

## Kol Nidre – 5771

Murray Summers tells the following joke: “A male ostrich was chasing a female ostrich. When her capture seemed inevitable, she stopped suddenly and buried her head in the sand, as ostriches are said to do. Immediately, the male ostrich skidded to a stop, looked around in bewilderment, and asked "Where'd she go?"

[Burying one’s head in the sand] ... “comes from the supposed habit of ostriches hiding when faced with attack by predators.... The 'burying their head in the sand' myth is likely to have originated from people observing them lowering their heads when feeding.... The notion is that the supposedly dumb ostrich believes that if it can't see its attacker then the attacker can't see it.”

Scientists, who have watched thousands of ostriches, assure us that the reference to ostriches sticking their head in the ground is indeed a total myth. What should be of far greater concern to us, is that too many people, too many leaders, do in fact stick their heads in the ground, hoping thereby not to confront reality and somehow to avoid serious problems if they refuse to see them. But the advice one receives, at least from business leaders, is that burying one’s head in the sand invites disaster, rather than preventing it.

“Jim Collins is a student and teacher of enduring great companies — how they grow, how they attain superior performance, and how good companies can become great companies. Having invested over a decade of research into the topic, Jim ... authored ... [a book I have looked at], ... *Good To Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... And Others Don't*. [That book has] attained long-running positions on the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Business Week* best seller lists, has sold 3 million

hardcover copies ... and has been translated into 35 languages, including such languages as Latvian, Mongolian and Vietnamese.”

According to the book, after securing the right people, the second principle of success, and the title of chapter 4 is: “Confront the Brutal Facts (Yet Never Lose Faith). In that chapter Collins asks: “Now, you might be wondering, ‘How do you motivate people with brutal facts? Doesn’t motivation flow chiefly from a compelling vision?’ The answer, surprisingly, is, ‘No.’ Not because vision is unimportant, but because expending energy trying to motivate people is largely a waste of time.... If you have the right people on the bus, [the right people leading your organization or institution], they will be self-motivated. The real question then becomes: How do you manage in such a way as not to de-motivate people? And one of the single-most de-motivating actions you can take is to hold out false hopes, soon to be swept away by events.”

Sometimes, it seems easier to stick our heads in the sand and not confront the brutal facts. But I think we are at a point in Jewish history where we had better be aware of some brutal facts and at least find ways in which to discuss them openly and honestly before they overwhelm us. There are many large issues I would like to address on this topic, but I cannot possibly do them justice in one sermon, so I will touch on only three. One area of interest for me is the Conservative Movement, once, but no longer, the largest Jewish religious movement in the United States. We are an aging, shrinking movement. The line between Conservative and Reform practice is blurring and very few Jews seem interested in the philosophical and theological differences. Many younger Jews want to be “just Jewish,” trans-denominational or unaffiliated. Conservative Judaism will not disappear, but our leaders need to confront the brutal facts with more

innovative approaches if we are to keep the middle ground between liberal and very traditional Judaism.

The Lehigh Valley Jewish community is also aging and at best is demographically stable. There are more issues in our three communities than I can address tonight. We have failed our oldest members, who are the largest segment of the Jewish community, notably in the area of senior housing. Our synagogues are facing enormous financial challenges. Just for a little perspective, I spoke with both a representative of the Catholic Diocese and of the Protestant churches in the Lehigh Valley. Because of its structure, it is easier to get numbers from the Catholic community. In the last two years, nine parishes and five parochial schools closed in the Lehigh Valley; nine out of forty-seven Catholic churches which closed in the entire Allentown Diocese. Several Protestant churches have closed or merged as well. Do you really think all the local synagogues can survive? Calls and requests from the unaffiliated are growing. Do you want us – Jewish Family Service and me and the other rabbis and cantors – to serve them exactly like we do members and supporters? The Jewish Community Center has a capital debt of over three million dollars and an annual allocation from the Jewish Federation of the Lehigh Valley of over three hundred thousand dollars. It also has a significant percentage of non-Jewish members. Do you know these brutal facts and what do you think we should do about them?

