

This Week's Message of Torah from Rabbi Rick Rheins:

There's Nothing Progressive About Anti-Semitism

This week we read *Pekudei*, the concluding Parashah from the Book of Exodus. Its last line foreshadows the history of the Jewish people:

כִּי עָנַן יְהוָה עַל-הַמִּשְׁכָּן יוֹמָם וְאֵשׁ תִּהְיֶה לְיָלֵה בּוֹ לַעֲיֹנֵי כָל-בֵּית-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל-מִסְעֵיהֶם:
For over the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*) a cloud of Adonai rested by day, and fire would appear in it by night, in the view of all the house of Israel throughout their journeys.

Throughout our 3,500 year journey, we have always searched for and were guided by the presence of God. In bright daylight and in the darkest of nights, in times of security and during eras of pogroms and bigotry, we maintained our covenantal faith and a dedication to leading a moral and ethical life.

And throughout those journeys, we have witnessed more than our share of tyrants, fascists, and other purveyors of hate. We Jews have gotten pretty good about recognizing them. Well, to be perfectly honest, recognizing them isn't really very hard because they usually turn their wicked glare and brutal plans against Jews first before extending their evil designs.

Reform Judaism is known as Progressive Judaism around the world. We have been champions of social justice and have stood up to many powerful leaders and interests in our pursuit of *Tikkun Olam*, building a more respectful and compassionate society. As progressives, we are creative and open to new ideas. We seek ways to be celebrate Judaism with a spirit of inclusion and egalitarianism. We build bridges of interfaith understanding and community cooperation. Progressive philosophy is modern, sensitive, dynamic and and intelligent.

And as progressives, we should be outraged that a rogue gang of new members of Congress have coopted the "progressive" label while they spew anti-Semitic slurs against Jews and venomous attacks against Israel. Representatives Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib have shocked this nation with their comments and tweets. Both are a part of the self-described "New Progressives." Let us declare loud and clear: There is nothing progressive about anti-Semitism!

Prejudice, bigotry, and hate speech of all kinds erode the fabric of society. It doesn't matter if the perpetrators are affiliated with the Republicans or the Democrats, we must call them out and expose their hatred. Light is an excellent defence against corrupting elements.

With Rosh Chodesh Adar Bet, we are now only days away from Purim (Wednesday evening, March 20). At the service and the *shpiel* we'll recall the murderous plans of wicked Haman. The sad fact is that in every age and at every stage of our journey we have faced people like Haman.

So we teach our children that when we hear his name we stamp our feet and spin the noisy grogger to drown out his hateful legacy. Still, the anti-Semites keep coming in ever new and surprising disguises. We can never afford to be fooled by those disguises.

שבת שלום וברכה מארץ ישראל,
Shabbat Shalom and Blessings from Israel,

Rick

Rabbi Rick Rheins