

YK5783 KN Jews Count

Yes, Jews Count Too

Words have power. And so does silence. We each can point to scores of instances where words have inspired and informed, soothed, and delighted. We also know that words have caused great hurt. And silence in reaction to hurtful words adds insult to injury.

You may be familiar with the “*Hep-Hep*” chant of the German Nazis as they marched threateningly through Jewish neighborhoods. But what is the meaning of that crude *Hep-Hep*? “*Hep*” is an acronym from the Latin: ***Hierosolyma est Perdita*** (“Jerusalem is lost”). It was originally chanted by Roman soldiers in 70 CE during and after the destruction of Jerusalem. For the Romans, there was certainly no difference between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. They knew that the destruction of Jerusalem, the burning of the Temple, and the conquering of Judea was an attempt to irradicate the Jewish people. It is for that very reason that the *Hep-Hep* chant was revised by university students in the Bavarian city of Würzburg in August 1819. It quickly spread among other antisemitic groups and eventually became popular with the Nazis and their followers.

In Charlottesville, those Nazi chants were repeated and updated. Far-right thugs marched and lifted their arms in the Nazi salute while chanting of “Sieg Heil,” “blood and soil,” “Jews will not replace us.”

And we also see radical leftists harassing Jews on college campuses throughout this country with their own chants against Jews and Israel. The pro-Palestinian chant “From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will be Free,” is a direct descendant from the Nazi cry for a Germany “*Judenrein*” (a land “cleansed from Jews”). Those who chant “From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will be Free” might consider themselves progressive, but what they are calling for is for Israel to be wiped out along with the over 7-million Jews who live in Israel. They are advocating for a repeat of the Holocaust. What’s the old saying, “Politics makes strange bedfellows”? Well, when it comes to Jews, the extreme far-right and the radical-left are partners. Whenever Jews gather for a pro-Israel celebration, there will be a mixture of antisemitic and anti-Zionist protestors from different political and sociological perspectives. On almost every other issue, they probably would not agree. However, with their mutual hatred of Israel they are best of buddies.

Part of the Nazi methodology was the spreading of the big-lie. Joseph Goebbels, the minister of propaganda for Hitler and the Nazis, perfected the manipulation of media and popular opinion to promote the antisemitic plans and eventually the Holocaust. It was Goebbels who organized a boycott of Jewish businesses in 1932. He followed it with the burning of Jewish books. Modern day promoters of BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) have copied the Nazi plan. Again, their opposition is not just against Israel, it is also against the Jewish people.

During WWII, Goebbels was infamous for using the media to broadcast lies in order to turn every battlefield loss or setback into a German victory.

Modern anti-Zionists and antisemites use the same formula. The ADL (Anti-Defamation League) has tracked these antisemitic conspiracy attacks for the decades. The big-lies told by antisemites try to link Jews to 9/11.

Others attempt to blame Jews for the Sandy Hook and El Paso mass shootings, and the Charlie Hebdo massacre in France. There are groups putting up fliers and posting on-line that Jews are responsible for the Covid pandemic.

It doesn't matter that these lies are so farfetched and ridiculous. There are tens of thousands of people who are influenced by them. Those lies are even created and perpetrated here in Denver. Just a few weeks ago, Nader

Hashemi, University of Denver professor of International Affairs and Director of the University's Center for Middle East Studies, speculated on a podcast that the attack against Salman Rushdie was likely orchestrated by Israel's Mossad.

As you know, Salman Rushdie, an internationally acclaimed novelist, has been under an Iranian death threat for decades. He has had other attempts against his life as Muslim extremists try to avenge what they believe is Rushdie's blasphemous book Satanic Verses. On August 12, a 24-year-old Muslim, Hadi Matar, was arrested at the scene after a stabbing attack that nearly killed Rushdie. And yet, Professor Hashemi, who teaches college students just down the street, blamed Israel for the attack! The man who is the Director of Middle East Studies is a conspiratorialist who, just like Goebbels before him, manipulates media and gullible students to blame Jews. Now here is where it gets even more infuriating: when Scott Levin of the ADL, along with other Jewish leaders, protested, Denver Post columnist Krista Kafer rebuked the ADL! Kafer accused the ADL and Jews of stifling Professor Hashemi's freedom of speech! Imagine that. According to Kafer, it's perfectly acceptable for a professor to promote conspiratorial hate against Israel, but it is not acceptable for Jews to speak up in defense or protest.