Are you aware of the poll results that were reported last month (Published 22:15 18.08.10) on *Haaretz.com*? The headline: **“U.S. support for Israel is decreasing, new poll shows ...** – (by [Barak Ravid](#))

American support for Israel is waning, a poll presented to senior Israeli officials in Jerusalem ... revealed. The survey was carried out by pollster and strategist Stanley Greenberg and sponsored by the American

Jewish organization the Israel Project, which organizes and executes pro-Israel public relations campaigns with a focus on North America....

One of the questions that the poll presented was "Does the U.S. need to support Israel?" In August of 2009, [a little over one year ago] 63% of Americans polled said that the U.S. does need to support Israel. In June of this year, 58% of respondents shared the same view; by July only 51% of respondents said the U.S. needed to support Israel."

My main focus tonight is: how concerned are YOU about Israel's image, support and future? Did you see the recent, September 13, 2010 cover of Time magazine which had a star of David made out of flowers and in the middle the title of the cover story: "Why Israel Doesn't Care About Peace." Depending on one's perspective, the article may or may not have been as negative as the cover implies. "Now observing two and a half years without a single suicide bombing on their territory, with the economy robust and with souls a trifle weary of having to handle big elemental thoughts, the Israeli public prefers to explore such satisfactions as might be available from the private sphere, in a land first imagined as a utopia.... Asked in a March poll to name the 'most urgent problems' facing Israel, just 8% of Israeli Jews cited the conflict with Palestinians, putting it fifth behind education, crime, national security and poverty." In a scathing analysis, Daniel Gordis sees the TIME article as yet another attempt to portray Jews, Israelis, as consumed with money. At the same time, the article ignores that a major factor affecting Israelis indifference to the peace process is the apparent absence of any serious partner for negotiations. Israelis, of course, are never able to be very far from conflict. Even the Time story acknowledges the ever present soldiers in the streets and the buyers of beautiful Mediterranean shore apartments still inquiring if there are bomb shelters.

But whatever the Israelis think, are YOU aware of the brutal facts? Do you know about the global effort to deligitimize Israel? Have you heard of the “Global BDS [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions] Movement?”

Posted by StopTheWall on Mon, 06/15/2009 - 11:47

(by: Palestinian Academic and Cultural boycott Initiative - [www.pacbi.org](http://www.pacbi.org))

“On July 9, 2005, ... a clear majority of Palestinian civil society called upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel, similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era, until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with international law....”

Or are you aware that “At a monthly membership meeting of the DC Statehood Green Party on Sept 2 [2010] the membership unanimously endorsed a BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions for Israel) campaign by human rights activists in Washington, DC. “The Green Party of the United States is [a federation of state Green Parties](#), committed to ecology, social justice, grassroots democracy and non-violence,....”

The Green Party received information about the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Non-Violent Campaign from Mai Abdul Rahman, a 46 year old woman from Chevy Chase who is seeking a position on the D.C. Board of Education. According to Ms. Rahman:

“... This non-violent [BDS] campaign offers every American the means to bring peace among Palestinians and Israelis, support our peace efforts in the Middle East, and help protect our troops.... Americans can help advance peace, support our interests by simply refusing to purchase Israeli consumer products such as: Ahava Dead Sea Cosmetics, which operate in the Israeli

settlement of Mitzpe Shalem in the occupied West Bank; Sabra Hummus, owned by an Israeli company that supports the Israeli ... Golani Brigade notorious for human rights abuses in Gaza and the West Bank; ... and Motorola, which arms and assists the Israeli military in the construction of the illegal “apartheid wall” in the West Bank. Americans active in their churches and religious organization can help advance peace, ... by calling their local, regional, and national religious organizations to sanction companies linked to the Israeli occupation by divesting from mutual funds that invest in Caterpillar, Terex, or ITT, General Electric, and United Technologies – All are American companies that benefit from Israeli war crimes and the Israeli occupation.”

