

KOL NIDRE
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A story! When Reb Leizer of Czenstochow walked out of the gates of Buchenwald, he set out to find his youngest son. In the last moments of deportation he had thrust the child into the arms of gentiles ... perhaps he was still alive. In his old town, he was told to try the monasteries. Not surprisingly, none of them admitted to sheltering any Jewish children. Reb Leizer bought an organ and added one melody to the stock of marketplace ditties: Kol Nidre. He moved about the countryside as an organ grinder, setting up his instrument in each village and watching as children ran out to hear his music. Whenever he played Kol Nidre, he would observe their faces for any reaction. Sometimes, he saw signs of recognition, of sadness and longing. He would follow these children, take them aside and tell them: "The war is over. You can go back to your own people." According to the story, Reb Leizer never did find his son, but he helped dozens of Jewish children regain their faith. (Jerusalem Post, Sept. 23, 2004)

That's the story, that's the story on Kol Nidre. There is something about Kol Nidre ... no matter how far a Jew has drifted from his moorings Kol Nidre still enters his soul. Its melody is haunting, its words very important. Kol Nidre, on its simplest level, is an annulment of vows; vows that I have made, that I didn't keep, I ask to be annulled. But on a broader level, Kol Nidre means much more than that. It represents the theme of this whole Yom Kippur experience; just as I am sorry for the vows I made and didn't keep ... I am sorry for all the other things I did and regret. Kol Nidre represents the desire to repent, to change, to break from the bad habits of the past. It is important for every Jew to undergo the Kol Nidre experience. But this year I think it is more important for every Palestinian and Arab to recite the Kol Nidre as well.

I thought of this when my entire family visited Israel at the end of May, shortly after Israel had celebrated its 60th anniversary. My family has been to Israel enough times now that we know our way around. My six year old granddaughter, Ella, was already experiencing her fourth visit. And we have certain spots – stores, restaurants, sites – that we keep going back to. One of them is in the Arab section of Jaffa where there is a hole-in-the wall, Arab-owned restaurant – Israeli Arabs, citizens of Israel - where more people eat outside of the restaurant, sitting on ledges or stoops. And it has no menu; it only sells two things: hummus or misbacha. It has the best misbacha in the world! Misbacha is primarily a breakfast dish made of cooked garbanzo beans and tahina, served with an onion and pita, and no fork or spoon. The restaurant's clients are mostly working class people; a mixture of Jews and Arabs, but in recent years, after the Intifada, more Arabs than Jews. And this year when we went there I could understand why. On the walls outside of the restaurant and on many of the walls in Arab Jaffa posters were posted in Arabic and in English proclaiming: "May 15th – 60th anniversary of the Nakba – the Catastrophe." And then the words: "We will never forgive ... we will never forget."

60 years ago the state of Israel came into existence. In the Hebrew calendar we refer to that day as Yom Ha-Atzmaut – Independence Day. But in the Arab calendar it is marked as the Nakba – the Catastrophe. 60 years later they are still referring to the establishment of the state of Israel as a "catastrophe." And perhaps even worse, they are promising to never forgive and to never forget. How badly they need to recite the words of the Kol Nidre. How urgently they need to change their thinking. There will never be peace unless they do! To never forgive and to never forget traps you into making the same mistakes over and over again. And that is just what the Arabs have been doing! Every time the Arabs were offered a chance for peace, every time

they were offered the opportunity to share the land ... they chose instead not to forgive and not to forget. 60 years ago both the Arabs and the Jews were offered to have their own states; the Jews chose, "Independence," the Arabs chose, "Catastrophe," and it's been the way ever since. And the "catastrophe" it is now clear, is not that they don't have a state ... many times it was offered to them. The "catastrophe" for them is that we do. And, they have never changed! Same old, same old ... never forgive and never forget.

The Jewish people changed! Most of the major leaders of Israel today came from strong nationalistic backgrounds which believed that Israel was entitled all the land from the Mediterranean to the Jordan. The parents of Bibi Netanyahu and Ehud Olmert and Tsipi Livni all believed in the concept of "Greater Israel" – all the land belongs to us. And the three of them grew up believing it as well. But they changed! They knew that they had to change; that Greater Israel was a nice dream, but an impossible reality. Tsipi Livni, Israel's Foreign Minister and expected next Prime Minister, said it best when she said, "Each of us can live with our narrative so long as we are pragmatic when it comes to the land. I still believe in our right to the whole land but felt it was more important to make a compromise. We cannot solve who was right or wrong in 1948 or decide who is more just. The Palestinians can feel justice is on their side, and I can feel it is on my side ... what we have to decide about is not history but the future."

