

ANTI-SEMITISM

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse . . . (Devarim 11:26)

The message of this parshah is so appropriate for the situation in the world today. It is amazing how easily and quickly the war in Gaza surfaced world-wide anti-Semitism. The war did not create anti-Semitism, it merely gave anti-Semites the world over, the opportunity they wanted to publicly hate Jews. After all, aside from fellow Muslims, who in the Western world really relates to Hamas or the way they treat even their own people?

I am not the only one to point this out. There have been some brave people, gentiles, who have little in common with Jews and Israel other than a desire to live in peace and according to reality. They have done a good job at pointing out the glaring inconsistencies in the presentations and the arguments of the media and anti-Semites in general. They are to be applauded, but their heroic words will only fall on deaf ears, just like our own words, because this is not about truth and falsehood, just falsehood. Anti-Semites see what they want to see.

Sight is an amazing thing. You would think that our brains would tell us the truth about what we're seeing, but so often they don't. Eyes, like the other senses, are like witnesses: they only tell you what they experience. However, if the judges before whom they are "testifying" are corrupt, they will make out of the evidence whatever they must to support their own crooked way of thinking. They'll find a way to turn the truth into falsehood for their own good.

In other words, it's better to have poor physical eyesight but 20-20 mental vision than the other way around. We may take in information with our physical eyes but, it is with our mind's eye that we truly "see" the world. Judging from the direction of the world today, things don't look good.

I once read part of a book that discussed how a certain psychiatrist went from being totally pro-abortion to a more cautious attitude regarding the issue. A suicide preventionist in California, his position changed, he explained, while in Germany once learning from a top psychiatrist and suicide preventionist there. The beginning of the change began when he went off topic and asked his German colleague how her people could carry out a Holocaust?

Perhaps, as a psychiatrist, she was used to being asked the question, because rather than take offense or avoid the issue, she answered the question straight out.

She explained that for genocide to occur, especially on the unbelievable scale of at least 6,000,000

souls, three conditions had to be met. First, the concept of the Fatherland had to be created in the minds of the general population. Secondly, it had to be drilled into the consciousness of the citizens that whoever was not loyal to the Fatherland was in fact an enemy of the Fatherland.

This, however, she explained, would not guarantee that even the average loyal German citizen would follow orders to either carry out or assist in genocide. One more condition had to be driven into the minds and hearts of those loyal to the Third Reich: Anyone who is an enemy of the Fatherland is in fact subhuman. When a people is sufficiently demonized, she concluded, everyday people can be a part of genocide.

The American psychiatrist, upon hearing this, came to realize how easy it is for people with crooked mentalities to distort reality and become guilty of the greatest crimes against God and mankind. He became uncertain about his fellow man's ability to always take the moral high road when it comes to life and death decisions. This is especially true with respect to "unwanted" elements of society. Therefore, the American psychiatrist chose instead to play it cautious on the abortion issue.

We act in life based upon our perception of reality, and our perception of reality is about upon our assumptions about life. Perverted assumptions result in perverted perceptions, and therefore perverted actions. When this is the case society can become a very dangerous place, especially for a Jew living amongst gentiles, as we are once against seeing.

This is different from people who do the wrong thing even though they know what the right thing is. When that is the case, there is a chance that such a person can still find it within himself, in certain circumstances, to have mercy on his victims, either to leave them alone completely or to minimize the suffering he plans to cause them.

When people, however, believe that their evil way is the correct way, there is no room for mercy on the victims at all. Quite the contrary: showing mercy becomes the immoral response and indicates a lack of "moral" resolve. It can make even normally placid people into sadists. It can make people mistake blessing for curse and curse for blessing.

When a nation rises up against another nation unprovoked for no reason other than selfish gain, it is a war crime. When one army unduly harms another army, and how much so an enemy's citizens, it is a war crime. When soldiers go raping and looting, it is a war crime.

When a people defend itself against a ruthless enemy it is not a war crime. When they risk the lives of their own soldiers to avoid killing not-so- innocent enemy citizens they are certainly not guilty of war crimes. When they kill non-military people because the enemy uses them as human shields to thwart countermeasures or to have their enemy look bad in the eyes of the world, it is certainly not a case of war crimes.

And certainly the last person you choose to head a committee to investigate what happened during the war is someone who has already stated his bias against the Prime Minister of Israel while having

a difficult time calling Hamas a terrorist organization. Perhaps this is even his way, being an anti-Israel Canadian, of getting back at Canadian Prime Minister Steven Harper who has come out in support of Israel and her defensive measures.

