

Nous Sommes Juifs (We Are All Jews!)
A Sermon by Rabbi Arnold Saltzman

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The recent shocking events in France, the Bataclan concert, the murders at Charlie Hebdo, the murder of a policeman, the murders of four patrons of a Kosher Market while terrorizing many others, these were followed by an historic reaction in France. 3.7 million people, including 40 world leaders demonstrated in solidarity with the cartoonists at Charlie Hebdo to say: Freedom of Expression in this form will not be eroded under the threat of terror; we are all Charlie; We are all the Police; We are all Jews.

Both President Francois Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls, stated that anti-semitism will not be tolerated. They called out the military to guard all Jewish institutions, schools, synagogues and businesses. For the first time in memory, the Great Synagogue of Paris was closed to protect people from unknown attackers. What is the background of the Jews of France and what is the truth about what is going on?

According to history, Jews settled in France early as the first century BCE, during the time of Roman domination. Mostly this was along the Mediterranean Coast and southern areas of France. The composer, Darius Milhaud makes references to his ancestors dating back to this time, and that the ancient synagogue of Aix-en-Provence was founded during the time of Roman domination.

The Jews of Carpentras were known as the Pope's Jews during the great schism, as the Pope protected them in the time of the dual Pope's to such a degree that Jews had portraits of the Pope in their homes, which they turned around to face the wall on Shabbat.

Under Napoleon, the leaders of the Jewish community were called together to discuss how they could modernize, take surnames, and become more assimilated in exchange for ending the Ghetto, bringing down the walls which separated Jews into their own

communities, locked in at night, and only allowed to leave with permission or by wearing the yellow star or yellow oval. A copy of the proceedings of Napoleon's convocation is in the Library of Congress.

The pendulum of acceptance and rejection has been a historic constant in France, with great strides during the early and mid 19th century, and a return to anti-semitism surfacing again at the time of and following the Franco-Prussian War. Anti-semitism has been generated by bigots as well as philosophers, some clergy and academics. Rooted in a Catholic history which included the inquisition and the burning of the Talmud, France had a split history of great freedoms along with anti-semitism and prejudice. The trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus had people calling 'Death to the Jews' which was observed by Theodore Herzl, and which forced him to conclude that there was no future for the Jews of Europe. This inspired him to conclude that there was a need for a Jewish State.

WWII certainly demonstrated that the virulent anti-semitism which existed now had caused the deaths of 76,000 French citizens turned over to the Nazi's because they were Jews. It is well documented that this was with the assistance of the Vichy government and many French police departments. This was only part of the story as many French Catholics hid Jews, including our own Mina Parsont, who was a hidden child. Following the war when people found out that families had been decimated, they fled in fear. Twin boys I am teaching for Bar Mitzvah, have French ancestry, yet their families want a small private service. Fear and experience are part of the decision, or no Bar Mitzvah at all.

A huge influx of Jews came to France during the early years of Israel. They came from Northern Africa, from Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt. Many of these immigrants already spoke French, and they enlivened the business, educational, and cultural life of France. It was no longer safe in their Northern African homes to remain. France was one destination.

France with the largest Jewish population in Europe now faces a dilemma. In 2013 there were about 450 Anti-semitic incidents. In 2014 that doubled to over 900 incidents, including the recent murders, attacks on a synagogue, and beatings including a rape during this past year. Haaretz news in Israel said that 2015 saw an 84% increase in anti-semitic incidents, including hundreds of violent incidents.

What is different this time? When Benjamin Netanyahu says 'Come to Israel – Israel is Your Home!' Many are listening with 8000 making aliyah last year, it is still less than the expected 15,000. The question needs to be asked will this be the end of the Jews of France? I do not think so. However, I also do not think that anti-semitism will end without some sobering evaluation and real education.

Alan Dershowitz, the outspoken attorney and constitutional lawyer, has written that terror, unfortunately is rewarded. This means that in the current climate, there is less determination to fight even though a state of War has been declared in France following the Bataclan Rock concert massacre, the killing spree at restaurants , a sports stadium and bar, all intended to terrorize the population. Are you terrorized yet?

How many arrests were there in relation to these attacks in the past years? Not that many. That leads me to conclude that the training and attitudes of the French police must be part of the solution. The Policeman killed at Charlie Hebdo was Muslim. The Kosher Market worker that protected many was Muslim. There are two French societies. One believes in the values of France, the others on the right and left wish to turn it into something else. When would we ever say that the political Right in France looks more realistic than the left? Marie Le Pen recently apologized for the statements made about the Holocaust and Jews made by her father. I guess we should be grateful.

We have to know that many Jews will leave France, yet, most will remain, and I emphasize that there is no Nazi program to deport,

injure, or separate the Jews of France. The government and the people can stop this madness, and just as Mina Parson and her sister, Nelee, were protected, I believe that France will protect its Jewish population, having begun a new awareness and program in response to these terrorist actions.

If anti-semitism is not tolerated it may not disappear, nevertheless it will diminish and begin to retreat. In the minds of the people of France the terror at Bataclan, at Charlie Hebdo and the terror of the Kosher shop where Jews were killed for being Jewish, these events are linked. Therefore, the people of France will not tolerate such acts without a strong response. That is why *Nous Sommes Juif* – We are Jews is the motto, and why President Obama this past week said all Americans are Jews in order to put on notice those who would isolate and attack us.

Nevertheless, we have to pay attention to Alan Dershowitz' observation and make sure that Terror is not rewarded. That is the difficult lesson Israel has learned – not to be passive, to be proactive, and even if we cannot stop the haters, killers and terrorists, together we can make it our work to foil their aims and their deeds.

We hope and pray that the long term future will bring back an alignment of French ideals and the reality of living in France without fear of being Jewish. Freedom of religion is essential to being French. In this, France should not capitulate by recognizing groups that have no intention of working for a two state solution. To do so is to reward terror. Due to the actions of Palestinians their reputation has been equated with terror. Surely, they can do something which will improve their reputation such as trading peace for peace. That's a fair trade. What an idea !
Shabbat Shalom