

SHABBAT SERMON
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RABBI MITCHELL WOHLBERG

“Ivanka Trump’s First Empire Turkey”

This was a historic Thanksgiving for American Jews ... a “first” took place. Ivanka Trump had her first Empire Turkey for Thanksgiving ... and I only hope she didn’t get the piece that had the metal tag on it!

Last month’s marriage of beautiful Ivanka Trump – daughter of “the Donald,” to Jared Kushner, a member of a prominent Modern-Orthodox Jewish family, was big news for all. Ivanka converted for the love of her life, and taking on her Hebrew name made this the marriage of “when Yoel met Yael.” New York newspapers and bloggers across the country gave every detail they could get their hands on regarding Ivanka’s conversion, her wedding dress, the invitation and the affair itself ... and all of it was fully in keeping with Orthodox Jewish tradition. Her conversion was a real one; the rabbi who officiated at the conversion and marriage is a friend and colleague whom I admire, Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, and who is respected by all for his integrity. Her wedding dress had long sleeves. The invitation had one side in English and one side in Hebrew.

When you think about it, it’s really quite remarkable: a woman with one of the best-known American names traded it in, going from Trump to Kushner. Just think of all the people over time who had gone the reverse route:

- Alan Konigsberg, who changed his name to Woody Allen.
- Benny Kubelsky who changed to Jack Benny.
- Nathan Bernbaum who changed to George Burns.
- Bernie Schwartz who changed to Tony Curtis.
- Jacob Cohen who changed to Rodney Dangerfield.
- Robert Zimmerman who changed to Bob Dylan.

They – and countless others - all did it in order to make it as Americans. And for many over the centuries, changing your name was not enough. We frequently speak of the martyrs who gave their lives rather than to convert to Christianity or Islam. But the record shows that during the late 19th century between two and three thousand European Jews converted every year! And now, a Trump becomes a Jew ... a Trump becomes a Kushner! As noted sociologist, Sylvia Barack Fishman, pointed out: In 1926 Christian Ellen Mackay, an heiress to a mining fortune, fell in love with famous Jewish songwriter Irving Berlin. Her Catholic father said she would marry him “over my dead body.” When she married Berlin, her father disinherited her. After her civil ceremony to a Jew, she was dropped from the social registry, although her sister, who dated a Nazi and wore a diamond swastika, remained a member in good standing.

That’s the way it used to be in our country. But not anymore! The conversion and marriage of Ivanka Trump says a lot about the status of Jews in America. And it gives us a lot to be thankful for on this Thanksgiving weekend. It was just three weeks ago that the Anti-Defamation League came out with its annual report on anti-Semitism in America. “The survey

found that 12% of Americans hold anti-Semitic views, down from 15% in 2007.” Anti-Semitism is going down, and what makes that all the more remarkable is that if there was ever a year when anti-Semitism in America should have gone up, it was this past year. After all, history shows us that when the economy goes down, it is the Jews who are inevitably blamed! It was a failed economy that allowed Hitler to come to power under the banner of “Die Yidden sind unser ungluck – the Jews are our misfortune.” Certainly if America was looking for a scapegoat for the collapse of its economy, which came close to being a second Depression, it could have pinned the tail on the Jews! After all, what are the names that became associated with America’s economic crisis: Bear Sterns, Lehmann Bros., Ben Bernanke, and let’s not forget our good friend, Beryl Madoff. Based on our history in every other country this was the year America should have turned against us. But it didn’t! Instead, this month’s Atlantic Magazine’s cover story is entitled: “Did Christianity Cause the Crash?” This is the year anti-Semitism went *down* in America! It’s unbelievable!

Now of course, for some people, this is not such great news. If you work for the Anti-Defamation League which is supposed to fight anti-Semitism, what do you do when there’s no one to fight with? So, of course, the ADL warns us: “There continues to be violence targeting Jews and an increasing use of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.” Yes, that’s worth tens of millions of dollars to spend fighting those 12% of the anti-Semites! We Jews have been victims of anti-Semitism for so long that we have difficulty accepting that not everybody out there is trying to “get us!” For some, it is much easier to explain all our woes by blaming it on the anti-Semites. Two weeks ago Sholom Rubashkin was found guilty on 86 counts of money laundering, and bank, mail and wire fraud in regard to his Iowa slaughterhouse – the largest kosher slaughterhouse in America. The response of some of his supporters ... they called the conviction a “blood libel.” And I tell you, that is a libel on America. All 86 convictions were because of the anti-Semites? Recently our own Jewish Times quoted someone from our community who is going on Aliyah to Israel, explaining the decision in these words: “Our current President embodies the lineage of Esau and Ishmael. I’m not saying he’s an evil person ... but that is symbolic.” There are certainly a lot of good reasons for going on Aliyah, but to say one of the reasons is because our President is a descendant of Esau and Ishmael is absolutely, positively, a disgraceful statement about the President and of our country. You all know I’m not crazy about President Obama’s approach to the Arab/Israeli conflict but that does not blind me to the fact that his government – our government – gives \$3 billion a year to aid to Israel. That’s more money than Israel Bonds and United Jewish Appeal combined send to Israel! Is there no room for gratitude and appreciation? With all the issues separating the U.S. and Israel regarding the settlement and the peace process, there is still hardly a day when there aren’t American military advisors meeting with their Israeli counterparts to keep Israel strong and militarily superior to all the Arab forces combined. Should I just take that for granted? As Dennis Prager writes: Nowhere in Jewish history have we had it as good for so long as we have had it in America. The person going on Aliyah said, “I’ve been feeling an increasing level of discomfort about the future of American Jewry.” Have *you* been feeling uncomfortable? Does Ivanka understand what she’s gotten herself into? In France, a Jewish student cannot cover his head in a public school. In England a court just ruled that it is illegal for a Jewish school to define a Jew as being “one who has a Jewish mother.” Can you imagine anything like that ever happening in our country? You know what happens in our country? Larry Ziffer, the head of Baltimore’s Council on Jewish Education, also serves on the Archbishop’s Blue Ribbon Committee on the Future of Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. That, in and of itself, is rather remarkable. The head of Jewish Education in Baltimore serves on the Archbishop’s Blue Ribbon Committee for Catholic education! But listen to this ... here’s is a text of an email that the Archbishop’s Committee sent out last week to all its members: “In an effort to accommodate Rabbi Ziffer, the starting time for the next meeting scheduled for Dec 11 has been changed from 2-4 PM to 1:30-

