

Bo 2015 - Global People, Local Customs pt. 2  
Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick, January 24, 2015

We are continuing today in our series Global People, Local Customs in preparation for the upcoming visit by Rahel Musleah, who will be speaking about the Jews of India. We have invited a lot of our Indian neighbors to come for the Friday night Indian Food Shabbos Dinner Feast (2/6) and we hope you'll want to be part of it, too. (I hope our Indian neighbors appreciate our attempt at Curried Matzah Balls Masala!... Just kidding, it's gonna be great!)

When I picked this topic well in advance, many months ago, I did know how precarious life would become for the Jews of Europe. What happened in France is just a symptom of a far wider epidemic. And therefore it might not surprise you to know the outcome of a question I put to the 11th and 12th graders I was studying with earlier this week in our Post-Confirmation program. I asked them, "Which of the following 4 issues should be on the top of the agenda for American Jewry?" - 1. Supporting Israel. 2. Addressing Issues of Inter-marriage. 3. Fighting Anti-Semitism 4. Making Jewish Education Affordable. Which do you think they said should be at the top of the list?

"Fighting Anti-Semitism!" I would not have guessed that. America is an amazingly safe place for Jews to live and freely practice Judaism. But I guess the issues in France are on their minds, but many of the kids said they had heard of anti-Semitic incidents in their own schools.

Now it is sad to me that our kids put fighting anti-Semitism at the top of the list. It's sad that they feel at all unsafe, for a number of reasons. It's sad because our kids are living in fear of being Jewish in public. It's troubling that they live with suspicion because we know that the vast majority of non-Jews are not anti-Semitic. Most people do not harbor that hatred in their hearts... It's also troubling because well, what happens if anti-Semitism goes away? What's left? Will Jews know enough, and be dedicated enough, and large enough in numbers to matter? But what really bothered me the most about their answer (and these are GREAT kids! - kids who were sitting for 2 hours on a weeknight studying Judaism when they could have been doing a ton of other stuff...) What bothers me the most about putting fighting anti-Semitism at the top of the agenda means that the Jewish agenda - indeed what it means to be Jewish - is being set by the enemies of the Jewish People. Fighting anti-Semitism is not so much about "Who We Are" as it is "What We Are Against." We need to understand what we are "for" - what we stand for - what binds us together as a global people. And that's why I think this topic, "Global People, Local Customs" is so important.

Last week I mentioned that when France's Jewish community was in the news there was one spokesman for the Jews of France. Can you imagine? Can you imagine one Jew who could speak for the Jews of America? We can't get one Jew who can speak for the Jews of Cherry Hill! We have Reform, Conservative, Orthodox and Reconstructionist. We have Ashkenazic and Sephardic. We have observant and non-observant. We have left wing and right wing, AIPAC and J-Street and ZOA. The list goes on and on. And we Jews love, it seems, to argue passionately with one another. We have so many answers, so many spokespeople, and sometimes it seems, so little unity. And it's a real problem.

But there is one group of people who don't have that problem when they look at the Jewish People. One group that really does see "The Jews" as a unified whole. You know who that is? The ANTI-SEMITES! To them, a Jew is a Jew. They don't care about our denominations, our politics, our regional differences. Nope. To them we are all just Jews. But here's the thing: We need to embrace that. We need to know that we really are just One People.

You know it's interesting: We are able to embrace the fact that we are One People world-wide. It's cool to us that there are Jews in India and Venezuela and the Caribbean. And when we go to those places it's cool to try to find the shuls. We look for a kosher restaurant or Jews wearing kippot... Abroad we have no problem embracing our concept of global community. Global Judaism is an easy concept to embrace when it's exotic!

But I think we need to Embrace Global Judaism here at home, in our own community. It's right here at home that this idea matters the most. Sure, we need to take on anti-Semites. But we need, perhaps even more, to get our backs up when fellow Jews talk about one another in disparaging ways. When someone typecasts the Orthodox for their "crazy customs" or the Reform because their services don't sound like ours; when we label AIPAC or J-Street and assume that because we don't agree with them that they are not "good for Judaism" - we are hurting ourselves. When we fail to see that gay Jews, and Jews of color, and disabled Jews are all vital parts of the Global Jewish People right here in our own community - we are hurting ourselves. Our infighting is hurting us. We really are a Global People, just with Local Customs, dedicated to a vibrant Judaism.

In our parsha this week the Jewish People are told to mark their doors with blood. Why? If the Angel of Death was an emissary of Gd, wouldn't the angel know who the Jews were? Of course! No, the Jews had to mark their doors as an act of defiance against those who wanted to hurt them. And they were not judgmental of one another - they were all in it together because they recognized that that was the way the Egyptians saw them: A Jew is a Jew. And it was at that moment, when they all came together as one, when they all marked their doors and said simply "I am a Jew" that Gd knew they were worthy of redemption and the journey to freedom began.

And so it is with us. We are One. And to each and every Jewish person here today I say unequivocally: We need YOUR Jewish opinion, your Jewish expression, what you and only you have to offer the Jewish People. We need a broad, bold, colorful spectrum of Jews from all walks of life working together, respecting one another, building community together. If anti-Semitism has taught us anything it is that we really are one People - not united against a common enemy- but united in common cause. Each of us carries a small but piece of the puzzle that when they are viewed as one form the rich mosaic that is the Jewish People. Your voice, your heart, your Jewish soul is critical to the success of our Global People, The Eternal People - The Jews.