

Facing Double Standards



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In the lead up to the High Holidays, I've been thinking a lot about double standards. I tend to be allergic to them.

When I hear or see them, I tense up and my fight or flight response is triggered; usually it is more the fight reaction that comes to the fore. Of late, this has been especially true when it comes to Israel.

The way that double standards are playing out when it comes to Israel, and the number of people presenting them, have grown significantly in recent years. I often wonder whether or how people can believe some of the things they are claiming or even say them with a straight face. Israel as an "apartheid state" ... "committing genocide" ... "harvesting organs of Palestinians" ... "the tool of colonialist powers" ... the list goes on.

While I think the expression that there is a grain of truth in every lie has more than a grain of truth in it, and there are often real issues behind every slogan and

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soundbite – they often tend to be more complex and nuanced. And those who use slogans or argue by soundbite have their own agendas.

Do all those making these claims really believe – or understand – what they are saying? My guess is ... no. Not really. There are lots of people just following the crowd, wanting to believe in something and hopping on the bandwagon of a cause that sounds good and justified ... so they can "make a difference." Might they believe whatever it is they are saying or spouting? Yes. But do they really know what they are talking about, context, or what is really going on? Probably not.

Sadly, we live in an age when truth is more flexible, if even aspired to. Facts are inconvenient things that can get in the way of what you want to believe. Narratives and subjective lived experience can get in the way of context and data points more objective measures. This is a time that is ripe for charisma and pathos and manipulation and demagoguery.

Which brings me back to double standards.

During Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur

we are supposed to take stock of our lives. To get beyond artifice and obfuscation and get to the core of our motivations and actions. Why do we do what we do? What should we do better? How can we get there?

Double standards are when one holds different people to different standards. Basically, these are lies one tells others about what is right or just, often claiming the moral high ground (unless one is an outright bigot, of which there are a few).

Hypocrisy is when one holds oneself to a different standard than others. In many cases these are lies one tells oneself about motives or why one behaves in a certain way.

Our goal emerging from this holiday season of self-reflection should be to eliminate or minimize these double standards, out in the world and within ourselves. It is a big challenge and a noble goal for a new year.

Especially this year, I see an additional challenge – how do we apply this when it comes to Israel? And, increasingly, antisemitism?

I want to share 3 thoughts...

One approach is to educate about hate and how it plays out through double standards – and to encourage people to stand up when they see this happening. That's the goal of our Heroes Against Hate program and the rationale for our efforts with the County educating students in Ocean County. Nominate a local Hero Against Hate. See page 3 for information.

I think another important area to call out double standards is with our political leaders and elected officials. There are elections coming up in the US and Israel. Let's hold our leaders more accountable and not make excuses for them.

The other challenge is a bit more difficult and centers around hypocrisy. We often hold Israel to a double standard. We buy into the rhetoric and want to be good citizens and people, so we criticize along with the crowd. Or we, too, think that Israel should behave differently than any other rational state or society. Further, and sadly, many young people have internalized an artificial view of Israel, as if it is some Disneyworld where everything is perfect, and when they discover that isn't the case they feel cheated and become among Israel's harsher critics. These are all a bit hypocritical, since we haven't done our own due diligence to understand what is really going on or put ourselves in the shoes of those living – and dying – in Israel.

That is why we are offering and promoting a special series of resources and programs this fall to learn more about the challenges facing Israel, the context for life in the Jewish state and its dangerous neighborhood, and the choices facing those who live there and care about the country and its people. Please see our ad about schedule and opportunities.

And may we all see a better new year.