



Sermon Tidbits

JUNE 1, 2015

Parashat Beha'alotecha

A Trumpet against Anti-Semitism has Fallen Silent

You shall sound an alarm with trumpets (Numbers 10:9)

והרעתם בהצצרות (במדבר י' ט)

Moses was commanded by God to make trumpets, which would be used to guide the nation in their travels through the desert. In addition, the trumpets had another use: “And when you go to war in your land against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets; and you shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies.” (verse 9) In times of war, the trumpets served as a form of prayer; a method to call for divine assistance. Yet, the author of the *Sefer Hachinuch* notes another purpose for the sounding of trumpets in time of war. He writes (Mitzvah 384) that, “...we were commanded to sound the trumpets during these [challenging] times, for because man is a physical being, he requires a great awakening to [these] matters, for by nature, without something to awaken him he will stand as if asleep—and there is nothing to wake him up like the sounds of music, and certainly the blasts of the trumpets.” Even in times of war it is possible to “fall asleep standing,” ignorant or indifferent to the imminent danger confronting the people. For this reason, the trumpets served as a wakeup call to the nation, to rise in defense of their country and people.

[Robert Solomon Wistrich](#), a professor of European and Jewish history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a world-renowned scholar on the topic of anti-Semitism, died of a heart attack late last month. Wistrich, who served as head of the Hebrew University’s Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of anti-Semitism, was a prolific writer, renowned internationally for his study of, understanding, and efforts to combat the scourge of anti-Semitism.

Writing in *Israel Today*, Tsvi Sadan [shared](#) Professor Wistrich’s final column, which serves as a mission statement for each of us and a legacy for his lifetime of work on behalf of the Jewish people. Wistrich wrote that, “We must recognize much more clearly than before, that since 1975 [with the passing of the scandalous UN resolution condemning Zionism as racism] hatred of Israel has increasingly mutated into the chief vector for the ‘new’ anti-Semitism. By libeling the Jewish state as ‘racist,’ ‘Nazi,’ ‘apartheid’ its enemies have turned Zionism into a synonym for criminality and a term of pure opprobrium. ... Today’s anti-Semitism is a product of a new civic religion that could be termed ‘Palestinianism.’ The official Palestinian narrative seeks to supplant Israel with a *Judenrein* Palestine from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River... Since the turn of the 21st Century, anti-Semitism has undergone a process of growing ‘Islamicization,’ linked to the terrorist holy war against Jews and other non-Muslims with its truly lethal consequences...” Professor Wistrich ended his piece with words of encouragement: “I believe that in an age of Jewish empowerment, living in a sovereign and democratic Israeli state, we can and must first clarify for ourselves our vocation, *raison d’être*, moral priorities, and the deeper meaning of our near-miraculous return to the historic homeland. This is the other side of the coin in our essential and relentless fight against anti-Semitism.”

Today, we face a silent, but growing war of Anti-Semitism that, if left unchecked, has the potential to threaten the safety and security not just of Israel, but of every Jew around the world. Robert Wistrich served as a trumpet, calling us to fight the growing threat of Islamic-based anti-Semitism, which equated Israel with evil and Zionism with Nazism. Yet, too many of us have been “standing up asleep,” indifferent to this growing threat not only in Europe, but in our country, on our college campuses and in our communities. ■

Excuses and Lies

And the people were as murmurers (Numbers 11:2)

וַיְהִי הָעָם כַּמְתַּאֲוֹנִים (במדבר י"א:ב)

Last week, four rockets from Gaza were fired at southern Israel, landing, thank God, in open areas, causing no damage or injuries. Yet, when reporters asked leaders of the local Gaza militia about the rocket attack, they were told no such attack ever took place. Khader Habib, a senior Islamic Jihad leader in Gaza, [told reporters](#) that his movement was not responsible for firing any rockets into Israel. “The Israeli media reports are baseless and untrue...Israel is using such excuses and lies to prepare for launching a new aggression on the Gaza Strip.”

Excuses and lies. It's true that someone told excuses and lies, but it wasn't the Israeli or international press, who immediately reported the sirens that sounded across much of Israel's southern region, once again sending thousands of civilians to safe rooms and shelters. Rather, it was Habib, who was trying to cover up his own group's incompetence. According to the [Times of Israel](#), “A source in Gaza said the firing was the result of an internal dispute inside the Islamic Jihad terror group, which has included kidnappings of people in northern Gaza. The source said Islamic Jihad recently appointed a new commander to oversee the northern region of the coastal enclave. The new commander was supposed to start his new position today officially, but his predecessor opposed it, sparking clashes between the two commanders' supporters. The new commander's men then kidnapped two operatives working under the former commander and, in retaliation, the predecessor's followers decided to fire rockets at Israel.”

That's what wicked people do: they make excuses for their own evil behavior, blaming others, outside forces—anything or anyone but themselves for the situation in which they find themselves in. Moses encounters this very behavior in the midst of the nation in our parashah. “And the people were as murmurers, speaking evil in the ears of the Lord.” (Numbers 11:1) What were they complaining about? According to Rashi, the subject of their complaints wasn't really important. He explains (in his commentary on verse 11) that the term ‘the people’ mentioned in the verse, “denotes only the wicked.” These were people with an agenda, looking for something to complain about. It is for this reason that the text describes them “as murmurers”—like complainers. Rashi continues, “Murmurers is a term denoting a pretext; namely, they seek a pretext whereby to separate themselves from the Omnipresent.” What exactly did they complain about? We can only guess—perhaps it was the long journey, or the taste of the food. But what they complained about was beside the point; they had already settled on a goal of disruption and conflict, and were simply looking for excuses to make problems.

This tendency to act first and then make excuses later is a clearly documented tactic of Hamas. This behavior represents a major theme in a recently released Amnesty International Report. According to the [Daily Mail](#), at the height of the war in Gaza last summer, “Hamas abducted, tortured and unlawfully killed dozens of Palestinians accused of ‘collaborating’ with Israel during last year's Gaza conflict.” Many of the unlawful killings were publicly described as attacks against people assisting Israel during the 2014 conflict, as part of an operation codenamed Strangling Neck to target ‘collaborators.’ Yet, when Amnesty investigated the claims of collaboration, it revealed that some of those executed members were supporters of Hamas's political rival, Fatah, and at least 16 of those executed had been in Hamas's custody since before the conflict broke out. Sadly, the [Daily Mail](#) article concludes, “Amnesty International revealed not a single person has been held accountable for the crimes committed by Hamas forces against Palestinians during the 2014 conflict.”

Benjamin Franklin once said that “He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else.” As long as the world accepts Hamas's excuses for violence, terrorism and murder without holding them responsible for their terrible crimes, the citizens of Gaza will continue to suffer at the hands of vicious, violent Hamas leaders driven by fanaticism and hatred. ■

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