

FIXING OURSELVES FIRST BEFORE OUR ENEMIES DO

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

The messengers [went and] returned to Ya'akov and told him, "We went to your brother Eisav; he himself is coming towards you with 400 men." Ya'akov was frightened and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, the flocks, the herds and the camels, into two camps. (Bereishis 32:7-8)

One of the biggest frauds of history is the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. It is pure anti-Semitism, obviously meant to discredit Jews and incite violent hatred against us. True, but we're not as innocent in all of this as we think.

And then there are those who claim that the Holocaust never occurred. They say that the Jewish people fabricated the entire story about the death of 6,000,000 Jews, and all that happened until their deaths, just to gain world sympathy, or something like that. How they can believe this in the face of so much evidence to the contrary just proves how indecent and delusional they are. The only point to make, though, is that they are only following our lead.

History is a function of Hashgochah Pratis—Divine Providence. Divine Providence, the Talmud teaches, works measure-for-measure with the Jewish people (Sanhedrin 91a). This is the meaning of the verse, says the Nefesh HaChaim, "God is your protector; God is your shadow off to your right" (Tehillim 130), for just as a shadow mimics the person who creates it, so too does God mimic the actions of men (Nefesh HaChaim, Sha'ar 1, Ch. 7).

Hence, if a person sees his shadow move its right arm, he doesn't assume that the shadow made that up. Rather, he knows that the shadow's movement is in response to his own, and if he wishes to change it, he has to start with himself. The same is true with Jewish history: if we wish to change the way history moves we have to start with ourselves.

That may sound strange with respect to Holocaust deniers. I mean, which Jew in his right mind can deny the Holocaust? Which Jew wouldn't swear that the Holocaust did occur, and become distraught when hearing others speak to the contrary?

True, but denial has different levels; there are levels of denial. Not only this, but to God, who evaluates every individual based upon his abilities, background, and circumstances, a less intense level of denial by someone who ought to know better can be as bad as a more intense level of denial of someone who doesn't. So, whereas Jews may never deny that the Holocaust took place,

they may act as if it didn't, and that can be as bad as someone who denies it altogether.

The Holocaust was the ruthless and systematic murder of 6,000,000 Jews. It occurred after the Nazis, y"s, took over Europe and hunted them down before stripping them of everything and shipping them off on cattle cars for miles before killing them or working them to death. And, it happened between 1942 and 1945, at a time that civilization was quite advanced and by a population that was one of the most advanced of all in its time. And there is nothing to learn from that, nothing to be concerned about in every single generation since then, especially when anti-Semitism returns?

We act as if the Holocaust is some kind of mythical catastrophe from Roman times, as if we could never be subject to anything similar. The very fact that we act so securely amongst the gentile nations, especially given our long history amongst the gentile nations, and even more especially our most recent history amongst the gentile nations, indicates that we do not take the Holocaust seriously.

I hate to use this as an example, but it makes the point.

If a woman is severely abused by a man, she has a difficult time trusting all men, or at least most men, for a long time after. Even the men she has every reason to trust can make her uneasy and insecure, because every man, in her mind, has the potential to abuse her again. How much more so is the case when around men who act in ways that indicate such a potential for abuse.

The Jewish people have been severely abused by the nations of the world countless times throughout the millennia. Yet, we live amongst them as if just the opposite has been true, trusting them with our lives and the lives of our families. How many Jews when asked the question, "Could your host nation ever abuse the Jewish people?" would answer a definitive and defiant no? Far more than is good for our nation as a whole.

So, it as if God says, "If you're not going to take the Holocaust seriously, why should the nations of the world?"

The same thing is true of Protocols. True, the Jewish people really have no plans to take over the world, but we certainly control a lot. We have become successful over the last several decades, and many have no problem showing it. We simply don't see ourselves the same way that non-Jews see us. We just don't view our success through the eyes of those who are jealous of our accomplishments. We live in America too. We work in America too. We have been successful in America too. So, why can't we show it like the rest of our fellow Americans, or Canadian, etc.?

Because, we can never be like the rest of Americans, or Canadians, or English, etc. Not because we don't try to be; we do. But because being Jewish means something to non-Jews, and most have a difficult time seeing past our Jewishness. And though in our minds our history may not include the history of our ancestors, to our gentile hosts, it very often does. The negative stereotypes of days long forgotten by us are always still quite fresh in their minds.

So, it's as if God says to us, "If you're not going to be cautious of how your involvement in gentile society looks to the average non-Jew, why should they?" And so they write, publish, and widely distribute books such as Protocols.

This basis of this awkward and often dangerous relationship with Eisav was actually established back in Parashas Toldos, when Yitzchak made Eisav's success dependent upon Ya'akov's failure:

"Your settlements will be in fat places of the earth, and [you will also have] from the dew of heaven above. You shall live by your sword, and serve your brother. But when the time comes that you feel justified to complain, you will break his yolk from off your neck." (Bereishis 27:39-40)

Hence, the Ya'akov-Eisav relationship is interactive, indeed from their very births:

His brother came out holding onto Eisav's heel; he named him Ya'akov. (Bereishis 25:9)

Thus, Ya'akov's own name is derived from his connection to Eisav at birth. Because of Yitzchak's blessing, and God's practice of punishing measure-for-measure, his history is derived from his actions and Eisav's response to them. To what extent? To the extent that the following can be said:

It is law that Eisav hates Ya'akov. (Sifri, BeHa'alosecha 69)

This is important knowledge that, unfortunately, few Jews know or understand. They can see the anti-Semitism, but they can't see it as a function of their own actions, at least not in specific terms. Even Torah Jews, who see the bad things that happen to the Jewish nation as responses to sin, often do not see in their own actions what might have led to certain dangerous historical events.

