



Sermon Tidbits

MARCH 6, 2017

Parashat Tetzaveh-Shabbat Zachor-Purim

Hate by Any other Name

For he had told them that he was a Jew (Esther 3:4)

כי הגיד להם אשר הוא יהודי (אסתר ג:ד)

The modern specter of anti-Semitism seems to have reared its ugly head in different ways than in the recent past. It's hitting home in the United States in a manner that many of us have not felt before. [Cemeteries were vandalized](#). [Bomb threats have been called in to Jewish Community Centers](#) across the country. Thankfully, President Trump, before a joint session of Congress, [spoke out forcefully and explicitly](#) condemned anti-Semitism as a form of hate. Yet, the rise of anti-Semitism raises many questions for the Jewish community and all Americans: How does anti-Semitism grow in a country founded on the values of freedom and liberty? What steps can and must be taken to halt these disturbing trends before they metastasize into something even darker and more sinister? The Purim story reveals that the answer begins with Israel—and that same answer rings true today.

In a nutshell, the theme of the story of Purim is very familiar—baseless hatred of the Jewish people that leads to threats, violence and ultimately attempted genocide. While we can speculate on the genesis of Haman's hatred towards the Jews, Midrash suggests one possible origin. According to the Talmud, the anti-Semitic overtones within story of Purim began not in Shushan, but years earlier in Israel. Shortly before the era of the Purim story, we read in the book of Ezra, that King Cyrus of Persia charged the Jews with the mission to return to the Holy Land, rebuild Jerusalem, and reconstruct the Temple. A small group took the charge and began that project. We learn that a number of years later, "When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity were building a temple...in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem" (Ezra 4:1-6). In their letter, those adversaries accused the Jews of attempting to rebel against the king, charging that a rebuilt Jerusalem would serve as a seat of that rebellion. "Know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful to kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time..." (4:15). One is left wondering, who were those anonymous "adversaries" that accused the Jews of disloyalty to the Persian king? According to the Sages in the Midrash (*Seder Olam Rabbah* 29), "the ten sons of Haman wrote the letter." Perhaps Haman's hatred and ultimately his plot to destroy the Jewish people began not with blatant anti-Semitism, but rather with accusations that the people of Israel are disloyal and not unified in purpose—accusations that escalate to claims that Jews are a threat to the world at large.

We are witnessing precisely the same phenomenon today. For years, we have watched anti-Israel activists single out the Jewish state in an attempt to delegitimize Israel's right to exist. Disguised as a righteous movement, the BDS campaign blames Israel—and only Israel—for the absence of peace and attacks the Jewish state with a moral code applicable exclusively to Israel. By eroding confidence in Israel's legitimacy, BDS attempts to isolate, weaken and ultimately destroy Israel. Speaking to the Times of Israel, Malcolm Hoenlein, head of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, [directly connected](#) anti-Semitism in the U.S. to the anti-Israel movement. "For the last decade or two, it was okay for Americans to say that they are anti-Israel. Today it is accepted to say I am anti-Jewish," Hoenlein said. This, he suggested, is partly to due to the anti-Israel Boycott, Divest and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which, he said, provided a "cover for anti-Semitism."

Our elected officials have responded forcefully to our calls for action. Late last month, Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA) and Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) [reintroduced](#) the Combating European Anti-Semitism Act, which requires the State

Department to monitor incidents against Jews in Europe and submit its findings to Congress as part of its annual International Religious Freedom report. In state capitals across America, representatives are passing laws formally condemning BDS, requiring state pension funds to divest from companies that promote BDS, and preventing state governments from buying goods or services from them.

Now more than ever, we must follow in the footsteps of our forefather Mordechai from the Purim story, and stand up against not only anti-Semitism, but also the anti-Israel attitude that serves to legitimize that hatred. If we fail to act now, we increase the likelihood that hatred for Israel today could turn into something far more sinister tomorrow. ■

The Light of Peace – Tetzaveh

To cause a lamp to burn continually (Exodus 27:20)

להעלות נר תמיד (שמות כז:כ)

Did you know that the candles that we light each and every Shabbat have a connection with lighting the Menorah referred in this Parashah? We read in the Mishnah (Shabbat 2:2) that Rabbi Tarfon ruled “One may only light with olive oil”—reminiscent of the lighting of the Menorah kindled by the priests that could only be lit with, “pure olive oil beaten for the light.” What is the connection between these two lightings? The Sages teach us that the Temple served as a place of unity and peace not only among Jews, but for all of humanity as well. Thus, the lighting of the Menorah represents the light of peace spreading around the world. Today, Shabbat candles serve a similar role. With the modern convenience of electricity, many do not realize that the Sages instituted candle lighting on Friday night for a simple reason: *Shalom Bayit*—peace in the home. How could a family truly enjoy a Friday night meal if they could not see each other? When the candles have been lit we wish those around us, “*Shabbat Shalom*—Have a peaceful Shabbat”—because light represents the source of peace in the world.

When the time came to choose a symbol for the fledgling Jewish state in 1948, members of what would ultimately be the Knesset considered two possible choices: a lion, which represented vitality and energy, and the Menorah. Moshe Sharett, who would serve as Israel’s first Foreign Minister, explained that the Symbols Committee chose the Menorah, but also decided to add two olive branches running up the sides of it in order to add an additional critical element: the Jewish state’s desire for peace.

Even before Israel’s founding in 1948, the founders of the state enshrined their hope for Israel’s peaceful coexistence with its Arab neighbors in the very symbol of the state—the Menorah. Since then, Israel has repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to make serious concessions for peace, such as withdrawing from land and forcibly removing citizens in order to resolve the conflict. While Israel continues to support a two-state solution with the Palestinians, and encourages their return to direct negotiations, it is also pursuing additional avenues to encourage peace within the region. In an interview in the [Washington Post](#), Israeli Minister of Intelligence Israel Katz spoke about promoting the notion of regional economic peace and security cooperation, leaving the thorny political and diplomatic issues to be resolved at a later time. According to Katz, “Security coordination and economic peace will help bring about diplomatic, political peace.”

The kindling of light—from the Menorah in the Tabernacle, to the Friday night candles, to the symbol of the state of Israel—has long represented Israel’s desire to live in peace and harmony. Israel’s willingness to wait patiently until its neighbors truly desire peace ultimately paid off both with Egypt and with Jordan. One day—hopefully soon—the Palestinians will follow suit. Until that time, we will continue to support creative solutions that might one day bring peaceful coexistence to citizens of Israel and their Arab neighbors. ■

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