

Blood Libel USA

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

We have by now, all heard of the maniacal misfit in Tucson, Arizona. One would have thought that any discussion about what might have averted the tragedy would focus on guns and the all too easy way crazy or just evil people can get hold of them in the USA.

The figures speak for themselves. Each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate there are more than 50,000 deliberate and 24,000 accidental nonfatal gunshot injuries, and over 16,000 suicides by firearms in the United States—twice as many as any other country.

Apologists argue that people kill, not guns, and you might as well ban cars because people driving cars cause far more deaths than gun-toting killers. But the fact is that access to guns is far too easy in too many states, and restrictions tend to be removed by Justices who interpret the American constitution as if they were Davy Crocketts. Washington is so terrified of the National Rifle Association, the biggest and richest lobby in town, that it dares not act. Even Democrats, who usually favor strict controls, lose their voices when they get to Washington.

There is some particular lunacy in the USA that thinks a law hundreds of years ago allowing citizens to carry weapons to defend themselves against Indians and the British army is in any way relevant today. I have even heard it argued that America can only be free thanks to guns. As strange and as manifestly risible an argument as I have ever come across.

But the issue everyone is debating is whether violent political rhetoric is responsible for the assassinations. Never mind that the killer never watched television or read the newspapers and hated most of the world and all parties, and has for ages, long before Sarah Palin appeared on the political scene. Democrats and liberals are all using this as an excuse to go for Sarah Palin and her Tea Party groupies and accuse them of encouraging assassination because of the virulence of their opposition to what they see as Democratic excess.

They have conveniently forgotten that during the Bush years, the rhetoric of his opponents was far, far more abusive and vicious. As always in politics, truth is irrelevant. They are all pupils of Goebbels. Tell a lie often and loudly enough and most people will believe it. And if you doubt that this is now the norm in the Western World, just try listening to any public debate on Israel (if you can find one that the opponents of Israel have not eviscerated with threats and violence).

I am no Palin fan, but she responded to the charges. She called them a “blood libel”. The apostles of freedom on the Left immediately jerked to affront and, hoping to hide behind an outward appearance of being sensitive to anti-Semitism, screamed that she had no right to use “blood libel”, a term too

specific in history to be applied here. Well blow me down, if this isn't exactly what most of them do to Israel nowadays. (Again, I have to reiterate, in no way do I oppose criticizing, complaining, or demonstrating against specific actions that Israelis perpetrate. They must be addressed. It is the excessive focusing on Israel, the refusal to see the dangers of her enemies, the lack of fairness and impartiality, as well as the lies that I object to.)

The blood libel actually originated in England (oh, I am so proud). It is based on the ridiculous notion that Jews, forbidden by the Bible and everything they hold holy to drink blood, actually need Christian blood for the four cups of wine at the Passover seder (meal). For it, they need to kill Christian children.

It's a strange world. The idea of drinking blood is actually Christian. The wine the faithful drink at Communion turns into the blood of Christ and the wafer turns into his body. Nowadays most Christians take this symbolically, but in days gone by everyone believed it literally. Another example of how religions can get perfectly normal people to believe the most unbelievable of things.

The first blood libel was in Norwich in 1144, when a young lad named William was found dead and the whole Jewish community was imprisoned, some tortured to death. William was made a saint, as was Saint Hugh of Lincoln in 1255, in similar circumstances. Declarations of neither pope nor king could stop the spread of the libel (any more than the fact that "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" is still regarded not as a crude forgery but true, by the anti-Semitic world).

The last blood libel trial was in Kiev in Russia in 1913, where a young Jewish factory worker called Bayliss was charged and eventually was acquitted by only one vote. But still, whether it is the King of Saudi Arabia, the Russian Duma, the People from Krasnoyarsk, or Hezbollah, it is still being spread today. Over the years countless thousands of Jews in Sephardi and Ashkenazi lands have been killed because of the blood libel. How dare Sarah Palin, her opponents scream, use such imagery?

Alan Dershowitz jumped to her defense and issued a statement declaring that, although it is true the term was originally used against Jews specifically for supposedly drinking Christian (and Muslim) blood, it had now entered the general language as a term applicable to any patently dishonest and dangerous claim. Just as we use the word "ghetto" with no association to its Jewish history.

The enemies of Jews and Israel have never shrunk from purloining terms specific to one situation, like the Holocaust or Apartheid, and joyfully applying it to Israel. But of course when it comes to polemic, accuracy is irrelevant.

The real issue here is not the violence in political discourse. It is the refusal of self-declared rational thinking people to be honest, fair, and objective. Instead everyone seems to resort to the worst kind of propaganda. Truth is irrelevant so long one persuades others to think the way one wants

them to. I have no truck with any politician, regardless of party, nationality, or religion. When truth goes out of the window, no area of human interaction is safe.