Tsipi Livni and the overwhelming majority of the Jews of Israel have recited the Kol Nidre, while the Arabs are still promising never to forgive and never to forget. Why is that? Why is it so hard for Hamas and Hezbollah and Iran and so many of the Palestinians and other Arabs to make their peace with Israel? Why, when Arabs across the globe were recently polled, did they say the three leaders they admire most are Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah, Syria's Bashar Assad and Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad – and he's not even an Arab – all intractable foes of Israel? Why is it so hard for Arabs to accept the reality of Israel? There are a lot of reasons, but a basic, fundamental one is underscored in two books that came out this year. One is a book by the Israeli historian Benny Morris, called "1948." The other, "The Legacy of Anti-Semitism in Islam" by Andrew Bostim.

Benny Morris is well known as one of Israel's most highly respected historians. In researching all the data that is now available regarding the War of Liberation in 1948, Morris has confronted the reality that a strong factor in what motivated the combined Arab armies to destroy Israel was their religion. Document after document shows that the Arabs considered fighting Israel a Jihad – a religious war, fought because, as the king of Saudi Arabia, Ibn Saud, wrote to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the "treacherous conduct of the Jews toward Islam." The Mufti of Egypt issued a Fatwa in 1948 saying that it was the religious duty of all Muslims to fight the Jews and kill them.

Andrew Bostim's new book, "The Legacy of Anti-Semitism in Islam," shows how deep these anti-Jewish feelings have run in Islam from its very inception. We always speak about how, historically, the Muslims treated the Jews better than the Christians did; but that is only by comparison. Built into Islamic tradition is dhimmitude – the belief that non-Jews are inferior and must be humiliated and must be obedient to Muslims. And those beliefs have not changed right up until today!

The question is: can Islam change its attitude toward the Jews? Can a religion change? And the answer is: yes! Just look at Christianity ... Christianity changed! The fundamental belief of the Catholic Church down through the centuries was that the Jews were a cursed people, the Jews were a rejected people, the Jews were condemned to wander for having rejected Jesus. Go back just 100 years to 1904 when Theodore Herzl had an audience with Pope Pius X. The

pope told Herzl, who had come looking for Vatican support for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine: "The Jews have not recognized our Lord; therefore we cannot recognize the Jewish people."

Contrast such sentiments with Pope John Paul II in 2000, standing in tearful solidarity with Jewish suffering at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, or praying at the Kotel, placing in the cracks his personal prayer asking God's forgiveness for the sins perpetrated in the name of Christianity against Jews through the ages. Simply put, this is not your grandparents' Christianity. The days of official anti-Judaism in the church are over. As part of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church officially repudiated the deicide charge and the teaching of contempt for Jews.

Sure, religion can change! Christianity changed its attitude toward Judaism and you know what else changed? Judaism changed its attitude toward Christianity! There are many references in the Torah and many references in the Talmud that put Jews and non-Jews on an unequal footing. One example: the Bible commands us to return lost property but the sages in the Talmud interpreted that to mean only if it is a Jew's lost property. There is no responsibility to do it for a non-Jew. There are many reasons given for that and, there are many other laws like that; laws that would put all of us today to shame. But there is no need for us to be ashamed, because that is no longer the law. In many ways the change started in the 13th century when a great Talmudic thinker, Rabbi Menachim Ha-Meiri, introduced a new term; a term of '*ummot ha-gedurot b'darchoi hadatot* – nations restricted by the ways of religion.' Meiri taught that those laws that put non-Jews on an unequal footing were referring to the non-Jews of Biblical and Talmudic days; non-Jews who were Barbarians, non-Jews who were pagans, heathens and idolaters. But in his day Meiri writes, "The non-Jews – Christians and Muslims – are religious people. They are people, that are 'nations restricted by the ways of religion' which led the Meiri to write, "In our days nobody heeds these laws of discrimination found in the Talmud, neither Gaon, rabbi, disciple or Chasid."