It seems that it has become fashionable once again to be anti-Semitic. It's like a fad that catches on and everyone buys the same item no matter how silly it looks to be just like everyone else. Somehow it has become the heroic thing to attack Israel and the Jewish people in general, as illogical as it may seem to be. And to send 100 M-35s to Turkey, which is hostile to Israel, and only 19 to Israel, well that just smacks of the British who pulled out of the Middle East back in the 1940s but not before arming the Arabs to the teeth and denying the Jews of that time any means of self-defense.

But that's anti-Semitism for you. In fact, there is a story in the Talmud that exhibits the very same theme:

There was once a Caesar who hated the Jews. One day he said to the prominent members of his government, "If one has a wart on his foot, shall he cut it away and live [in comfort] or leave it on and suffer discomfort?"

They replied, "He should cut it away and live in comfort."

Then Ketiah ben Shalom told them, "In the first place, you cannot do away with all of them, as it says, 'I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven' (Zechariah 2:10). What does this verse indicate? Were it to mean that [Israel] was to be scattered to the four corners of the world, then instead of saying, 'as the four winds,' the verse would have said, 'to the four winds.' It can only mean that just as the world cannot exist without winds, so the world cannot exist without Israel. (Avodah Zarah 10b)

Nevertheless, the Romans slaughtered the Jewish people anyhow, just as Hitler, ysv"z, murdered countless Jews who could have contributed so much to the benefit of mankind. Anti-Semitism is not logical, just the result of some primordial hatred of a nation that is supposed to represent all that is good and noble about mankind. So, is there anyone out there really to complain about regarding injustices against the Jewish people today?

So here are some questions for Jews instead. Did you ever think that anti-Semitism would return with such viciousness in your lifetime? Did you ever think that it would rise so quickly? Do you think that it will get better from here, or worse? If worse, how much worse? Do you think that any of the leaders of the Western world will step on our behalf and save us?

Is the situation today going to become Europe, Part 2, God forbid, or have we reached the apex of anti-Semitism for this generation and just need to grin and bear it until it passes? Don't forget that they thought the latter in Europe until Kristallnacht in 1938. No one but no one ever imagined just how far the Nazis were prepared to go to make the world Judenrein.

It is hard to have clarity on the situation. First of all, we have no prophets today. In fact, as one of my readers jokingly said, I run a non-prophet organization. Secondly, our leaders are not saying too much, at least in public, about how they view current events and how the Jewish world should respond to them. It seems that we're afraid to overreact and cause panic while also wondering about throwing caution to the wind.

There are also technical problems. So many people are invested in the Diaspora. Over the decades they have bought houses and paid off mortgages. They have begun business and nurtured them to success. In the best of times it is not easy to sell a house and close down a business, especially if you weren't planning to do so and have nothing securely set up on the other end.

But . . . if the situation does worsen and history does repeat itself, will we even be able to retain our properties and possessions outside of Israel. It is hard to imagine the answer being no, but then again, it was also difficult to accept a "no" in pre-Holocaust Europe. There is no lack of anti-Semitism in places like America, Canada, or England. There is, at this precarious moment of time, only a lack of anti-Semitic leaders to galvanize the population against their Jewish neighbors. That, history has proven, can change on a dime if, for example, the economy collapses.

It's the Jewish conundrum, one that, unfortunately stems from seeing blessing as a curse and curse as a blessing. If Diaspora Jews didn't see making aliyah as such a "curse," and would view it as the blessing it really is, they might have been better prepared for the situation today. As it says,

You will arise and show mercy on Tzion because the time, the appointed time will have come. For your servants want her stones and cherish her dust. (Tehillim 102:14-15)

Likewise, they also should have realized that being settled and attached to any country other than Eretz Yisroel is not a blessing, but a "curse." As the Maharal points out in his commentary on the Haggadah Shel Pesach, that is supposed to be one of the key messages that the matzah teaches each year. Poor people, explains the Maharal, symbolized by the matzah, have the freedom to pick up and leave their current location at a moment's notice, having little or no property to bind them there.

We saw how important that was just seven decades ago. We also saw how, being attached to Egypt, resulted in 12,000,000 Jews dying during the Plague of Darkness. It is the only plague in the Torah that has an allusion to Hitler, ysv"z, and the Holocaust.

Here we stand once again at that nasty threshold. We can see clearly what has come before us. We see relatively clearly what is going on around us today. It's the future that is murky and we do not yet know what we're going to find once it clears up and becomes the past. That is when it becomes most important to have a good understanding of our long term national goals, and how best to fulfill them.

Text

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