

Kahane

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

To me, the name Meir Kahane conjures up an aspect of the Jewish people that I deplore. A racist, violent strain of narrow-minded primitive Jewish jingoism. His coarse, brutish language ignited hatred. And to try to justify him as a proud, committed Jew only makes his poison even more dangerous and morally dangerous.

To generalize and call any group of humans dogs and dirt is what we expect from other uncivilized cultures, not ours. It is unacceptable by any moral standard. After all that is precisely the kind of pathetic stereotyping and racist demeaning that we ourselves suffer from and object to. It may be true that most Palestinians want to see the Jews out of Israel and the West Bank. It may be true that many of them would, given the chance resort to violence and kill innocents. But to say that they are all that way is no different than saying that all Jews love money.

The most reprehensible hatred of Jews, by so many minorities and political extremists like Farrakhan in the USA, should not be an excuse for some of us responding in a similar vein. Hatred breeds hatred, violence breeds violence and prejudice breeds prejudice.

Neither is it an excuse that we are increasingly surrounded by racists on both extremes and at all levels of society, who wish us ill and deny us self-determination – something they would allow to any and everyone else on this earth. Two wrongs do not make a right. The moment we descend to the level of our enemies we lose the moral high ground. And the moment we de-humanize our enemies we end up de-humanizing our own and those who disagree with us within our own societies. It leads to religious fanaticism which I deplore wherever it comes from.

Meir Kahane was an American-Israeli politician and rabble rouser. Kahane started off as a passionate defender of Jews, calling on Jews to defend themselves against their enemies wherever they were. In the USA, Israel and the former Soviet Union. He advocated Jewish power and violence. In 1968, he was one of the cofounders of the Jewish Defense League. He was convicted in New York for conspiracy to manufacture explosives and received a suspended sentence of five years. He left for Israel and in 1971, he co-founded a Right-Wing Political Party Kach. In 1984 he entered the Knesset. In 1988, the Israeli government banned Kach for being racist and “anti-democratic”. He

was assassinated in New York in 1990.

Kahane was typical of a certain gun toting aggressive American mentality that reacted to tensions between the Black and Jewish communities of Brooklyn. When he moved to Israel, he transferred this animus to the Arab communities instead of seeking reconciliation. He wanted to restrict Israel's democracy to its Jewish citizens only, expel Arab citizens, annex the Judea and Samaria and expel its Palestinian population. But what really marked him as a fascist was his use of derogatory and hate language towards the Arab population in general.

Kahane proposed that Non-Jews wishing to dwell in Israel would have three options: remain as "resident strangers" with limited rights, leave Israel with compensation or be forcibly removed without compensation. While he was serving in the Knesset in the mid-1980s Kahane proposed numerous laws, none of which passed, such as forbidding sexual relations between non-Jews and Jews and ending cultural meetings between Jewish and Arab students.

It is a sad reflection on Israeli politics that in the recent years that the Right has become increasingly aggressive and bellicose. Kahanism has become acceptable on the Right both in Israel and the USA. Where papers such as the Jewish Press are openly pro Kahanism and popularize his poisonous ideology. I will concede that the hatred of Jews amongst the Palestinians and their allies has played a part in stoking this hatred. It shows little sign of abating. But returning like with like will solve nothing. And Jewish fascist bullies are still bullies.

One should be very clear. There is a fundamental difference between fiercely defending Israel against its enemies and on the other hand turning into an overtly racist society. When we de-humanize others, we end up de-humanizing our own. We see this actually happening in the increasing conflict within our own communities where extreme religious violence towards those who disagree with them is becoming more common. Who would ever have thought that Haredi men volunteering for army service would be attacked by other Haredis.

The moment you regard a whole nation as evil; the moment you do not differentiate between those who wish to destroy and those who wish to live in peace; the moment you do not differentiate between those who disagree with you peacefully and those who use violence, then you have lost your own humanity and ethical justification.

In Israel, the Otzma party has emerged as the heir to Kahane and his ideas.

It is poisonous. It is the mouthpiece of his fanatical followers. If it were merely that I would have held my peace. But if such a party enters government it will be a disgrace and a blot on Israel's reputation. The recent news is that Netanyahu has encouraged Otzma to join a more moderate Right-Wing coalition with the Bayit Hayehudi party of Naftali Bennet under the banner of the Union of Right-Wing Parties. He is doing this in the hopes of strengthening his own chances of re-election in April. The Union itself is sad proof of how a once moderate tolerant religious party can descend into xenophobic extremes. But that's what often happens when religions dabble in politics.

However much good Netanyahu may have done for Israel (and we will not mention the rest), if this turns out to come to pass, it will be a very dark day for Israel and the Jewish people. I pray it never happens. As the old English saying goes "He who sups with the Devil should have a very long spoon."

A PS on last week's on Abortion. This week by a vote of 53-44 the Senate failed to achieve the 60 votes required to pass a bill called the Born Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act. It would have required doctors to provide medical care to infants born alive after attempted abortions. Without 60 votes, the Democrats would have used the filibuster to prevent its passage. Need I say more?