Judaism changed ... Christianity changed. Of the three Monotheistic religions, only Islam has not changed. Christianity had its reformation. Judaism its Haskalah and neo-Orthodoxy. And Islam ... same old, same old. To this day concepts like "human rights," "egalitarianism," "democracy," and "equality" are nowhere to be found in Islam. And the world today pays a bitter price for this. But it is the Muslims themselves who pay the bitterest price of all. The Arab countries rank way behind the Western world in education and literacy and scientific achievements and democratic institutions because they still have not adapted to the modern world. Their religious view perverts their entire perspective. None of the suicide bombers have been Christian Arabs, only Muslim. They alone are the ones who applaud suicide bombers, they are the ones who cheer when women and children are blown up, they alone are the ones who give a hero's welcome to a Samir Kuntar.

Samir Kuntar was the Arab terrorist that Israel traded for the bodies of Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, who were kidnapped by Hezbollah in 2006. Let's just remember who this Samir Kuntar is. He was serving multiple life sentences for infiltrating Israel in 1979 and killing three Israelis – a 28 year old man, his four year old daughter and an Israeli police officer. The attack is considered one of the cruelest in Israel's history. Kuntar entered the home of the Haran family; Mrs. Haran, hearing the terrorists, ran through the apartment and tried to silence the cry of her daughter, accidentally smothering the two year old to death. Kuntar took the rest of the family, the father and his four year old daughter, and drove them to the beach where he killed the father in front of his four year old daughter, then smashed the little girl's head against a rock and crushed her skull with a rifle butt ... for all of which he never expressed any remorse. After

trading him for the bodies of the two kidnapped Israelis, the Arabs welcomed him home as a hero. I hated everything about this trade ... I hated that Israel made any deal with Hezbollah. They held Israel's kidnapped soldiers and didn't even let their families know if they were alive or dead. Not even the Nazis acted in such an inhumane way. British and American soldiers that were held captive by the Germans received and sent mail to their families through the Red Cross. Hezbollah acts in the most inhumane manner. And to trade such a murderer for two bodies ... what kind of a precedent does that set? Would that not encourage Hezbollah and Hamas to go on kidnapping Israelis? Is this not a sign of weakness on Israel's part? I hated everything about the trade, but it made me proud to be a Jew. Only Jews show such concern for each and every human being. Only Jews will make such a trade, even if it means finding out that their soldiers are dead ... but now at least their wives can remarry and not remain agunot. Only in Israel is there such a sense of connectedness where everyone seemed to be against the trade, and yet wanted it to happen because they knew they would want it to happen if their child was involved. The Arabs still idolize people who kill Jews ... the Jews consider every human life sacred.

That's what worries me about Iran having a nuclear bomb. The so-called "civilized" world has been negotiating with Iran for the past six years after it was discovered that Iran surreptitiously, and in violation of international law, was working to make a nuclear bomb. To date, all the negotiations have been for naught. Some people claim that Iran having a bomb is no different than any of the other countries that have a bomb, because Iran would find itself in the same situation that the United States and Russia found themselves in during the Cold War ... in a situation called MAD, which means 'Mutual Assured Destruction.' The United States and Russia knew not to nuke each other because they realized they would get nuked back! And similarly, Iran – with a bomb – would never nuke Israel because it knows Israel will nuke it back! But I worry about that thinking. I don't believe it is true. The reality is, the Arabs look upon life very differently than Jews do. Listen to what the former President of Iran has said about how Iran would use its nuclear weapons: Hashemi Rafsanjani – considered a moderate – said that with a nuclear bomb, Iran could kill as many as 5 million Jews in Israel, and he went on to say that even if Israel retaliated and dropped a nuclear bomb on Iran, Iran would only lose 15 million people, which he said would be a small sacrifice from among the billion Muslims in the world. I take his words seriously. Only recently, Italy's Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, said Iran's President is acting like a lunatic in his attitude toward Israel.

That is the mentality Israel is up against; a mentality that glorifies death, not life ... a mentality that claims a man who takes a tractor and goes to downtown Jerusalem killing and smashing people is a martyr. And this is not only the mentality of a few. Samir Kuntar got a heroes welcome when he returned to Lebanon. Waiting to embrace him were not only the leaders of Hezbollah, but all the leaders of Lebanon. And not only them! Waiting at the airport to greet him were also the ambassadors from Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco. That's the mentality of the people of their countries. It's a mentality that goes back to the Dark Ages and still hasn't changed!

