

## ROSH HASHANA 5775 – FIRST DAY

“They hate us, they’ve always hated us and they will always hate us.” That used to be the classic rabbinic sermon about anti-Semitism, one which was so predictable that, for many years, I largely avoided the topic.

However, after the events of this year, it is time to say “enough, already!” While clearly “they don’t all hate us,” the poison of anti-Semitism is rapidly spreading around the world, though less so in America. The best way to attack this enemy is not with violence, but with information.

Earlier this year, a huge controversy engulfed the national Jewish and Presbyterian communities. Led by a vocal group of activists, The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church voted to support a resolution urging the Church to divest from HP, Motorola and Caterpillar, all of whom were accused of participating in the “Israeli occupation of Palestine.”

The dollar amount of this boycott to the companies was miniscule.

However, the symbolic value of this resolution passing was significant.

Or, at least it was. This summer, as Hamas terrorists fired thousands of rockets and missiles into Israel, the issue of the Presbyterian vote quickly disappeared. Now, with at least a temporary cessation of hostilities, we

can pause from worrying about Gaza and return to the events of the first part of 2014.

The venom and zeal of many of those supporting this resolution was far more disturbing than the content of the resolution itself. Just what was it that got them so excited? Was it “the occupation” or was it their target?

The reality is that this vote sharply divided the Presbyterian church. Many who opposed the resolution shared the shame of a Fort Myers, FL minister who said “one must question the motives of anyone who vilifies Israel with greater fervor than any other nation, especially when we consider the numerous places in which violence is being reported continuously.”

The actions of the surrounding Arab nations, many of which still practice beheading and slavery, oppose women’s rights, gay rights, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion and more, were ignored by the Presbyterians, as was the kidnapping and murder of the three Israeli teens by Hamas. Instead, the Presbyterian Church focused on Israel’s alleged occupation of Palestinian territories.

Are they seeking justice or are they out to get Israel and, if the latter, why?

For fifty years, the Presbyterian Church has partnered with liberal Jews on many social issues. However, there has been a disturbing pattern of insensitivity and more with regard to more religiously “Jewish” issues.

Eleven years ago, the Presbyterian Church committed hundreds of thousands of dollars to fund messianic Jewish congregations in their buildings and to train “messianic rabbis.”

Seven years ago, the Church lobbied the US Department of Defense to allow their “messianic rabbis” to be certified as “Jewish rabbis.” In an amazing act of hutzpah, they stated that “the American Jewish community does not have the sole right to define ‘Jewish.’ We have an equal right to our own definition of “Jewish” which is equally valid.”

And so, when the Presbyterian General Assembly voted 310 - 303, this past June, to target Israel, from among all of the problematic areas of the world, most Jews were not mollified when the moderator of the convention declared “in no way is this a reflection of our lack of love for the Jewish people.”

From 1963, our temple has shared a very close relationship with Naurashaun Presbyterian Church, here in Pearl River. They housed our

services and our school for many years when our temple first began and I have no doubt that our close relationship will continue.

So, let's focus on "the Occupation," which has engendered such emotion and will undoubtedly continue to be the catalyst for those who wish to stoke the flames of anti-Israel feelings and anti-Semitism. We all know that the more misinformation is repeated, the more it is believed. So today, rather than emotion, I offer you facts.

**Fact #1: Following Israel's 1948 War of Independence, the Armistice or cease-fire agreement, recognized Jordanian sovereignty over the area known in United Nations Resolution 181 as the hill country of Samaria and Judea. "Samaria and Judea," the traditional Jewish, Biblical terminology for this area is the language of the United Nations resolution, not "The West Bank."**

In 1950, when King Abdullah of Jordan formally and illegally annexed this land, he renamed it "The West Bank." This annexation was rejected by The Arab League and recognized by only three countries in the world: Great Britain, Iraq and Pakistan.

In May of 1967, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, expelled United Nations troops from the Suez Canal, amassed Egyptian troops at the border and prepared to attack Israel. The only question was “when?”

On June 5, Israel launched a surprise attack on the Egyptians and within a matter of three days, Israel had achieved a major military victory over Egypt and the other nations who were part of the war effort. However, back in 1967, there was no instant communication via internet or cell phones.

Egypt and its allies urged Jordan’s King Hussein to enter the war effort, assuring him that the Israelis were being driven into the sea. Meanwhile, the Israelis were telling the king that the Egyptians had been vanquished. If he stayed out of the way, Israel would not enter the lands he controlled.

King Hussein made the error of believing the outright lies of his brother Muslims and almost instantly, lost the West Bank which his father had illegally annexed. The Old City of Jerusalem was reunited, the land mines and barbed wire dividing the city were removed from what is now Mamila, the most chic area of Jerusalem.

