

Rabbi's Column – March 11, 2019

Purim is coming!

I really wish that were the only Jewishly relevant news these weeks. It is not. The police around the Wall in Jerusalem are engaging in a lot of "blaming the victim" behavior. They have not been protecting the Women of the Wall, which is no big surprise, despite plenty of warning from WOW leadership that there were banners up in some neighborhoods asking religious teens and adults to go the Wall plaza specifically to try and keep the approximately 800 women from having a prayer service. Physically harming young girls and old ladies was perfectly fine, as long as it kept "Reform" women from praying loudly. Even burning prayerbooks was ok.

I am definitely not ok with people mis-using religion and common sense in this manner. This is not *mentschlichkeit* behavior and this is actually a desecration of God's reputation to a much greater extent than any women's service could be. The Rabbis who asked for this to be done in order to protect the Wall's sanctity seem to be very similar to the religious leaders decried by the prophets - they call evil, good and good, evil and so teach others erroneously.

Antisemitic words and acts are increasing, again, throughout the world. This includes the many times people are killed for being Jews, some of the acts of damage to property belonging to Jews, the repetition of inappropriate statements and a seeming inability to listen to the other (which, as far as antisemitism is concerned, are Jews).

In America, the US House of Representatives voted on a resolution. There are many places where you can find the text of the resolution, I will be outlining the topic headings in order to show the breadth of the resolution. There were some people who voted against it. An unexpressed reason is simply to vote against what the other party proposes. Expressed reasons include partial disagreement with the final wording as well as being upset that the Representative who was the reason for the resolution in the first place is never named or blamed for any of the statements that Representative made which involved things that Jews have been blamed for and killed for in the past. Some Jews voted against the resolution because the instigating action was an antisemitic one, and the resolution mentions a lot more than just antisemitism.

The rationale for the resolution is that antisemitism is a hateful expression of intolerance, anti-Muslim discrimination and bigotry against minorities are also hateful expressions.

The "whereas clauses: 1st amendment allows religious freedom and 14th amendment established equal protection; adherence to these is vital for progress; any political stance from any thread of politics that involves bigotry, discrimination, oppression, racism or claiming somebody else to have dual loyalties is a threat to American democracy and politics; white supremacists target African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, other people of color, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, the LGBTQ community, immigrants and others; paraphrasing Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.; the events in Charlottesville in August 2017; the 9 African Americans murdered at church in 2015; the Tree of Life massacre of Jews in 2018, "antisemitism is the centuries old bigotry and form of racism faced by Jewish

people simply because they are Jews; in 2017 there was a 37 percent increase of hate crimes against Jews and Jewish Institutions, coming to a total of 58.1 percent of all religiously motivated hate crimes; urgent need for safety and security for Jews; many other countries are even worse; monitoring and combatting antisemitism abroad is a foreign policy priority; "antisemitism includes blaming Jews as Jews when things go wrong ...making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing or stereotyped allegations about Jews"; other myths against Jews include that they control the Government, seek domination and are obsessed with money; Jews have been a target for a long time; "Accusing Jews of being more loyal to Israel or to the Jewish community than the United States" is antisemitic; dual loyalty has been abused in the past - Japanese Americans, the Dreyfus Affair, President Kennedy concerning being a Roman Catholic, Islamophobia after 9/11; anti-Muslim bigotry includes believing that all Muslims are violent, disloyal and foreign; myths about Muslims include their sympathizing with terrorists; 5 mosques were destroyed in 2017; between 2014 and 2016 anti-Muslim hate crimes went up by 99%; bigoted attacks against supposed Muslims have increased since 9/11; violating civil rights based on religion is against the law; everyone has a stake in fighting antisemitism and all other forms of hatred.

The resolution section contains 9 paragraphs. 3 of them mention antisemitism; 1 mentions using the Middle East as justification for violence; 2 mention anti-Muslim behavior; 1 decries death threats against either Jewish or Muslim legislators; 1 asks law enforcement to stop profiling; 1 asks officials to recognize the reality of all forms of bigotry.

There is a definition of antisemitism from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. This does not appear to have been used as such, although there are some areas of similarity. Here is a link to that page: <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>

I hope that my next article can focus on Pesach and the Torah Portion. May your week go safely.