3:30 PM. As winter draws near and sunset comes earlier, Sabbath services also move earlier in the day.” The Archdiocese changes the time of its Committee meeting so that there is no problem for its one Jewish Shomer Shabbat member! What a country!

An exhibit just opened in New York’s Museum of Tolerance – it focuses on three generations of the Morgenthau family; one of America’s and the Jewish people’s most prominent families. One of this generation of Morgenthau’s is quoted as saying, “There was a time when the family had to suppress its Jewishness in order to open doors and that’s not true anymore.” That’s right ... that’s not true anymore! And for that we should be thankful, for indeed, that’s what it means to be a Jew. In today’s Torah portion we are told how our matriarch, Leah, gave birth to her fourth child and she said: “*Hapaam odeh et Hashem* – this time I will thank the Lord.” And so she called her son “Judah” from the word “Odeh” meaning “thanks.” Based on this, a great sage, the Chidushei Harim, says that this is why the Jewish people took on the name of Judah ... because to be a Jew means to be thankful.

And that is why it bothers me that in most ultra-Orthodox synagogues there is no Prayer for the Government recited at Shabbos services. The regular Artscroll Siddur – the one most popularly used in Orthodox synagogues – has no Prayer for the Government. They had to publish a special edition just for those synagogues like ours where such a prayer is recited. In a recent article by Rabbi Daniel Korobkin, he wrote: “Recent criminal scandals within the Orthodox world have been devastating. How did we get to this point? To be sure there are undoubtedly multiple factors that contributed to this new phenomenon but there is one probable culprit that can be easily identified and redressed.” And you know what that culprit is? Rabbi Korobkin goes on to point out that in many ultra-Orthodox schools and synagogues; there is no respect taught for the government here in America. And one aspect of that is the lack of the Prayer for the Government being recited. In the Talmud we are taught: “Pray for the welfare of the government.” And major rabbinic lights over the century, including the Magen Avraham, Rav Yisrael Salanter, and the Chasam Sofer all spoke in favor of such a prayer. And prayers over the centuries were recited by Jews for the Polish government and the Russian government. Not to recite one for the government of the United States? What a message that sends! I should point out that here in Baltimore the Agudah on Park Heights Ave, which is the bastion of ultra-Orthodoxy in our community, under the leadership of Rabbi Heineman recites a prayer for the government every Shabbos. He understands what we all should understand: we live in a great country ... a country where the acceptance of Jews are unparalleled in history ... a country where Yael marries Yoel ... where Kushner becomes a Trump! How sweet it is!

So on this Shabbos of Thanksgiving, let me share with you excerpts from a prayer which was recited in a synagogue in New York City on November 26, 1789 on the occasion of the very first Thanksgiving Day proclaimed by President George Washington:

May he that dispenseth salvation unto kings, and dominion unto princes; whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom ... Bless, preserve, guard, assist, and supremely exalt to the highest degree, the President and Vice-President of the Union, the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America; the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, and People of this State represented in Senate and Assembly, with the Judges and Magistrates of this city; and all Kings and Potentates in alliance with these States.

May the Supreme King of Kings, through his infinite mercies, preserve them, and grant them life, and deliver them from all manner of trouble and danger ... May the Supreme King of Kings, through his infinite mercies, impart his divine wisdom to the Rulers of

these States, and grant them a spirit of just counsel, so that they may be enabled to support their determinations with wisdom and judgment; and may peace ever subsist between them and the Kings and Potentates in alliance with them; and establish to them a covenant of peace until time shall be no more, so that nation shall not lift up their sword against nation, neither shall they make war any more. Amen.

We beseech thee, O most gracious father and merciful King, to whom peace pertaineth, that thou wilt long cause us to enjoy a firm peace and tranquility; and as thou hast been pleased to establish us in peace, so spread over us they tabernacle of peace everlasting, and speedily effectuate, that among us may be heard “the voice of him who bringeth glad tidings,” announcing that “the redeemer cometh to Zion.” So be it thy will, and we will say Amen.

That prayer was recited in an Orthodox synagogue – the Spanish/Portuguese synagogue ... that congregation still exists as an Orthodox congregation, Shearith Israel. That synagogue is still here ... and so are we. Let us be grateful. *Modim anachnu lach* ... we are thankful to thee, O Lord, for living in this great country *V'al nisechaw sh'bechol yom imanu* ... and for all Your miracles which are daily with us. Amen.

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