

Dylan and Moses: Two Poets and Prophets

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The International association of clowns, whose formal name is UNESCO in a vote taken last Thursday denied that there is a Jewish connection to the city of Jerusalem.

In response, Israel's permanent delegate to UNESCO, Carmel Shama Hacoen, said, "There is no connection of another people to another place in the world that comes close to the strength and depth of our connection to Jerusalem from a religious, historical and national perspective, a connection that has stood the test of 2,000 years."

PM Netanyahu recommended that members could read the Bible, or visit the Arch of Titus in Rome where they can see the seven branched menorah that the Romans carried back to Rome after they destroyed and looted the Second Temple 2,000 years ago. The menorah they took from that place which we supposedly have no connection to, is today the symbol of the State of Israel.

Netanyahu went on to say, "Soon, UNESCO will decide that Titus engaged in Zionist propaganda," and concluded, "To say that Israel has no connection to the Temple Mount is like saying that China has no connection to the Great Wall of China or that Egypt has no connection to the pyramids."

Looking for good news, and the silver lining in the vote, it was noted that more nations, 26, abstained than supported it, with 10 nations that had previously voted for a similar resolution abstaining this time.

The ganging up on Israel at the international body brings to mind a song you may or may not have heard of, called "Neighborhood Bully."

"Well, the neighborhood bully, he's just one man
His enemies say he's on their land
They got him outnumbered about a million to one
He got no place to escape to, no place to run
He's the neighborhood bully.

The neighborhood bully he just lives to survive
He's criticized and condemned for being alive
He's not supposed to fight back, he's supposed to have thick skin
He's supposed to lay down and die when his door is kicked in
He's the neighborhood bully.

The neighborhood bully been driven out of every land
He's wandered the earth an exiled man
Seen his family scattered, his people hounded and torn
He's always on trial for just being born
He's the neighborhood bully.

Well, he knocked out a lynch mob, he was criticized
Old women condemned him, said he should apologize

Then he destroyed a bomb factory, nobody was glad
The bombs were meant for him. He was supposed to feel bad
He's the neighborhood bully.

Well, the chances are against it, and the odds are slim
That he'll live by the rules that the world makes for him
'Cause there's a noose at his neck and a gun at his back
And a license to kill him is given out to every maniac
He's the neighborhood bully.

Well, he got no allies to really speak of
What he gets he must pay for, he don't get it out of love
He buys obsolete weapons and he won't be denied
But no one sends flesh and blood to fight by his side
He's the neighborhood bully.

Well, he's surrounded by pacifists who all want peace
They pray for it nightly that the bloodshed must cease
Now, they wouldn't hurt a fly. To hurt one they would weep
They lay and they wait for this bully to fall asleep
He's the neighborhood bully.

Every empire that's enslaved him is gone
Egypt and Rome, even the great Babylon
He's made a garden of paradise in the desert sand
In bed with nobody, under no one's command
He's the neighborhood bully.

Now his holiest books have been trampled upon
No contract that he signed was worth that what it was written on
He took the crumbs of the world and he turned it into wealth
Took sickness and disease and he turned it into health
He's the neighborhood bully.

What's anybody indebted to him for?
Nothing, they say. He just likes to cause war
Pride and prejudice and superstition indeed
They wait for this bully like a dog waits for feed
He's the neighborhood bully.

What has he done to wear so many scars?
Does he change the course of rivers? Does he pollute the moon and stars?
Neighborhood bully, standing on the hill
Running out the clock, time standing still
Neighborhood bully."

Is there any question who the songwriter is talking about?

Does anyone know who wrote the song?

It was written by a songwriter who this week became the first lyricist and musician to win a Nobel Prize for Literature. That's right, Bob Dylan, who wrote this song became the fifteenth Jew to win the literature prize, joining the ranks of Saul Bellow, Yiddish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer and Hebrew author S.Y. Agnon, among others,

Robert Zimmerman, the son of Eastern European Jews, and raised in a tight Jewish community in Hibbing, Minnesota grew up with a Yiddish-speaking grandmother down the hallway in an extended Jewish family. His mother was president of the local Hadassah, and his father was president of the B'nai B'rith chapter. Dylan went to a Zionist summer camp in Wisconsin, Herzl Camp.

As I speak about his Jewish connections, I must admit there is an asterisk, because there was a brief period in the '70's when Dylan became a born again Christian, but soon returned to his Jewish roots in the 80's. He went on to send his kids to the same Jewish camp he went to as a kid. He studied with Chabad rabbis in the 1980s and appeared on the Chabad telethon fundraiser in 1989 wearing a yarmulke accompanied by his son in law, Peter Himmelman, who is an observant Jew and sang Hava Nagila, which he has introduced in previous performances as a foreign song he learned in Utah. He held his eldest son Jesse's bar mitzvah at the Western Wall, where both can be seen wearing tefillin.

Shortly after his son's bar mitzvah at the Kotel, and a year after Israel's first Lebanon War, Dylan released the song "Neighborhood Bully" on his 1983 album "Infidels." In what is probably one of the most pro-Jewish rock songs ever recorded.

Biblical references pepper much of Dylan's work. One of his most famous songs was Blowin' in the wind, very Jewish: a series of unanswered questions.

Perhaps my favorite is when Dylan wrote the original "Forever Young" where he takes the words of the blessing in Brachot 17a where the rabbis say,

"May your cherished hope be fulfilled in your lifetime, and may your ideals persist throughout the generations. May your heart be filled with understanding. May your tongue give expression to song, may your feet swiftly take you to places where the words of God are heard."

He combined that invocation with the shabbat blessing for a child and the imagery invoking the story of Jacob's ladder, and wrote:

May God bless and keep you always
May your wishes all come true
May you always do for others
And let others do for you
May you build a ladder to the stars
And climb on every rung
May you stay forever young

May you grow up to be righteous
May you grow up to be true
May you always know the truth
And see the lights surrounding you

May you always be courageous
Stand upright and be strong
May you stay forever young

May your hands always be busy
May your feet always be swift
May you have a strong foundation
When the winds of changes shift
May your heart always be joyful
And may your song always be sung
May you stay forever young

How interesting that this Shabbat, Shabbat Ha'Azinu, when we read the final message of the prophet Moses to his people, which is written in the form of a poem and when the haftarah reading, The Song of Deborah is also a poem, this great modern Jewish poet and prophet, Bob Dylan is recognized by the Nobel Prize committee as well.

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