WE ARE ALL JEWS
HHDs 5767
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An Israeli recently visited Paris, and on an outing he happened upon a dog attacking a little girl. The Israeli sprang to the rescue and saved the little girl, but the dog died. Surrounded by reporters congratulating him, he was asked, "Where in Paris are you from? Tomorrow's headlines are going to read: "Brave Parisian saves girl from Dog", "Heroic Parisian rescues little girl from Savage beast."

"Actually," he said, "I am not a Parisian."

"Alright, so the headlines will be "Brave Frenchman saves girl from Dog", "Heroic Frenchman rescues little girl from Savage beast"."

"Well, actually I am not from France either"

The reporters then inquired, "So where are you from?"

"Israel" he replied and the interview ended. And the next day, the headlines read, "Israeli brings violence to Paris, Dog dead, little girl injured."

Thankfully, this story is not actually true. But while it is not true in fact, it is true in reality; which is to say, while Mel Gibson may have been drunk, much of the world, even when completely sober blames the Jews for all their problems.

A true story, I received a phone call from a member of our congregation the other day, she was very upset, crying on the telephone. When I asked her was wrong, she explained to me and all too familiar series of events. She and a group of friends, some Jewish some not correspond via email on a regular basis, they share information about their children, and families and offer each other advice and support through life's daily challenges. It's a buddy list of friends that have been together for more than 8 years.

One day, soon after the war broke out between Hezbollah and Israel one of the members on the list posted a joke. The joke, like hundreds of others we have all seen pass through our in box on the way to our trash or our spam folder blamed Israel for making a big deal out of nothing and plunging the world precariously toward World War III. Our congregant posted a reply to the joke saying that she found the joke to be just what it was; hatred and bigotry and that it didn't belong on this list or in the realm of civilized discourse.

If emails were stones and bricks, then the response that our congregant received was an avalanche of hate and anger. She and Israel were compared to Nazi storm troopers, she was told that the root cause of all evil in the Middle East was Jewish aggression and intolerance, and that Israel was deliberately killing children and spreading hate and fear around the world. Friendships that had been forged over 8 years of support and good will were torn apart over the age old hatred – anti-Semitism.

It is really incredible, almost unbelievable that 60 years after the holocaust, 55 years since the establishment of the State of Israel by ¾ of the member countries of the United Nations. 40 years after Vatican II - the exoneration of the Jews as Christ killers

and the apology of the church for generations of Jewish blood and hatred spilled in its name. 25 years since the Camp David accords and peace with Egypt, 10 years after the signing of a peace treaty with Jordan and a handshake between Israel and the PLO on the White House Lawn, and 6 months after Ellie Wiesel appeared on Oprah; Anti-Semitism the world's longest hatred is still flourishing around the world, and right here in the San Fernando Valley.[i]

Mel Gibson's racist ranting aside, around the world Jews and Jewish communities are victimized and vandalized, and it is a hatred that is increasing in scope and in violence according to a recent study by the US State Department. Scholars and historians give a laundry list of causes for anti-Semitism; but they all boil down to one undeniable fact of history. The anti-Semites of the world hate us because we are different, because we are Jews. Some will say it is because of Israel, or because of Jewish power, and influence. Others will claim that we bring it on ourselves by not assimilating into society more, or because of our professed (and so often misunderstood) claim to being a chosen people. The justifications are as varied and as long as the hatred itself, but make no mistake we are the world's perpetual outsider, its historic scapegoat, and we are always the ones to blame. We are .2% of the world's population and just 2% of the population of the United States, but to the anti-Semite we are 100% the cause of all the world's problems.

The history of Anti-Semitism begins almost at the beginning of Jewish history when first Moses stood up for a Hebrew slave that was being beaten by an Egyptian Taskmaster and it continues sadly to and through Daniel Pearl (z"l) who was murdered at the hands of Islamic terrorists for no other reason, than as Danny said in his own last words, as his attackers held a sword to his neck, "My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish and I am Jewish."

In that first biblical incident, our tradition relates that Moses looked around to see if someone would come to the aide of this man who was being beaten, but no one cared or noticed, so Moses who was himself conflicted and hiding about his own Jewish identity, realized as our tradition commands, that he could not stand idly-by when another human being, Jewish or otherwise, freeman or slave was being terrorized, and so Moses broke with Egyptian law and precedent and came to the man's rescue. It was a moment of great heroism, not for Judaism, but for humanity, the embodiment of the rabbinic command of *pikuach nefesh*, the primacy of saving a life. But also in that moment anti-Semitism was born, for in that moment when his Judaism compelled him to stand up for the rights of others Moses himself became the target of hate and murder.

