted, such as freedom of expression, and even the freedom to laugh and make fun of each other are the very subject of the attack. If there is any doubt as to the intent of the jihadists, the targets of their assault make their objectives obvious.

And yet there are those who attempt to explain or justify these acts as being motivated by anger against discrimination, or that young Moslems who have emigrated to France or who are the children of emigres feel alienated and disenfranchised, or that they are acting out of desperation because they suffer economic deprivation. If that were the case, let them organize a protest march outside of the French social welfare office.

Nor does it have to do with the conflict in the Middle East. Just the other week France voted in the United Nations Security Council in favor of the creation of a Palestinian state. French pro-Palestinian policies do not inoculate them from the violent acts of Islamist terrorists. To excuse, rationalize and attempt to find a source based in economic or social conditions misses the point and prevents us from to correctly responding to and confronting the real source of the problem.

The world will be better equipped to confront and respond to the horror we just witnessed when we are honest and admit that we are dealing with an ideology that is fueled by fundamentalist extremists who are intolerant of any way of life other than their own. This is why there are attacks wherever people do not practice Islam as defined by these terrorists. This is why targets include churches in Africa, the kidnapping and forced conversion of Christians, and even mosques and other Moslems who do not practice the way they believe they should.

Israelis and Jews are not newcomers to this battle, nor are we surprised by the viciousness of the attacks. We cannot help but wonder if the situation could have been avoided if people would have expressed their outrage earlier, when the targets of their attacks were Jews.

Where was the outrage when terrorists entered a synagogue in Jerusalem and in cold-blooded murder gunned down Jews in prayer? Where was the international outrage when an angry mob went on a rampage in a synagogue in Paris a few months ago? Where was the outrage over the 2012 killing of a rabbi and three children at a school in Toulouse, France, or in May this past year when a gunman in Belgium opened fire at a Jewish Museum?

To be honest, the response to the murder of Jews at a French kosher supermarket feels a little different than the outrage over the attack at the newspaper in Paris. Would it even receive the notice it is getting were it not linked to the attack on the newspaper?

Yossi Klein Halevi said, "There's a certain bitterness in Israel where we have been watching the international community get worked up about terrorism in every part of the world except in Israel. World leaders condemn Islamist terrorism from Indonesia to London, but Jerusalem somehow doesn't get mentioned. It's as if we deserve it."

Is it asking too much for people to also hold up signs that say, "Je suis Juif: I am a Jew," in solidarity with the French Jews who have been killed? The attacks are not just against a free press, but against Jews and anyone who is not practicing religion the way these terrorists believe to be the correct way.

Is it unreasonable to expect honesty in reporting on the incident? The very same media organizations who worry so fiercely about government surveillance and who do not hesitate to advocate for the right to protest and for freedom of the press and who are so quick to decry infringement of freedom of expression and freedom of the press practice self-censorship. When they say they will not publish the offensive cartoons because they have suddenly become concerned about religious sensitivity, we know they are publishing a lie. They are concerned about their own safety, and they are being intimidated. They should be honest enough to tell us that.

I recently re-read a High Holiday sermon in which the rabbi said:

"The attacks upon Israel in the academic world and elsewhere should be viewed in the context of a broader global effort to undermine the Jewish state's right to defend itself and its right to exist. These affronts are a threat not just to Israel, but to the western principles of freedom and democracy.

Throughout history we have been the proverbial miner's canary. Israel was the first country to be the victim and target of international terrorism. Since the world thought the problem was confined only to the Jewish state, it looked the other way. It did even more than that. The Jewish Prime Minister of Austria, Bruno Kreisky freed Palestinian terrorists who had hijacked the Achille Lauro. Later Italy also released terrorists. These nations and all the world now knows no one is immune from extremism, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism.

The situation is reminiscent of Lutheran pastor Martin Neimoller's powerful oft-quoted message from the 1940's: 'First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me.'"

What I said is as true today as it was when I first said it on Rosh Hashanah.

In the face of these attacks, there are those who show their defiance and solidarity with the victims by proclaiming, "Je suis Charlie." I join with them. But let us not stop there. Let us defy the terrorists, repudiate their intolerance and reject and renounce their attempts to intimidate us by proudly proclaiming, "Je suis Juif: I am a Jew." For Judaism is the antithesis of the system of the Islamists, which is why it is a target of their fury. The 20th century French Jewish writer Edmond Fleg returned to and re-

embraced his Judaism in response to the anti-Semitism he experienced. In an essay he wrote in the 1920's he captured the ideals of our faith when he wrote:

"I am a Jew because, born of Israel and having lost her, I have felt her live again in me, more living than myself.

I am a Jew because, born of Israel and having regained her, I wish her to live after me, more living than in myself.

I am a Jew because the faith of Israel demands of me no abdication of the mind.

I am a Jew because the faith of Israel requires of me all the devotion of my heart.

I am a Jew because in every place where suffering weeps, the Jew weeps.

I am a Jew because at every time when despair cries out, the Jew hopes.

I am a Jew because the word of Israel is the oldest and the newest.

I am a Jew because the promise or Israel is the universal promise.

I am a Jew because, for Israel, the world is not yet completed; men are completing it.

I am a Jew because, above the nations and Israel, Israel places Man and his Unity.

I am a Jew because above Man, image of the divine Unity, Israel places the divine Unity, and its divinity."

This is why I am proud to say, "Je suis Juif: I am a Jew."

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