And little Israel ... it so wants to change ... it so wants to see an end to this seemingly never-ending war. You know, in many hospitals in Israel, when a woman gives birth, if it's a girl the nurse tells the father that it's a girl ... if it's a boy, the nurse says, "You have a soldier." But Israelis don't want their children to be soldiers anymore. All of us, in growing up with the newborn Israel, thought of the typical Israeli as being Ari ben Canaan, the Paul Newman soldier of the movie "Exodus." But Israel doesn't want to glorify its soldiers anymore. The true picture of an Israeli, crazy as it sounds, is Zohan – the hero of this summer's movie, depicting the Israeli commando who wants nothing more than to be a hairstylist. Yes, from Ari ben Canann, from

Paul Newman to Adam Sandler and Zohan ... from Jaffa oranges to high-tech ... Israel has changed, but the Arabs – for the most part – have not.

And what of the rest of the civilized world? Has it changed? Will it allow Iran to have a nuclear bomb? Will it have learned from the past the danger of appeasement? I hope so. But I have to tell you the truth. I don't trust them! I don't know how much the world has really changed when I read that no Prime Minister of Israel has ever been invited to the headquarters of the European Union in Brussels. I don't know how much the world has changed when I read that no member of Britain's royalty has ever paid an official visit to Israel. Israel and India received their independence at the same time; independence from Britain. Why visits by British royalty to all the other of its former colonies and not to Israel? I don't know! But I don't trust the Europeans enough to put Israel's survival in their hands. How can I when they continue to do billions of dollars worth of business with Iran? Right now it is estimated that 10,000 European companies are doing \$100 billion a year worth of business with Iran. Do you really think they will give it up for some Jews?

Elie Wiesel has said, "We were victims not only of the killers, but also of the indifference of the good people in the world who somehow didn't pay attention to our plight." And now we know it's not just *our* plight. Ask the people of Darfur, ask the people of Rwanda. One of the most powerful sentences I read this year I found in Saul Friedlander's monumental book on the Holocaust, "The Years of Extermination," in which he writes, "Not one social group, not one religious community, not one scholarly institution or professional association in Germany and throughout Europe declared its solidarity with the Jews ... to the contrary, many social constituencies, many power groups were directly involved in the expropriation of the Jews and eager, be it out of greed, for their wholesale disappearance. Thus Nazi and related anti-Jewish policies could unfold to their most extreme levels without the interference of any major countervailing interests."

No one cared then. Do you think they care now? Now, when there is a Jimmy Carter and the Walts and Mearsheimers and a Patrick Buchanan who in his latest book claims it was a mistake for the U.S. to fight in WWII. The truth is, the United States of America is different. And thank God for that! But when push comes to shove, so much counts on who the President of the U.S. is. Can Israel count on him in a time of crisis? We don't know right now who the next President will be. Does it make a difference? Sure it makes a difference! 35 years ago, to the day, when Israel faced destruction in 1973 during the Yom Kippur War, it was Richard Nixon who called for an emergency airlift of arms to save the nation. At the time, European countries resisted allowing those airplanes to fly over their territory ... that's how much they cared. Nixon did it nonetheless. Would George McGovern have done the same if he had been elected then? No one knows for sure. But I'm certainly glad that Israel didn't have to find out. Don't get me wrong ... there is no way of knowing how McCain or Obama would react. When George Bush was elected, friends of Israel were very worried. After all, his father was no friend of Israel and he himself was a friend of the oil interests. Most Americans feel that George Bush didn't turn out to be much of a President, but the truth of the matter is, he did turn out to be a great friend of Israel. So there is no way of knowing for sure.

All I know for sure is that when the people of the world sleep well at night, the children of Sderot and their parents have to worry about when the next rocket might hit. Our Beth Tfiloh group visited Sderot this summer. There is very little to see in Sderot; Sderot is not Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. What it is, is the real Israel ... a city of twenty thousand people, mostly immigrants to Israel, somewhere in the middle of nowhere but very close to the border with Gaza – the Gaza that was returned to the Palestinians so they could show how they would build a state, the Gaza

they have turned into an armed camp with thousands of missiles headed toward Sderot. Sderot now has a warning system; a siren goes off when a rocket is fired and you have 15 seconds to get into a shelter. Do you know what that means? That means parents don't want their children to be further than 15 seconds away in case a rocket is fired. That means children can't play in the community playground because it's more than 15 seconds away. Do you know what that means? That means *you* can make a difference!