Well, if she can use her column to protect antisemites and rebuke Jews and Hashemi can use his classes and the media to attack Israel with outrageous lies and theories, then at the very least I can use this pulpit to warn our community that the antisemites and anti-Zionists are not just uninformed and inconsequential misfits in faraway places. Rather, they are found on campuses, in the media, and running sophisticated organizations right here in our own backyard.

This is not news to most of you. As you may know, Temple Sinai was selected to be one of 20 synagogues nationwide to pilot an initiative created by the ADL and the URJ (Union for Reform Judaism) to combat antisemitism. We called our initiative: **Antisemitism: Recognize, Respond, Report.** Through this ADL-URJ Task Force, we offered programs to empower our Temple Sinai members of all ages and we will continue to do so.

The ADL reports that incidents of antisemitism are up over 30% in Colorado and in the United States. And while systematic and institutional antisemitism is unlawful, acts of violence and harassment against Jews is still plaguing us. The very fact that synagogues like Temple Sinai invest in armed guards and security measures speaks volumes about the situation.

Yes, Israel has its own security concerns. There are acts of violence by Palestinian terrorists and there are rocket attacks by the Palestinian nation controlled by Hamas in Gaza. Israel also faces the saber-rattling by the rogue nation of Iran which is planning to build a nuclear arsenal to carry out its demonic agenda. Still, to be a Jew in Israel, to walk freely down the street with or without a *kippah*, openly speaking Hebrew, and proudly and securely identifying as a Jew, that is a very special feeling. One of the reasons it is so important for every Jew to travel to Israel again and again is to experience that feeling of pride and security and belongingness. When Susan and I bring a group of Temple Sinai members to Israel, as we will in a few weeks, we rediscover and recharge the sense of *brit*, of the sacred covenant that has inspired and preserved over 3,500 years.

And when you cannot be in Israel, the next best thing is to come to services and programs at a synagogue. When we are together, we openly, securely, and proudly identified as Jews, we celebrate and reinforce the extraordinary spirit and wisdom of our Jewish faith and culture.

It is important to note that the Holocaust, the murder of 6-million Jews, was born from centuries of antisemitic Church teachings and the denial of basic freedoms and rights by nearly every nation in Europe. Well before the Holocaust, many European Jews realized that the only way we could ever

truly live with security and dignity would be to immigrate to America or to our ancestral homeland of Israel. Thus, was born the modern Zionist movement: a determination to find at last a safe refuge for our people in our ancestral land. Yes, millions, like my family and yours, chose to come to the United States for the blessings this amazing country has offered: freedom, liberty, and opportunity. But as I mentioned earlier, even here we have been harassed by antisemitism. And as bad as it is now, it was even worse a few decades earlier.

Like many of you, I was mesmerized by the recent showing on PBS of Ken Burn's 3-part documentary on the United States and the Holocaust. If you haven't seen it, please do so. It is unique in that it focuses on American culture and society, our leaders and the people before and during the Holocaust. What is demonstrated is that the refusal of the American government to rescue Jews from Europe was in keeping with the rampant antisemitism in this country during that period. The State Department led by Cordell Hull and the notorious Breckinridge Long used every wicked trick in the book to keep desperate Jewish refugees out of the US. They resigned in disgrace in 1944, only when the world learned how their misdeeds led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands.

Too many politicians and bureaucrats turned their backs on Jews because antisemitism was an acceptable prejudice in American. Antisemitism was made mainstream by people like Father Coughlin, who in the 1930s had a radio show that reached tens of millions with his rantings and hatred of Jews. Antisemitism was strengthened by the vicious articles against Jews published by Henry Ford in his Dearborn weekly newspaper. Ford's publication reached more people than all but one newspaper in the US in the 1920s. It was in this paper that Ford reprinted the notorious Protocols of the Elders of Zion, even though it was already widely known to be an antisemitic forgery from Russia. And antisemitism gained even more acceptability when the American aviator and celebrity, Charles Lindbergh, gave speeches around this country backing Germany and warning against Jews who were agitating against the Nazis.

