

SHABBAT SERMON
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In Praise of Ann Coulter and Hillary Clinton?

This is going to be a historic sermon! I am going to do something that I've never done before, and I suspect I will never do again! But it is just as well because I have a feeling that many of you are not going to agree with what I have to say. This morning I rise to defend the honor of Ann Coulter and Hillary Clinton. One is despised by most liberals and the other is despised by most conservatives. Both have come under attack in recent weeks and while I don't usually agree with much of what they say, in these specific incidents, I believe they did exactly what our tradition encourages in this morning's Torah portion.

There are three Hebrew words in this morning's Torah portion ... four when translated into English ... that have become a part of Jewish folklore, that have become a popular idiom that knowledgeable Jews have referred to down through the ages. And you're going to be surprised when I tell you what the words are. In English they are: "Rachel, your younger daughter." In Hebrew: "Rochail bitcha hakitanah." I know it sounds crazy, but in the shtetls of Eastern Europe, on the streets of Israel today, there is an on-going reference to these three words. And to understand what they signify you have to know the context in which they were uttered.

Our forefather, Jacob, fleeing from the murderous designs of his brother, Esau, has fled to the house of his uncle, Lavan. It is there that Jacob sees the love of his life – the young Rachel. Jacob knows who he is dealing with in regard to Lavan. Lavan is crafty, deceitful and totally untrustworthy. And so, when Jacob tells Lavan that he would like to marry his daughter, Jacob is very careful in making it very clear exactly who he wants when he says, I want "Rochail bitcha haketanah" – "Rachel, your youngest daughter." To which Rashi immediately asks, "Why didn't he just simply say 'I'm willing to work for Rachel?'" And Rashi responds, "Because Jacob knew that Lavan was a fraud. And had he said 'I will work for Rachel,' Lavan could have claimed that he thought he had in mind some other Rachel. And so, Jacob added, "bitcha – your daughter, not someone else's." And perhaps Lavan would attempt to change the names of his children and give his other daughter – Leah – Rachel's name. Jacob specified, "haketanah – the youngest daughter, not the older one." And from this time on these words "Rochail bitcha haketanah" have become a Jewish idiom, showing that one should be precise in what they say and make sure that nothing they say can be misunderstood.

Recently Ann Coulter got into trouble for something she said. That's nothing new! She is always getting into trouble for something she says. And I don't think she minds that. It helps sell books and get her on television. Most of what she says I find to be demeaning and disgraceful. But recently she got into trouble for something she said

about Jews, which created quite an uproar. And I'm not sure why. Appearing on a TV program on October 8th Ann Coulter said that what Christians ultimately want is for Jews to be "perfected" into Christians. "That," she said, "is what Christianity is. We believe the Old Testament but ours is more like Federal Express." The TV show's host replied, "You didn't really say that, did you?" Well, she sure did! The Anti-Defamation League said Coulter's comments were "a throw back to the centuries old teachings of contempt for Jews and Judaism." The American Jewish Committee called the remarks "hateful." And the National Jewish Democratic counsel called on all major television news networks to stop using Ms. Coulter as a commentator.

And I say: What was the big deal? I thought that what Ann Coulter said is what Christians are supposed to believe! In the New Testament Paul says of Jesus, "Having been perfected, he became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him." Don't Christians believe that Jews have an "old" testament, while theirs is "new" and "improved?" That in comparing Judaism and Christianity, Ann Coulter said that her religion "is more like Federal Express?" How different is that from the many times I have taught that Judaism believes that all righteous people have a share in the World to Come ... but Jews will get a room with a Jacuzzi when we get there! Really, when Coulter said that Christians ultimately want Jews to be perfected into Christians, was that all that different than what Maimonides wrote: "All the deeds of Jesus of Nazareth and this Arab (Muhammad) who arose after him, they are only to prepare the way for the Messiah King and to order the whole world to serve the Lord together." If we can believe that about them, why can't they believe that about us?

Ann Coulter stands guilty of doing one thing: she expressed herself like Jacob did: Rochail bitcha hakatenah. Instead of being wishy-washy, and being politically correct, Coulter was very specific in what she said and meant. And I have no trouble with that. I have more trouble with a better known – and more highly respected – Christian like the Archbishop of Canterbury. He recently paid a visit to Israel. He came to Israel, he said, in a true spirit of friendship. This was not to be a political visit, he said, he was not going to visit with any of Israel's political leaders. He was just going to visit with Israel's Chief Rabbis. Nice, right? But he wasn't in Israel for 24 hours when he declared that Israel's security fence "was driving Christians out of the Holy Land." "I recently met with Christians in Bethlehem," he said, "People by no means extreme, and they told of the daily burdens driving in and out of the city that were created by the wall." Now I'm sure that the security fence does create some inconveniences. I am also sure that the suicide bombers, which the wall was erected to stop, also caused some inconveniences. But what I'm most sure of is the fact that if Christian Palestinians are leaving the Holy Land, it is the fault of the Muslim Palestinians ... not the Israeli Jews! And don't take my word for it! Read Matt Rees's novel, "The Collaborator from Bethlehem." Mr. Rees, the former Middle East correspondent for *Time* Magazine, describes how the terrorists have taken over Christian neighborhoods in order to be able to attack Israeli settlements. Look the world over, Muslim countries where Christians are being persecuted, a situation so bad that last year in reference to Muslims the Secretary of the Vatican Supreme Court said, "Enough now with this turning the other cheek ... it's our duty to protect ourselves."