Let me tell you an incredible experience I had on my way to Israel this year, and I hope you will take its lesson to heart. On the plane with me and my family was a church group – a group of Christian Evangelicals – from Milwaukee. I was talking with one of them and I asked why they were going to Israel. He answered that it was a religious pilgrimage. I asked if they were first going to Jerusalem or perhaps to Nazareth or some other Christian site, and he said, “No. Straight from the airport we are going to Sderot.” “Sderot? How come?” I asked. And he explains to me the situation with the rockets in Sderot, and tells me that the pastor of his church had read that all the ice cream vendors in Sderot were going out of business because parents would not let their children leave their homes to go and buy ice cream for fear of a rocket attack. And so the pastor had all the members of the church contribute to an ice cream fund, and these church members were coming to Israel with thousands of dollars, and heading from the airport to Sderot where they intended to go to all the ice cream vendors, buy up all their ice cream to help support them and then go to as many homes as possible to deliver ice cream to the Jewish children. That's what Christian pilgrims were doing.

And we, we – the Jews living in the security of the U.S. – cannot really help Israel counter Iran, fight Hezbollah or protect the people of Sderot. In regard to all that, all we can do is marvel at the courage, strength and fortitude of the Israeli people. But, you know what we *can* do? We can help Sderot build more playgrounds so that children will be able to play in them. We can help Israel overcome its severe water crisis, which threatens the stability of the country. We can help Israel improve its educational system for which it has limited funds, and finds itself losing some of its best minds to other countries, with one of Israel's Nobel Prize winners comparing the growing drain of Israeli academics to that of Jewish scientists and thinkers who fled from Germany after the Nazi rise to power. We can't do all that much to help Israel's threats from without ... but we can do a lot to help Israel's threats from within. And we can do it right now with the purchase of an Israel Bond. I know the economy is down and things are tight. But it is never as bad here as it always is in Israel where there is a constant threat to its survival. If you find yourself in a position that the economy doesn't allow you to purchase as large a Bond as you did last year, then purchase a smaller one. Through the generosity of The Associated and Hopkins Federal, your purchase will be matched by them. Whatever you do, gets doubled! Please don't deny yourselves – don't deny Israel – this opportunity. Remember, double of nothing, is nothing! If you didn't buy a Bond last year, and you don't intend to buy one this year ... then know that you haven't changed, when the whole purpose of the High Holidays is for you to show God that you have changed.

We Jews are a changed people ... we changed 60 years ago with the rebirth of the state of Israel. With the creation of Israel we Jews no longer had to depend upon the compassion and mercy of others. For the first time in 2000 years, we could depend upon ourselves, although, thank God, there are some others we can depend on. Some! But can the people of Israel depend upon you? I hope so, because they really are a remarkable people. And Israel really is a remarkable country. And don't take my word for it! Listen to the words from the families of Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, the two Israeli soldiers that Hezbollah returned in metal boxes. Speaking at her son Ehud's funeral, Miki Goldwasser said, “We have found this nation to be a wonderful nation. We have found bereaved families with superior mental fortitude; we have

found generosity, we have found a spirit of volunteering, the meaning of the word ‘friendship.’ This is an amazing nation.”

Ofer Regev, speaking at his brother’s funeral, said, “We lived in a world where we believed that our enemy was exactly like us. We thought we could speak to people who also wanted to raise a child, grow a flower, love a girl ... exactly like us. But the enemy proved that they are not exactly like us, and still, we will not stop trying.”

Yes, in coming in contact with acts of barbarity, in fighting an enemy that refuses to change in its desire to destroy them ... the people of Israel have not forgotten the words of the Hatikvah: “Od lo avdah tikvahteinu hatikvah bat shnot alpayim ... we have not lost our hope, the hope of 2000 years.” “Li’yot am chofshi b’artzeinu b’eretz tziyon v’Yerushalayim ... to be a free people in the land of Zion – in Jerusalem.” Amen.

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