

Blood Libels

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

On March 22nd 1144, in Norwich, England, Jews were first accused of killing a Christian child because, it was claimed, they needed its blood for the Four Cups of Wine at the Passover Seder. In Gloucester in 1168, in Bury St Edmonds in 1181, Bristol in 1183 and most notoriously in Lincoln in 1255, Jews died as the result of this insane and illogical charge.

In 1171 the Jewish community of Blois in France of about 40 people (at a time when the total Jewish population of France was less than a thousand) were burnt to death singing the *Aleynu* prayer as they perished. The great Rabbeynu Tam instituted a fast day to commemorate the tragedy which for many years was adhered to strictly by the Jews of Ashkenaz.

A hundred years later, a German monk called Rhindfleisch claimed that Jews stole communion wafers from churches to beat until the blood of Jesus flowed. Hundreds of Jews were killed to avenge this 'crime.' All this because of the crazy idea that Jews, forbidden to drink blood, even of kosher animals, could possibly use blood from any source or human flesh in making Matzah.

Rhindfleisch and all the other Blood Libel murderers were simply borrowing Christian imagery. The Christian communion service, the Eucharist, involves the ceremony of eating a wafer to symbolize the body of Jesus and wine to symbolize the blood of Jesus. Until Protestantism which interpreted it metaphorically, all Christians believed a miracle actually took place inside each body when the "host" was consumed. It was (and remains in Catholicism) the doctrine of Transubstantiation. It was a short step to believe that Jews, who rejected Jesus and drank wafers and wine on Passover, were also drinking blood and eating flesh. It just illustrates the utter absurdity of anti-Jewish demonization which has not changed very much since then. It has just taken on different myths and equally illogical lies.

What I find amazing is that despite the kidnapping, rape and murder of our men women and children, nowhere in any major rabbinic authority or source will you find any support for a halachic position that says you do not have to treat non-Jews correctly and morally and according to the law of the land and even, if necessary in contravention of Jewish Law.

Throughout the periods of bloody chaos under both Christianity and Islam

(accepting the differences) whether it was Rabbeynu Tam in the twelfth century, Rav Menahem Meiri in the fourteenth, Rav Lowe of Prague or Rav David Ibn Zimri of Safed in the sixteenth, Rav Yehezkel Landau in the Eighteenth or Rav Yisrael Lipshitz in the nineteenth they all wrote and spoke out against any mistreatment, deception or amorality in dealing with non- Jews. They reiterated our obligations to adhere to 'The Law of the Land.'

One might think the Blood Libel unexceptional, given that this was an era of burning heretics, drowning witches and torturing people to confess almost anything. But the Blood Libel persisted into the twentieth Century. Kishinev in Bessarabia on 1903, 49 Jews were tortured and killed. Many women were raped to death in a frenzied pogrom ignored by the authorities. It too began with the claim that Jews were preparing for Pesach by killing Christian babies.

In Kiev in 1913 the unfortunate Menachem Mendel Baylis, an assimilated Jew, was charged with murdering a Christian child for Jewish religious purposes. Although at the trial he was acquitted, the Jewish religion was not! It will come as no surprise that the Blood Libel is making a big comeback in the Muslim world and is repeated and exaggerated on state sponsored television throughout culturally benighted parts of our planet.

Accusations of Israelis wantonly killing Palestinians, poisoning their wells and murdering their children to use their organs, is just a modern version of the Blood Libel enthusiastically adopted by many University Campuses, the United Nations, the Council of Human Rights and most NGO's. So is the accusation of being betrayers of nations as well as imperialists, tools of the Marxists as well as the Capitalists.

Sadly, we also have those who betray our own values. I was delighted that the Israeli Supreme Court by a vote of 8 to 1 has just banned the extreme Otzma candidate Michael Ben-Ari from standing in the upcoming elections. Because he is guilty of inciting hatred with his anti-Arab rhetoric. For all those who hate Jews, there are others who hold senior positions in the Courts, serve in the Army and Security Forces and are positive proud citizens of Israel.

I only wish Israel were given more credit for the stand of its Supreme Court. I have searched in vain for one example of any, any person punished or excluded from the political process in any Muslim State for inciting hatred against Jews. And the fact that one cannot point to one, is proof, if any were needed, of the irrational hatred we suffer from.

While we have a right to self-preservation and while charity starts at home, we cannot isolate ourselves and we must meet our obligations to society and humanity in general. And I can say categorically that no truly great rabbi has ever said anything to the contrary.

As we begin to prepare for Pesach and are in this sad period of mourning for those millions of Jews killed and tortured over the years in the name of other societies, simply because Jews were prepared to stand up for their identity and values, we really should wonder what disease it is that causes so much of the Western World to return to primitive Jew hatred once again.