The *Midrash* explains that when Pharaoh, heard that Moses put the life of a slave ahead of the life of a taskmaster, Pharaoh became enraged, he feared for the breakdown of his totalitarian empire, that human rights would take precedent meant the end of slavery and that meant the end of his regime. Pharaoh decided in that moment that a Jew could not be trusted, because his allegiance was not to the Pharaoh but to what we would call today a higher moral code. He ordered Moses killed.

Moses fled to the wilderness; there was a burning bush, 10 plagues and a sea that split in two, and as they say the rest is history. But the *midrash* and our tradition is clear, by being different, by challenging the status quo, by standing up for those that are being victimized, Moses found God, and found the Jewish purpose; to be an *or'lgoyim* a light unto the nations. A rabbi was once asked, "How do you bring light to a darkened room?" his answer, "Strike a match!" and to a darkened world? "Become the match, become the light!"

"Jews created universal education, charity, care for the elderly, respect for the rights and dignity of women, the primacy of saving human lives and the importance of justice which led to intense Jewish involvement with the legal, medical and scientific world."[ii] And in cultures and societies that lack or reject those values our very existence is rejected and despised as well. We are the world's conscience, we are *noodniks* for Justice, we call the world to account, because inspite of the fact that no people has been more persecuted, more brutalized, more victimized than the Jewish people throughout history, the Jew, in spite of this history of denigration remains the eternal optimist, for we believe and our tradition implores us that, as individuals and as a human race can always do better, be better. It is the prophetic ideal, it is the purpose for which we were created, *l'taken Olam b'malchut shadai*, to repair the brokenness in the world and resort it to God's intended perfection. Not for ourselves alone, but for the benefit of the entire world. That is what it means to be a chosen people, chosen by God to make the world a better and more humane place for all people.

Sadly for Danny Pearl there was no Moses amongst his terrorist captors, in that dark basement, there was no human light but his own, surrounded by darkness. They bound him at hand and foot, they extinguished his light, as they raged with the fire of hate, slaughtered him for the whole world to see on *Al Jazeera*. Surrounded by other people (I can't bring myself to call them human-beings) no one came to his aid, no one lit a match of hope!

Yes, many in the world shook their collective heads in disgust, but many others, <u>too many others</u>, danced in the streets and shouted Death to Israel! Death to America! Death to the Jews! They needed no alcohol to lubricate their hatred; their cup ruith over with hatred, it had been boiling over for generations; and friends let us speak it plane and clear <u>they are still dancing</u>! Danny's murder wasn't the end of their hatred, it only fanned the flames. Anti-Semitism, never really goes away, it recedes, but then comes back like the tides of the ocean; when the certainties of society collapse, when people are looking for some reason to explain their misfortune, they blame the Jew. And friends we live in uncertain and frightening times.

Rabbi Harold Kushner teaches, in his book <u>When Bad Thing Happen to Good People</u>, "that human-beings, can endure any burden, any suffering if they can only find a reason for it." A line of reasoning that makes me think of Red Sox fans and the curse of the Bambino. Kushner continues, that for some lacking a reason for the randomness of life is insufferable, unbearable if your theology claims that nothing is random and everything happens for a reason.

And so people try and find a reason for the seemingly unexplainable suffering, or hardship, or perceive inferiority, or failure. And it is there in the search for the root cause, where you and I and most rational human beings would discover that either we ourselves are the cause of the problem, or as is so often the case, we find no rational explanation at all and yet still we struggle to move forward, even without an answer to the why's of life, the rational human being makes do, the anti-Semite blames the Jew! Not as a last resort when all other explanations fail, but as a first resort so as to avoid a thorough examination of the self. In the words of Jean Paul Sartre anti-Semitism is a pathology, a hysteria. Sarte writes, "If the Jew did not exist the anti-Semite would invent him."[iii] The Jews are the perfect excuse for all the ills of the world, because we are the outsider, the other, the scapegoat, we are different, misunderstood and we are easy to blame.

