

Gratitude

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Elie Wiesel had plenty of reasons to be bitter and angry. He lost his family to the Nazi murderers. He could have devoted his life to revenge or fallen into a deep depression. But he did neither.

On the contrary; I begin with Wiesel because of his inspiring attitude to gratitude. He said, "When a person doesn't have gratitude, something is missing in his or her humanity. A person can almost be defined by his or her attitude toward gratitude."

Three other deep thinkers also focused on gratitude.

Alice is a big fan of Cicero, the Roman lawyer and orator. He is the subject of the next part of Alice's Latin class at Newton South High School. Here is what Cicero said about gratitude: "Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others."

Rabbi Harold Kushner has helped millions of people, including me, deal with tragic events. He says, "Can you see the holiness in those things you take for granted -- a paved road, or a washing machine? If you concentrate on finding whatever is good in every situation, you will discover that your life will suddenly be filled with gratitude, a feeling that nurtures the soul."

Gertrude Stein taught us, "Silent gratitude isn't very much use to anyone." So I recall this morning four events in 2015 for which I am grateful.

The climate change agreement reached in Paris last month has perhaps the greatest potential for securing the very future of humanity.

One hundred and ninety-five countries hammered out an agreement to reduce greenhouse gases

The greatest triumph of the Paris climate agreement is that there is an agreement at all. Unlike previous attempts, the Paris agreement includes the United States, China and India and 192 other nations.

It is this global solidarity that gives the Paris agreement such power and significance. Secretary of State John Kerry said that the agreement sends "a

critical message to the global marketplace” to invest in green energy. That signal springs in great part from the unity achieved in Paris.

The agreement addresses and solves four challenging issues:

One: by how many degrees should the world limit warming?

Two: how quickly will the world abandon fossil fuels?

Three: Who should pay, and how much, to fight climate change?

Four: How often will the nations check and reassess progress on their emission reductions?

Before this deal the agreed level of acceptable global warming was two degrees Celsius. This deal improved on that goal. The Paris agreement states that the parties aim to hold the increase in global temperature to well below two degrees, and also to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees.

To keep warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2100, we must stop emitting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere by 2060, then we have to start pulling carbon out of the atmosphere, which is difficult.

The Paris agreement not only includes the 2060 goal but improves on it. The parties resolved to peak global greenhouse-gas emissions as soon as possible and, after 2050, to require all man-made emissions to be balanced by what is called “removal by sinks.” This refers to oceans, forests and even large scale human negative-emissions technologies.

On the cost issue, the parties agreed on a global commitment of 100 billion dollars per year, but they went even further. The Paris documents also agreed that more than 100 billion dollars will be needed each year and expect all the nations to contribute.

Two mechanisms will be used to measure progress. They are called “stock-taking” and “ratcheting.”

By 2023 all the nations will take stock, announcing how much they have reduced carbon emissions by then. Ratcheting will occur every five years after that, when countries will “update and enhance” their plans.

We cannot be sure the Paris agreement will stop adverse climate change. But it is good news that the entire world will work in unity on that challenge. I am grateful for that.

Pope Francis is the hero of the second event of 2015 for which I am grateful. In October the Pontiff gave an address concerning the fiftieth

anniversary of Nostra Aetate, the papal pronouncement in 1965 that relieved Jews of the burden of centuries of Catholic anti-Semitism. Pope Francis extended that pronouncement further. In his October speech he condemned those who deny Israel's right to exist. He called that denial a modern form of anti-Semitism.

Pope Francis said, "To attack Jews is anti-Semitism, and an outright attack on the State of Israel is also anti-Semitism. There may be political disagreements between governments and on political issues, but the State of Israel has every right to exist in safety and prosperity."

With these words of support for Israel, Pope Francis drew a bright red line between critiquing Israeli policies and critiquing Israel's existence. The former, he said, is legitimate and sometimes necessary; the latter is bigotry.

Pope Francis thus joined other global leaders who likewise defended Israel during 2015. Speeches delivered by two of them are my third and fourth reasons for gratitude.

British Prime Minister David Cameron spoke eloquently in favor of Israel and against anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in a speech in March, 2015. Here is some of what he said:

At a time when once again the Jewish communities of Europe feel vulnerable...

...and when anti-Semitism is at record levels here in Britain...

...I will not stand by.

I will not turn a blind eye to the threats that the community faces.

If the Jewish community does not feel secure then our whole national fabric is diminished.

It is a measure of the vigor of our institutions and the health of our democracy that the Jewish community feels safe to live and flourish here.

It is about the strength of the values that we stand for.

The kind of country we are.

We are going to fight anti-Semitism with everything we have got.