And are you aware of the propaganda battles that are taking place on the internet? In addition to all the anti-Israel web sites, there was even a battle on Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia anyone can edit. Several staff members from CAMERA the [Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America] were banned [in 2008] for their effort to fight anti-Israel bias on Wikipedia... The Palestinian advocacy group, Electronic Intifada (EI), ... branded the effort "a plan to rewrite history" and filed a bitter complaint with Wikipedia administrators, resulting in unusually stiff penalties for the CAMERA volunteers involved.

Are you aware of the national meeting of Presbyterian representatives that took place this July in Minneapolis? “Presbyterian leaders strongly backed a proposal ... that included a call to end U.S. aid to Israel unless the country stops settlement expansions in disputed Palestinian territories. But they said the 172-page report, which details their church's approach to issues in the Middle East, was a sincere effort to mend long-standing fractures between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and Jewish groups.

It earned qualified praise but also criticism from pro-Israel organizations, which have long taken issue with various Presbyterian statements on Middle East peace. Church delegates approved the report by an 82 percent vote during the church's general assembly in Minneapolis. ...”

Do you realize that many of the Christians who are Israel’s strongest supporters may have theological reasons that many Jews would find difficult to accept? And how do we deal with the brutal reality and irony that mainstream Christian denominations may follow the Presbyterian’s lead or even jump on the BDS bandwagon?

How do we deal with the brutal reality of world demographics?

(Will Islam Become the Religion of Europe? by [Soeren Kern](#) September 9, 2010 at 5:00 am

<http://www.hudson-ny.org/1536/islam-religion-of-europe>)

Are you aware that on September 9<sup>th</sup>, “During his ... two-day state visit to Italy, Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi declared that ‘[Islam should become the religion of the whole of Europe.](#)’ He also said that Europe's conversion would become a fait accompli ‘when Turkey becomes a member of the European Union.’ Europeans mostly dismissed Gaddafi's proselytizing as ‘[Islamic propaganda,](#)’ and as a ‘non-solicited provocation lacking seriousness.’

Meanwhile, however, Muslim immigration to Europe continues apace, with record numbers of new arrivals daily in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and across Scandinavia.... Gaddafi's vision of an Islamicized Europe is closer to becoming a reality than many Europeans are willing to admit.

According to the [Pew Research Center](#), Islam is already the fastest-growing religion in Europe, where the number of Muslims has tripled over the past 30 years. ... with birth rates that in many cases are double or triple those of native European populations.... Muslim immigrants are clustering in large

European cities, many of which are being transformed beyond recognition by their Muslim inhabitants.

Analyst Ömer Taşpınar, writing for the Washington, DC-based [Brookings Institution](#), estimates ... that Europe's Muslim population currently is growing by more than one million each year. If current trends continue, the Muslim population of Europe will nearly double by 2015, while the non-Muslim population will shrink by 3.5 percent. ... Muslims are already transforming European society in ways unimaginable only a few years ago. In Britain, for example, the government ... acquiesced [in 2008] to adopting [Islamic law](#), with Sharia courts given full powers to rule on Muslim civil cases.... Princeton University's Bernard Lewis once told the German newspaper [Die Welt](#) that "Europe will be Islamic by the end of the century." At the time, European political elites expressed outrage at the prediction. But if current trends persist, Lewis (and Gaddafi) may yet be proven right.” Should it matter to us if Europe has a significant Muslim population? Will it matter to Israel?

I have shared all of these brutal facts without even mentioning the Goldstone Report, the flotilla disaster, let alone Israeli settlement policy. Nor am I here to give you answers tonight. I am here to share a few brutal facts because I do have faith in the future if we act. But I need you to know that it is no longer 1950, or 1967 or even 2000. Whether because of the Madoff scam or indifference or poor planning, Jewish organizations and institutions have disappeared and more will if YOU do not do something to stem the tide. Support for Israel is waning around the world, in the United States, on many college campuses and even among American Jews. These High Holidays should not only be about individual self-evaluation, which requires facing with brutal honesty our own lives, but also about communal

self-evaluation as well. It is time for you to demand more of our leaders, nationally and locally, than in the past. You have to tell us to get our heads out of the sand, so that we may all have faith in the future. I urge you not to delay.

AMEN