The measure of a society can taken by how they treat their Jews. It has been true throughout history and it is true today. "The treatment of the Jews has historically served as one of society's great moral barometers. Watch how a nation, religion or political movement treats Jews and you have an early and deadly accurate picture of that groups' intentions, not only toward Jews but toward all groups they consider to be other."[iv]

In our world today, America is the other as well. America is the world's newest Jews. Because like Moses, and the prophets of old, America holds the world to higher standards and a higher purpose; we defend the rights of the poor, the oppressed, the enslaved, we fight for dignity and equality for women, minorities and those who do not have a voice. We are not perfect, no person or nation is, but at the core of who we are and what we stand for as a nation, just like at the core of who we are and what we stand for as Jews, we insist that the world uphold the eternal and universal values of freedom of religion, of thought, of culture, of the press. America and the Jew are bound together we have become the world's conscience, we have staked our very existence on the principle that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are not just American values, not just Jewish values, but universal values, inalienable rights, endowed to human kind by our creator and guaranteed and protected by the rule of law, those written on paper and those written on stone.

In May of 1941, seven months before the attack on Pearl Harbor and America's entry into World War II, mindful I am sure of that great moral barometer, Rabbi Fred Isserman of Temple Israel of St. Louis ascended the pulpit and said to his congregation, "In all human history, the anti-Semites have been the war-makers, never the peace makers; the foes, never the friends of religion; the apostles of tyranny; never the champions of liberty; the spokesmen of reaction; never the leaders of progress; the voices of tribalism, never the teachers of brotherhood; the destroyers and never the creators. Name an anti-Semite of any land, of any age, and you will name not merely a foe of the Jew, but a foe of the finest values in civilization and the noblest standards of human life. The enemy of the Jew has always been the enemy of humanity. What history teaches the present eloquently verifies."[v]

Rabbi Isserman was prophet in his own day and his words resound even today. He understood the depths the problem we face, and now so do we! He knew too well, that, if unchallenged, Nazism, Anti-Semetism – terror - had the very real potential to darken the whole world.

Today, like Rabbi Isserman, I too feel a heavy responsibility to sound the alarm, to strike a match and bring light where there is darkness. We blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah to inspire us to bring about a better time. Let us recall that in the Bible, the shofar had another purpose, for it was sounded as also the call to battle. Our shofar calls us today to see the reality of the situation and not stand idly by.

Today, at this critical moment in world history, we are all Jews! We are all Israel! Surrounded it seems on all sides by those who blame us for all their problems, who see our very existence as an affront to their hate filled view of the world. Americans and those that hold western values, Judeo-Christian values, are experiencing now, in this clash of civilizations what Jews have experience throughout history. We have become the other, the outsider, we are Moses standing up for human rights, standing up to Pharaoh, interjecting ourselves into the problems of the world, even at our own peril, because our sense of right and wrong, of decency and justice, commands us to do so.

What the world needs is not less Jews but more Jews, not less Judaism, but more Judaism! We must find our prophetic voice once again, in the words of Rabbi Heschel, "we are messengers who forgot our message." And so our task, is to become as we were intended to be an *or l'goyim* a light unto the nations. To fight the fire of hatred and terror with the light of Torah, not to bring the world to Judaism, but to bring Judaism to the world. "It is the exquisite irony of Jewish history that this sacred task, which has been the ultimate cause of anti-Semitism since the days of Moses in Egypt, must be fulfilled in order to end anti-Semitism [and its companion – terror]."[vi] We must reclaim the language and the moral conviction of Moses and Danny Pearl, and teach the world our values and our ideals because they are the values and ideals that the world so desperately needs.

Now is the time to have the courage of Moses, the pride of Danny Pearl, and the conviction that deep down we know that Judaism is not the cause of the world's problems but it can be part of the solution! Educate yourselves about what our tradition truly stands for and then join together and like Moses and like Danny stand for it. Judaism is a light unto the nations, and in this time of darkness, we must let its light like a beacon of hope for all the world to see.

(CHOIR: THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE)

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[i] "Anti-Semitism in Europe increased significantly in recent years." REPORT ON GLOBAL ANTI-SEMITISM July 1, 2003 - December 15, 2004 Submitted by the Department of State to The Committee on Foreign Relations And The Committee on International Relations.

[ii] Rabbi Ed Farber, *Sermon* "Americans Are The World's Newest Jews" High Holy Days 5767

[iii] Jean Paul Sarte, Anti-Semite and Jew p. 13
[iv] Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, "Why the Jews?" p. 194
[v] Rabbi F. M. Isserman, *Sermon: How to Defeat Hitler* May 23, 1941 – Temple Israel, St. Louis
[vi] Prager & Telishkin p. 191