As antisemitism was rising and the Nazis increased in power, some Rabbis and other leaders raised their voices. They held rallies and organized protests. But too many other Rabbis and Jewish leaders taught that the best policy was to hide from the threats. They counseled silence. They thought that if we were quiet the bullies would go away. But the bullies didn't go away. The counsel of silence is a disaster.

We look back on that time, and thoughtful people shudder that we are seeing many of the same sins of hatred arise in our own day. It is this fear that prompted Jonathan Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, to write his important book It Could Happen Here. Indeed, it can happen here. The rise of antisemitism from the extreme right and the radical left is making it happen here. Attacks against Jews on the streets and on campuses is higher now than at any time since the Holocaust. And I, for one, will not be silent. And I pray that you will not be silent either.

I don't want us to indulge in the game of victim competition with other groups that are singled out for attacks by racists and bigots. But you'll be hard pressed to name one group other than Jews who are attacked by racists and bigots from both the right and the left. So, I suppose we win. Since we are attacked by both sides, you might think that Jews are protected by such noble policies as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. DEI is an initiative that is being promoted at schools, government agencies, institutions, and businesses around the country. The effort to ensure fairness of opportunity for all people, regardless of the color of their skin, gender, ethnic background, religious faith, or sexual identification is both noble and praiseworthy. I support those initiatives full-heartedly. However, those of you who are in schools and institutions that are engaging in DEI

programs have probably already discovered that Diversity, Equity and Inclusion rarely if ever includes Jews.

But how could it NOT include Jews? That's the subject of David Baddiel's book Jews Don't Count. While he primarily focused on the situation in England, his conclusion fits the situation here in the United States: namely, that since Jews are considered "White" and "White" is the majority culture, safe and empowered Jews do not suffer from Diversity, Equity and Inclusion problems. Of course, in light of the escalating acts of violent antisemitism in both the United States and England, such an exclusion is ludicrous. And it is not just grand statistics that guide us to that conclusion. We each have our personal experiences.

Let's set the record straight: the Jewish family is blessed with people from every race and nation: White, Black, Hispanic, Oriental, Asian, Middle-Eastern, etc. An estimated 6-10% of Jews in America are Jews of Color. And the **majority** Jews in Israel are what DEI would classify as people of color. Again, Jews are not a race; we are a family.

My hope is that we do not see other minorities as competition in the victim game. Rather, we are natural allies. Together with the majority of people, regardless of race, religion, or ethnic background, we need to stand strong against hate groups. Just as we should stand as strong allies with our

friends and neighbors who are of color, who are of different faiths, ethnicity, and sexual orientations, so too we need to stand up for ourselves.

It is essential that our reaction is not to cower in fear. We have seen how silence and hiding and pretending that the threats would go away played out in Europe and the Middle East.

It is vital that we organize, plan, coordinate, stand strong, and insist in a strong clear voice that “Yes, Jews also count!”

In our long 3,500-year history we have faced many difficult challenges. And in every instance, with God’s blessings, we have survived. Not just survived; we have thrived and succeeded whenever and wherever given a chance. One of the most important lessons we learned was that words have power. And we have also learned that silence in the face of hateful words is a sin.

The sin of silence led to the murder of 6-million Jews. The sin of silence has given tacit permission to antisemites, bigots, racists, and homophobes. The sin of silence gives cowards a temporary false sense of security. Silence, at best, is only a delaying tactic. Unless we stand up loudly and proudly against the hateful mob when they attack first one minority and

then the other - - - well it is only a matter of time before it is our turn to suffer.

Yes, we Jews have suffered. And we have also learned. After the losses, we have learned how to rebuild and renew. And have learned that we'd better teach our children and grandchildren that keeping silent, hiding, and pretending that danger is not there is not an option.

We have the right not to keep silent! And in doing so, we need to demonstrate a love of justice, fairness, and goodness by standing strong and proud. With our wits about us and allies to join, we will defeat the purveyors of hatred. We will defeat the antisemites and those who long to destroy our people. We will overcome the bigots and defend the most vulnerable and continue to shine the light of justice and goodness to brighten the world.

On this Kol Nidrei, the beginning of Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year, we stand before God and each other to repent, reflect, and renew our lives.

Chazak, chazak, v'nitchazeik, Be strong my people. Be strong and have courage. Together we will help to heal this world, for all people. Including us!