Israel immediately announced that it was prepared to exchange much of the conquered land for peace. However, at the Arab Summit in Khartoum

in September, 1967, the leaders of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, Kuwait and Sudan declared “no recognition, no negotiations and no peace.” With only a little change, that has remained the position of the Arab world since 1967.

Anti-Israel propaganda somehow overlooks the fact that since 1967, Israel has sought to make peace with nations committed to refusing to recognize Israel, negotiate with Israel and make peace with Israel. Israel’s leaders have consistently offered to go anywhere any time to negotiate peace, as Menachem Begin later showed. Yet somehow, people have come to believe that the source of the hostility is Israel’s occupation and “the settlements.”!

Everyone is entitled to their opinions about the Middle East. However, the fact is that since 1967, Israel has withdrawn from 85% of the lands it conquered in the Six Day War. Israel has recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization, though it was responsible for the murder of more Jews than anyone since the nazis during World War II. Israel has helped to create the Palestinian Authority, has made three peace offers that were never responded to and has totally withdrawn all Israeli troops from Gaza.

All this while Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas openly boasts that the PLO has not changed any of its positions since 1988.

Israel cannot always be the one to take the risks for peace. Since 1967, Israel has asked the Palestinians and the Arab nations to take three steps for peace: recognition of Israel's right to exist, committing to an end to violence and negotiating a peace agreement with secure borders.

However, as long as the Palestinians are able to run to the United Nations or to others to pressure Israel, they are unlikely to feel the need to negotiate a meaningful peace agreement with Israel.

As a response to Palestinian terrorists routinely walking into Israel from the West Bank and blowing up scores of Israelis, hundreds of miles of fencing and several miles of walls were erected along the border. This was seen as a hostile act by Israel's critics.

In America, we put up walls to keep out highway noise. So why should Israel be criticized for an action which has reduced the murder of its citizens by Palestinian terrorism by 97%?

Despite hype to the contrary, the fact is that every Israeli Prime Minister for the past 25 years has recognized the need for a two-state solution.

The problem has been that Israelis are getting tired of waiting. After all, the Six Day War was forty seven years ago!

The old saying is that a conservative is a liberal who has been mugged. Like much of the American Jewish community for decades, I supported the concept of “Land for Peace.” The problem has been that while Israel has been willing to give up most of the land, the Palestinian leadership has not been willing to take real steps for peace.

As a result, I support Israel’s establishment of authorized settlements on West Bank land, on Samaria and Judea. The Palestinian Authority complains about it, but consistently refuses to take the one practical step that would end it: making a peace agreement with Israel.

Israelis and most close observers of the situation remember that back in the early 1990’s, it seemed as though this would finally happen. Instead, Yassir Arafat launched a series of intifadas, murderous attacks against the citizens of Israel.

The Palestinians have infuriated American administrations of both political parties with their refusal to make peace, even as Israel expressed its willingness to agree to virtually all of their demands.

President Abbas has already made it clear that no Jews will be allowed to be citizens of the new State of Palestine. And to top that off, he signed a

unity agreement with Hamas earlier this year, the terrorist organization sworn to the destruction of Israel and the death of Jews. And Israel is the obstacle to peace in the Middle East???

No, my friends, the time has come to reject the media campaign about the settlements or the occupation being the obstacle to peace in the Middle East. The true obstacle to Middle East peace is the Palestinian Authority, which names public squares after suicide bombers, which forges a unity agreement with Hamas and which speaks one way to the American media and another way to their own people.

More than a century ago, the Yiddish writer Sholom Aleichem defined “hutzpah” as a child who murders his parents and then pleads for mercy from the court on the grounds that he is an orphan.”

It is time for all of us to stop buying the hutzpah that so many put forth, whether it is from being ill informed or simply anti-Israel. The infamous “Occupation” was the result of Israel being attacked in 1967. As we saw this summer, a lot of the world still has a problem with Jews fighting back.

The Occupation is not the reason that there is no peace. The settlements are not the reason there is no peace. There is no peace because the

**Palestinians and most of their Arab supporters have refused to renounce violence and have refused to accept Israel's right to exist . . . period!**

**Israel is not perfect. Nor is America or any of us. That is why we are here. This year, more than ever, we should take pride in the magnificent Middle Eastern oasis which is Israel and not be influenced by those with an agenda or those who pursue any angle but the truth.**

**The terms "hard-line", "obstinate," and "intransigent" have routinely been applied to Israel since 1967, however looking at the facts clearly demonstrates that Israel has consistently taken the risks for peace, sometimes more willingly than at other times, during the past 47 years.**

**If the Palestinian leadership sincerely wants to make peace, it is time for them to do more than blame Israel. Let them finally follow the advice of our Torah portion "vayaylkhu shnayhem yakhdav" and walk together with Israel, taking steps and risks for peace.**

**Pledging to end the violence, once and for all, would go a long way. It may not satisfy all of Israel's critics, but it would help to bring peace and Dayenu, that would be enough for us! AMEN**