There will be no excuses. No exceptions. No justifications.

Over generations we have built in our country a multi-ethnic, multi-faith democracy – and we are not going to let anyone destroy it.

Our young people should understand the freedoms we have fought to defend.

The right to free speech. The right to demonstrate peacefully.

Democracy. Property rights. The rule of law and equality before the law.

A free media.

And there is no community in our country more proud of these freedoms and more proudly part of Britain than our Jewish community.

You have produced Prime Ministers, industrialists, writers, actors, scientists, inventors and Nobel Prize winners.

All proud to be Jewish and proud to be British too.

You have asked whether the Jewish people in our country will be safe and whether you will be alone.

For as long as I am Prime Minister, you will never be alone.

When people talk of trying to boycott Israel - you will never be alone.

And when Israel is under attack from rockets or terror tunnels - you will never be alone.

I will always stand up for the right of Israel to defend its citizens, a right enshrined in international law, in natural justice and fundamental morality.

With me you will always have a British Prime Minister whose belief in Israel is unbreakable and whose commitment to Israel's security will always be rock solid.

And to you, the Jewish community in Britain, I say this:

For as long as I am Prime Minister, I will stand with you, work with you, celebrate what you do and ensure we do everything possible to keep you safe.

Together, we will beat anti-Semitism.

And we will make sure Britain remains a country that Jewish people are proud to call home – today, tomorrow and for every generation to come.

Like David Cameron in England, over in France the French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, denounced anti-Semitism in a searing speech to the National Assembly about one year ago, soon after the attacks in Paris on the offices of the Charles Hebdo newspaper and then the kosher market. It was an electrifying moment.

In a voice crackling with anger and pain, Prime Minister Valls denounced the rise of anti-Semitism in France. You can watch the speech on YouTube, with subtitles, by clicking on the following link: [Manuel Valls Speech](#)

Here is an excerpt:

I say to the people in general who perhaps have not reacted sufficiently up to now, and to our Jewish compatriots, that anti-Semitism cannot be accepted. The first question that has to be dealt with clearly is the struggle against anti-Semitism. History has taught us that the awakening of anti-Semitism is the symptom of a crisis for democracy and of a crisis for the Republic. That is why we must respond with force.

He listed a series of anti-Semitic outrages in France in recent years even before the kosher market attack: the abduction, torture and murder of a young Parisian Jew in 2006; the murder of three small children and a rabbi by an Islamist gunman at a Jewish school in Toulouse in 2012; and the rape of a young Jewish woman during an anti-Semitic assault on a Jewish home in a Paris suburb just one month before the January attacks. Then he said,

These incidents did not produce the national outrage that our Jewish compatriots expected. How can we accept that in France, where the Jews were emancipated two centuries ago, but which was also where they were martyred during the Nazi Holocaust 70 years ago, that cries of ‘death to the Jews’ can be heard on the streets? How can we accept that French people can be murdered for being Jews? How can we accept that compatriots, or a Tunisian citizen whose father sent him to France so that he would be safe, is killed when he goes out to buy his bread for Shabbat?

There is a historical anti-Semitism that goes back centuries. But there is also a new anti-Semitism that is born in our neighborhoods, coming through the internet, satellite dishes, against the backdrop of

loathing of the State of Israel, which advocates hatred of the Jews and all the Jews.

It has to be spelled out – the right words must be used to fight this unacceptable anti-Semitism. France without its Jews will not be France. This is the message we have to communicate loud and clear.

How can we accept that in certain schools and colleges the Holocaust cannot be taught? How can we accept that when a child is asked, ‘who is your enemy,’ the response is ‘the Jew?’ When the Jews of France are attacked, France is attacked, the conscience of humanity is attacked. Let us never forget that.

The National Assembly rose in a standing ovation when the Prime Minister had finished.

I join them today. I applaud him, and Prime Minister Cameron, and Pope Francis, for speaking up for justice and against anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, which are one and the same.

I am grateful for their words and actions, and for the leaders of the nations working together to combat global climate change.

For these things that happened last year, I am grateful. And I look forward to finding more reasons for gratitude in the year now beginning.

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I concluded the service:

Ribono Shel Olam, the most basic, central reason for gratitude for each of us is this: we woke up this morning to a new day. For this reason, the first prayer in our siddur and the first prayer to be recited each morning is “Modeh ani l’fanechah, Melech chai v’kayam, she’hehchezartah bi nishmati b’chelmah, rabbah emunatechah” – “I am grateful to You, living and enduring King, for restoring my soul to me in compassion. You are faithful beyond measure.”

And let us say, amen.

Shabbat shalom