The truth of the matter is the Archbishop of Canterbury may claim to be a 'friend,' but the record clearly shows that the church he leads – the Anglican Church – the third largest in the Christian world, is the church with the most hostile attitude toward Israel. Time and again it has dealt with resolutions to stop investments in Israel. Just a few weeks ago, several senior clergy of the Episcopal Church – which is the American branch of the Anglicans – participated in a convention in Boston where they discussed "Israel and Apartheid." And the truth is, all this should come as no surprise. During the 1930s the then Archbishop of Canterbury claimed that "the Jews themselves" were to blame for the "excesses of the Nazis."

Jewish organizations were up in arms about Ann Coulter, but had very little to say about the Archbishop. From my perspective, I would take an Ann Coulter over the Archbishop any time! At least I know where she stands. I know exactly who I'm dealing with. You know, there are two words in Hebrew for an enemy. One is 'soneh' and the other is 'oyev.' What's the difference? 'Soneh' is one who hates you and says so! 'Oyev' sounds like 'ohev' which means 'to love someone.' That is an enemy who claims that they love you, but really doesn't. And that's the one who is the greater threat. I would be more comfortable with the Archbishop if he came right out and said how he really feels. "Rochail bitcha haketaneh."

Ours is a world, unfortunately, that fudges the truth. That's called being 'diplomatic.' When someone says it like it is, they get into trouble. That's what happened with Hillary Clinton. There was a measure brought before the United States Senate labeling Iran's Islamic Guard as a terrorist organization. Hillary Clinton voted in favor ... and for that, she was condemned by her Democratic opponents who have offered all sorts of reasons for not voting for the resolution. But let me ask you: is there any doubt that Iran's Revolutionary Guards *is* a terrorist organization? The record is clear; it has involved itself in Iraq and has caused the death of many Americans. The record is clear; it has funded and supplied Hezbollah and Hamas. The record is clear; it has been responsible for the 1994 bombing of a Jewish Center in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people. Hillary Clinton is being skewered for saying "Rochail bitcha haketaneh," for not playing games and for not finding excuses for labeling the Iranians for what they are - terrorists - when others would have been more 'diplomatic' and simply labeled them as being 'not so nice.'

Forgive me, you know I don't like to talk politics, but the fact is, one of the political divides in our country is how to label the threat of terrorism that we face. While Republicans like Rudy Giuliani calls it "Islamic terrorism," and Mitt Romney calls it "Islamic Jihadists" and Fred Thompson calls it "Islamic Fascists" and John McCain calls it "radical Islamic extremism" the Democratic candidates tend to refer to it as "global terrorism" or "stateless terrorism" ... anything but "Rochail bitcha haketaneh." Yes, it is certainly true that not all Muslims are terrorists. But it is equally true that these days most every terrorist is a Muslim. And if we are reluctant to say it, it gives them every reason to believe that our country will be even more reluctant to fight them.

It is true ... it is not always easy to tell it like it is. And it's true that it's not always necessary. I remember once reading about a family that decided to compile a family history as a legacy for their children and grandchildren. The family's ancestors came to America on the Mayflower, and the family included Senators and Wall Street wizards. There was only one problem. How would they describe in their book the great-uncle who was executed in the electric chair? This is how they ended up describing it: "Great-uncle George occupied a chair of applied electronics at an important government institution and was attached to his position by the strongest of ties, and his death came as a real shock." Yes, sometimes it is necessary to fudge the truth. But when it comes to dealing both with our friends and with our enemies, if they are real friends ... and they are real enemies ... I vote for the "Rochail bitcha haketaneh" method. That's what Jacob did in dealing with Lavan. And you know what? It didn't work because Lavan ended up tricking Jacob just the same. That's what happens when you're dealing with a Lavan. What does the name 'Lavan' mean? It means 'white.' Lavan presented himself as a real friend, as a real good guy, as pure as white. But in looking back on the way he acted, and on who he really was, when you look at his name in reverse you have the Hebrew word 'naval' meaning 'despicable.' In dealing with the world around us let us not make the mistake of finding out too late who is with us, and who is against us.

It's not often that I get to salute Ann Coulter and Hillary Clinton ... both of them for telling it like it is. In one case I liked what was said and in the other I didn't. But in both instances at least I know exactly who – and what – I'm dealing with. And in the crazy mixed-up world we live in, we don't always have the opportunity to know something as important as that.

Let us learn to be honest with ourselves and honest with others as well. And let us strive to make sure our words are in keeping with the words of our prayer: "Yiheu l'ratzon imray fi v'hegyon libi l'fonecha Hashem tzuri v'goali – May the words of my mouth and the meditation in my heart find grace before thee, Lord, my rock and my redeemer." Amen.