

Anti-Jewish Jews

We have learned a lot this past week.

One thing we learned is that “pronounism”, or “pronounophobia”, two words I just invented, and which mean the incorrect use of pronouns, can get you into more trouble than calling for the genocide of Jews. The other thing we learned this past week is you don’t have to be smart to be a college president – or at least, you don’t have to have *sechel* to be president of an Ivy League college.

Against the backdrop of Israel’s effort to do the world’s dirty work and eliminate the threat posed to the Western way of life by a well-funded totalitarian terrorist group of thugs that governs Gaza and uses it as a launching pad for its genocidal actions and intentions to suppress freedom and any expression of religion or ideology other than theirs, we face the unleashing of a ferocious wave of anti-Semitism, the likes of which we have not seen since the defeat of Nazi Germany.

The assault on Jews around the world has taken many forms: anti-Israel marches in streets and cities and demonstrations in innocuous places like the public lighting of Christmas trees, anti-Semitic social media postings and ostracizing public figures who support Israel. It has entailed ripping down posters of those kidnapped by Hamas, lest there be sympathy or accountability for Hamas’ victims. It has included minimizing, ignoring or denying rape and sexual violence against Jewish victims of Hamas. The well-organized efforts to silence and intimidate pro-Israel voices has led to verbal and physical attacks on Jews on campuses and elsewhere around the world. Even Jewish owned or Israeli-themed restaurants have been subjected to boycotts – and not because of bad service or because there wasn’t enough corned beef in the sandwiches.

And with all that is going on, we say today: Happy Chanukah.

This holiday, which really is not one of our most important holidays, takes on new significance, for lighting the menorah is an appropriate metaphor and antidote to what is happening in the world today. Chanukah celebrates the military victory of the Macabees, of the small determined band of Jews who fought against the mighty Syrian-Greek nation to the north of Israel. Not unlike Iran today, which uses its proxies, Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis and the Syrians to accomplish their avowed goal to wipe Israel off the face of the earth, then as now, the Jewish people faced an effort to extinguish the light of Torah and the light of Judaism.

But I must let you in on a secret about the holiday, something you may or may not be aware of. The historical reality is a bit more complicated than the simple story we all know and love.

Chanukah was not just a battle against the Syrian Empire and their attempt to deny us from practicing Judaism. It was not just a battle against the attempt by Antiochus to impose the Greek Seleucid way of life on us.

It was also a battle among Jews for the very soul of the Jewish people. It was an internal struggle to determine if the forces favoring assimilation and accommodation would win out over those who wanted to maintain Judaism as a unique way of life.

There were Jews, especially those among the wealthy, upper class, including priests, who welcomed the Greek way of life and who enjoyed assimilating into the predominant culture. Their Jewishness was of secondary importance and was not central to their identity. The sources tell us that they enjoyed going to sporting events in the arena more than coming to Temple.

While many were seduced by the appeal of the Greek way of life, when Antiochus IV sought to suppress expressions of Jewish life, and tried to force Jews to publicly eat pork to show their abandoning of Jewish practice, or when he wanted them to bow and sacrifice to the gods worshipped and venerated by the Greeks, a small group among the Jews, led by the priest Mattathias and his son Judah and Judah's brothers and sympathizers rejected his entreaties and revolted against him. Mattathias, known as Mattiyahu, (prior to his career as a reggae hip hop rap artist) not only refused to make a sacrifice to the Greek gods, but he stabbed and killed the Hellenized Jew who stepped forward to do so.

While it is significant that the Maccabees recognized the need to fight against their own, sadly, within a couple of generations, the Hasmoneans who became the rulers in Israel succumbed to the very things their ancestors, the Maccabees had opposed. Nevertheless, the victory of the Maccabees, which Chanukah commemorates, stands as a symbol of what we should value and a reminder of what and who they fought.

As painful as it may be to admit, there are those among us today who, like those opposed by the Maccabees are on the side of those who seek the demise of Judaism and the Jewish people. I am referring to the small minority of Jews and those fringe Jewish groups who join protests and actions of the anti-Semites who hate us.

Gil Troy and Natan Sharansky have labelled them “un-Jews”. They are being kind. They should be called “anti-Jewish Jews”.

In their second article on this subject, Gil and Natan recently wrote, “While everyone likes to like a big tent, every community by definition requires some boundaries. The Hamas horrors on October 7th—and the subsequent reaction—have helped settle the debate and define our big blue-and-white tent generously but unmistakably, welcoming most while clarifying some red lines patriotic Jews refuse to cross.”

As an example, they point to what happened the day after the largest pro-Israel Jewish rally in our country's history. A few dozen groups, who despite their Jewish sounding names -- Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) and IfNotNow, and who did not join the 300,000 Jews who turned out to show their support for Israel, instead went and disrupted and harassed members of Congress at the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee calling for an immediate ceasefire and accusing Israel of all kinds of terrible things. They joined with the avowed enemies of Israel, the Democratic Socialists of America in denouncing Israel as "genocidal" and an apartheid regime.

The time has come for us to recognize and identify, as the Maccabees before us did, who among us stands with the Jewish people, who links their destiny with the rest of us, and who does not, and to disassociate from those who have chosen to stand outside of the community.

At a time when we are hurting and mourning the loss of over 1,200 among our people who were brutally attacked, when we pray for the release of hostages taken by Hamas, as we are horrified by what terrorists did to women and children, those who do not express sympathy for their fellow Jews, who speak and act insensitively, who partner with enemies of the Jewish people, who oppose the efforts of the Jewish state to protect its population should be ostracized.

I wish we could patent the word "Jew" or "Jewish" so they couldn't use it in their organizations' names or publicity.

Gil and Natan point out that many of these activists who wear tallitot and blow shofars at their rallies justify their actions by pointing out that they are children of rabbis and Jewish day-school graduates. But those who disassociate themselves from the Jewish people and from the sense of Jewish peoplehood, are like the wicked child of the Passover Hagadah who excludes himself from the community. They go against the very essence of what it means to be a Jew, especially in a post-Holocaust world, where more than half of our people live in the state of Israel.

When Max Berger, formerly of JStreet, and founder of IfNotNow tells Time Magazine, "It's hard to think of Israel as something good, because we've only known it as a place where bad things happen and things keep getting worse," he forfeits the right to speak as a Jew. When George Soros gives millions of dollars to groups opposed to the existence of the Jewish state, he forfeits the right to speak as a Jew.

Above all, the story of the Maccabees is one of defiance and anti-assimilation. It's about Jews who fight for survival, which is why we publicize the miracle and publicly light the menorah. Writing in Tablet Magazine. Arynne Wexler summed it up when she wrote, "Fighting for Jewish independence and resisting attempts to chip away at our peoplehood – now *that* is the meaning of Hanukah" – even if it means writing off some of our fellow Jews.

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