For example, not taking the lessons of the Holocaust seriously. Look at the way that Ya'akov Avinu prepared for his meeting with Eisav. He allowed himself to be concerned about the event, and prepared for war while trying to buy him off at the same time. He certainly wasn't casual about the impending interaction, even though 34 years had passed since Ya'akov took the blessings from under his brother's nose.

In fact, Ya'akov Avinu was on guard the entire time he was with Lavan, ready to respond to his every action. As he told Rachel upon their first encounter, "If your father wants to trick me, I can be his brother in trickery." In other words, Ya'akov Avinu wasn't intrinsically a trickster, as Eisav and Lavan were, but if he had to be to survive, he would be.

We, on the other hand, live amongst our Western gentile hosts as if they could never seriously harm us. We know that they may not be crazy about us, and that they harbor anti-Israel sentiments as well as pro-Palestinian opinions, but still, they're too civil to be uncivil to us. They're not nationalistic like the Germans were back in the 1930s, nor are they capable of the same level of bestiality as the Nazis were in their time. Therefore, many Jews in the Diaspora feel, we're safe enough.

However, such thinking denies some of the most fundamental lessons of the Holocaust. It was one of the most civilized nations that perpetrated the Holocaust, and other so-called Jew-friendly

nations collaborated and made the Nazi job easier. At the same time, Western countries turned a blind eye as the Holocaust was picking up steam, and even Jews in safer places chose to minimize in their minds the extent to which their brothers and sisters were suffering overseas.

One of the most important messages of the Holocaust is that the unthinkable happened; the unimaginable became reality. Six million Jews didn't run for safety because it was just too hard to fathom what could be happening, and how far it would go. They had experienced and lived through vicious anti-Semitism in the past, but nothing they had previously witnessed could have prepared them for what they were about to go through. It was a whole new level of anti-Semitism, and an entirely different way of dealing with Jews.

By approaching today's anti-Semitism and sizing it up based upon the thinkable and the imaginable, we disregard the Holocaust. And, if we're not going to take the Holocaust seriously enough, then why should the rest of the world? Hence, even the parts of the gentile world that acknowledge that the Holocaust occurred as we say it did also ignore its message and press the Jewish people to make concessions to a people who openly continue on with the legacy of the Nazi party, even reading Arabic versions of Protocols and Mein Kampf with great interest and fascination.

Every year on the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, Palestinian Authority leaders and official media issue harsh statements attacking it. According to the Palestinian narrative, Jews have no history in the land and therefore have no right to exist as a state. Consequently, Israel exists only because of the Balfour Declaration. This year, the PA Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Culture organized a workshop for high school girls in Tulkarem in cooperation with the city's Education Administration. The girls wrote "letters of sorrow and pain to the Queen of the United Kingdom, Elizabeth II, and to the British Foreign Minister, William Hague, since it was the letter by that country's Foreign Minister Arthur James Balfour, which has caused the Palestinian people ongoing suffering," reported the official PA daily. One girl wrote to Queen Elizabeth: "The real reasons that caused Balfour to give his dark promise, first and foremost [the desire] to be rid of the Jews in Europe and to award them a prize for the genocidal weapons which they had invented, which helped Britain to annihilate more people." PA leaders and official media have published claims on many occasions that the establishment of Israel was a European plot to get rid of the Jews in Europe because the Jews were a burden on European society. The Balfour Declaration is cited by many Palestinians as proof that Zionism was not a Jewish idea but a colonialist idea, and it was this idea that the Palestinian girl was expressing in her letter. (Palestinian Media Watch)

So, scream foul as we do, and scratch our heads in amazement as we might at how crazy the world can be when it comes to the truth about the Middle-East Conflict, the reality is, their craziness is just a reflection of our own. It may not seem that way, since ours seems so much less than theirs, but without ours, theirs wouldn't be.

This is also the result of not being on top of our responsibility to be a light unto nations. The Jewish

people are here to be a conduit for Divine wisdom for the entire world; if we aren't, then no one else is. And, without Divine wisdom, the world can't see straight, or at least, straight enough.

Writing your senator is not going to make the problem go away. When it comes to the gentile world, that may be a practical solution for racism and similar problems. Racism, unlike anti-Semitism, exists for superficial reasons and can therefore be resolved with superficial solutions.

But, when it comes to the Jewish people, we have to write ourselves to complain. If they're writing bad things about us, we have to see what it is we're doing that is wrong from God's perspective that He allowed it to be manifested amongst the gentiles in such a negative way. As Moshe Rabbeinu said:

I have taught you statutes, and judgments, as God, my God commanded me, so that you should do them in the land you are about to possess. Observe and do them, for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations who will hear about these statutes, and say, "This is a great, wise and understanding nation!" What great nation is there to whom God is so close at all times like God, our God, to call out to? What great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as just as these laws, which I set before you today?" (Devarim 4:5-8)

Hence, if we seem unwise, or worse, in the eyes of the gentile world, it is because we have acted in ways that gave rise to their over-exaggerated negative perception. And, the situation won't get better until we realize this, and first fix ourselves, before Divine Providence fixes it through them.

Text

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