

Young Israel of Riverdale

Pesach 5784

Rabbi's Message:

The horrific massacre of Simchas Torah and the ensuing Israeli reaction have led to an alarming rise in Antisemitism. The threat to the personal safety of Jews everywhere has been accompanied by international isolation of Jerusalem. Alas—she sits in solitude (Badad, Eicha 1,1)

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 104a) cites D'varim (33, 28): Yisrael dwells secure, solitary (Badad), the essence of Ya'akov, distinct and separate from the nations. If they intermingle with the nations and learn their deeds (Tehillim (106:35), the nations will separate from and isolate them (Netziv).

The following paragraphs appear in my recently published Haggadah shel Pesach (pp. 166, 7).

One of the most puzzling statements in the Haggadah is V'hee She'amda, it is this which has saved our ancestors and ourselves. "Scholars have offered many explanations as to what might constitute the antecedent for the cryptic "this." If the words immediately preceding the statement constitute the antecedent, then "this" would refer to the "rechush gadol," the physical wealth taken from Egypt by the departing Jews. Yet, this wealth has long since vanished. To what, then, does "vehi" refer?

The Netziv suggests that it refers to the beginning of the previous paragraph; "For your [Avraham's] children will be sojourners in a foreign land." This is a Divine promise that the Jews will never be totally assimilated in exile. Ideally, Jews themselves should realize their separate identity. But if they attempt to assimilate, God acts to thwart their efforts and thereby preserve His people.

Thus, it would seem, the secret of our survival is twofold: Torah, if we observe it,-and anti-Semitism, if we do not. The midrash comments on the pasuk, "Judah has been exiled... and has found no resting place" (Eicha 1:3), that if we were perfectly comfortable in galus, we might never return to Israel, and we would join the long list of nations that disappeared after their political decline.

It is interesting that Jean-Paul Sarte, in his book Anti-Semite and Jew (1946), reached the same conclusion based on sociological analysis. He states that instead of eliminating the Jew, the unique phenomenon of anti-Semitism has guaranteed our continued existence. His only unanswered question-what causes anti-Semitism-cannot

be addressed by a sociologist, for it relates to God's eternal plan to preserve the Jewish people. While the form that anti-Semitism may take, or the excesses to which it may descend, are incomprehensible to our limited understanding of the universe, the basic concept is comprehensible, as it is God's guarantee that we will survive forever.

It is this promise that has kept us alive as a nation. The very fact that, in every generation, our foes try to destroy us, ensures that we can never fully assimilate. And God ensures that their ambitious plans for our destruction will fail.

The study and practice of our Torah, and thereby, the preservation of our national identity, is the way that we can eliminate hostility to the Jewish people and hasten the ultimate redemption.

Simchas Torah proved that in our own generation, there are those who wish to destroy us.

The intervening months demonstrated both personal Antisemitism and national isolation. At Pesach 5784, let us reinforce the essence of Ya'akov and, thereby, merit the security promised and fulfilled by Hashem.

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