

### KOL NIDRAY 5779

Nearly a century ago, a violent thug, in a German prison, wrote the following words in his personal manifesto, "Mein Kampf:

In the big lie, there is always a certain force of credibility; . . .the broad masses of a nation are always more easily corrupted . . . in the primitive simplicity of their minds, they more readily fall victims to the big lie than the small lie, since they themselves often tell small lies in little matters, but would be ashamed to resort to large-scale falsehoods.

It would never come into their heads to fabricate colossal untruths, and they would not believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously. Even though the facts which prove this to be so may be brought clearly to their minds, they will still doubt and waver and will continue to think that there may be some other explanation. For the grossly impudent lie always leaves traces behind it . . . , a fact which is known to all expert liars in this world and to all who conspire together in the art of lying."

He was a master liar, because he understood the technique. According to his psychological profile, prepared in 1943 by the United States Office of Strategic Services, "his primary rules were: never allow the public to cool

off; never admit a fault or wrong . . . concentrate on one enemy at a time and blame him for everything that goes wrong; people will believe a big lie sooner than a little one; and if you repeat it frequently enough people will, sooner or later, believe it. “

We've been down this road before. Science is wrong; the world was created in six days, like the Bible says. Climate change is a hoax. There is an international Jewish conspiracy to control the world. You can get AIDS by having casual contact with a gay person. The earth is flat. Most gay people are child abusers. America has a big problem with voter fraud. The news media is the enemy of the people.

History is filled with a disturbing chain of people who claim that all of the ills of society can only be resolved through their leadership. The ultimate result is usually disastrous, as was the case in Jonestown, where over nine hundred people died.

Terror organizations, cults and other groups usually feed off of the charismatic personality of their leader. Now charisma is a good thing. Leadership is a good thing. However, facts remain facts. The world is not six thousand years old. Climate change is real. There is no international Jewish conspiracy to control the world. You cannot get

AIDS from casual contact with gay people. The earth is not flat. Most gay people are not child abusers. Voter fraud is virtually non-existent in America. And, while some news reports are inaccurate, the news is not fake and the media is not the enemy of the American people.

Alexander Hamilton once said “the masses are asses.” Germany, during the Holocaust, demonstrated how even educated, cultured people can be led to change their beliefs, suspend their morals, their values and ethics by someone who knows how to control them, just as a good magician or illusionist controls what we look at.

As a people, whether we are liberals, conservatives or independents, we Jews are the most educated and literate people in this nation. I care deeply about the direction of this country, but I also care about making decisions based on facts, not on hysteria.

One of my favorite stories is about a young Jewish adult, let's call him Isaac, who tells his rabbi that he doesn't believe in God. The rabbi responds, “interesting, have you read the Bible?” Isaac responds “not really, we just went over parts of it when I was in Religious School.”

The rabbi continues, “have you read the classic Jewish theologians, such as Maimonides and Yehuda HaLevi?” Isaac says “no, I haven't.” The rabbi

asks, have you read any of the more modern Jewish writers about God, scholars like Abraham Joshua Heschel, Martin Buber and Mordecai Kaplan?” Isaac says, “actually, I’ve never even heard of them!”

The rabbi concludes: “my friend, I have good news for you. You’re not an atheist; you’re just ignorant!”

During a Shabbat service perhaps twenty five years ago, my favorite atheist, now deceased, stood up during a Shabbat service and stated an objection regarding God. Far from being offended, I welcomed the comments because I knew that he was very well educated about the arguments for and against God’s existence. He knew what he was talking about.

The fact that his studies led him to a different conclusion than mine did not bother me in the least. I was happy that his conclusion was based on a careful analysis, rather than the fluff that passes for many people’s arguments for or against the existence of God or, for that matter, most any other subject.

Where our arguments lead us is sometimes less important than the evidence, the facts, the information which leads us to that conclusion.

I can say that racism is wrong. I can say that anti-Semitism is wrong. In 21<sup>st</sup> century America, these are values our nation has come to accept. However, I cannot say that it is a fact that racism and anti-Semitism are wrong.

Two centuries ago, America and most of the world were very comfortable with those ways of thinking and acting. The facts did not change, our values changed.

Only a few years ago, sexual harassment and abuse was largely tolerated, if not accepted by many in American society. While we still have a long way to go, the past year has witnessed a dramatic change in our society's willingness to accept this behavior. The behavior did not change; our response to the behavior changed.

Striking out used to be a bad thing in baseball. Now, it is accepted as part of a valid strategy for hitting more home runs. Did the facts change? No! Opinions changed and if there is one thing that is certain, it is that those opinions will change again.

Facts, however, are facts. When someone says that "you need a picture ID to buy groceries," that is factually incorrect. When someone says "I did

not have sexual relations with that woman” and he did, that is factually incorrect. When someone says “I didn’t know anything about those emails” and they did, that is factually incorrect.

Facts matter. Truth matters. However, those facts and truths don’t always coincide with the results we want and so we embellish, we spin, we lie.

However, values can be molded. If and when someone turns racism and hatred from a negative value to one which depends on the circumstances; if and when someone can mainstream members of hate groups; if and when someone can undermine any media groups who say something critical as “fake news,” they have changed the playing field.”

The call of the shofar on Rosh Hashana is to return to our values, not those of outside forces, who may not have our interests at heart. We gather as a community on Yom Kippur to reaffirm the values which we stand for as a community. We meditate on their message and we turn, we return . . . we change . . .for the better.

Republicans, Democrats and Independents . . . liberals, conservatives and moderates . . . we all interpret truth in our own way, but we acknowledge

that there is a truth. There is right and there is wrong. It isn't always easy to define them, but they do exist.

On this day, we stand before the Divine Judge who, despite our excuses, our protests, our justifications and our spin, knows the truth. Passion does not, ultimately, trump science, nor does charisma triumph over reason.

May we all be forgiven for our shortcomings. If we are blessed to have our names sealed in the Book of Life this year, may we take advantage of this opportunity to pursue truth, facts and reality. May we use these blessings to better ourselves and our communities. **AMEN**