

Frogs: Today's Anti-Semitism

- David Hollander.

Whimsical discussion about the plague of frogs. Rabbi Akiva, one frog and multiplied. Rabbi Elazar be Azaria said it whistled and all the rest came and swarmed. Frog is the symbol of anti-Semite. Does it start with one tyrant who convinces others, or do they always exist under the surface, really one frog but whistles... How does it happen today?

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There is a discussion in the Talmud about the plague of frogs, which seems at first glance to be a study in whimsy. How did the plague of frogs come about? Rabbi Akiva said, tzefardea ahas hayta, veshartza, umalah et kol eretz Mitzrayim. It was one frog, and it multiplied and filled the land. Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah said it started with one frog, but it whistled, and all the rest swarmed and came; tzefardea ahat hayta, vesharka lahem ubau. (Sanhedrin 67).

The discussion is actually far from whimsical. In Rabbinic literature the frog is also the symbol of anti-Semitism, a logical metaphor because of the croak of the frog and its harsh sound. The rabbis were concerned about where anti-Semitism starts: Does it start with one tyrant who influences others, convinces people who would otherwise be friends, benign people who would otherwise be friends of the Jews, but who change under the evil influence of one man? Or are there always anti-Semites under the surface, who need only the excuse of the demagogue to get them going. Is it indeed one frog, but it whistles and attracts all the hordes of potential anti-Semites, frogs lurking everywhere in the bulrushes, needing only the leader to whistle for them and they come running, for they had always been Jew-haters beneath their friendly facade.

It is an interesting and far from a theoretical question today when we are considering the new anti-Semitism of our time. It is now fashionable to be an anti-Semite. How did it happen, how did it start? Was it one man: an Arafat, an Osama Bin Laden, a Farakand, earlier in our time a Hitler, who by his actions, demagoguery or by any other means, caused the anti-Semitism to be born again, or has it always been under the surface, and now at an opportune moment it is coming to the surface again.

The recent scandal, more than thirty years old but now revealed, that Billy Graham the seeming friend of Jews and a Christian to whom we had presented awards for his tolerant ways and refusal to proselytize us, was always an anti-Semite and said things in private to Nixon which we would never have dreamed might come from his lips, indicates that the anti-Semitism is latent and comes to the fore whenever there is an opportunity. Even Nixon, who did so much for Israel, cannot be considered a friend of Jews in his heart if we take his tapes at face value and accept what he said about us as coming from his heart. For he had said things about us which indicate his intolerance. So why did he help Israel so? Apparently he did so because of American self-interest, and possibly for political reasons. Churchill once said that nations and national leaders act for either of two motives: Pure self-interest or enlightened self-interest. Whether they act purely for self-interest or for enlightened self-interest is the difference between the Eastern Block and the Western Democracies.

On the other hand, we have no worse example of demagoguery that sways the masses than Hitler's words and deeds, which transformed an entire continent into anti-Semites.

The Bible itself hints at an answer. We are taught that after three days the frogs disappeared. Now every other plague also disappeared at the appointed time. But with frogs there was this difference. Every other plague disappeared completely. The frogs, on the other hand, disappeared from every habitation, and from every place where there were people. But they did not disappear entirely. Rak baYeor tishaarna. They remained in the Nile.

The Nile was the symbol of Egypt's civilization. Deep in the heart of that civilization anti-Semitism remained. Deep in the consciousness of every Egyptian, there was hatred of the Jew, waiting to erupt.

What does this teach us about other civilizations, even lands where we are free and respected such as this one?

Apparently, both are true. And there is much evidence to show this.

(There are several articles which are available on the Internet under Anti-Semitism. I commend a few to you. AN OVERVIEW FROM TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY, STEPHEN ROTH INSTITUTE- ANTI-SEMITISM AND RACISM; In addition, Hillel Halkin has written a masterful article in Commentary Magazine which is not available on the Internet but is available in some magazine stores and Jewish Book stores. The Simon Wiesenthal Center is listed when you search for Anti-Semitism, and has an essay by the late Martin Luther King entitled ANTI-ZIONISM = ANTI-SEMITISM. Selections from this material can be used to fill out this sermon. It is, unfortunately, a matter we need to talk about in today's climate.)