



## Liberalism Is Not Our Religion

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Aryeh Rubin

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I believe in equality for all. I support civil rights, women's rights, gay rights, universal health care, feeding the poor, social justice, separation of church and state, access to education, diversity, the arts, animal rights (I have not eaten meat or poultry in 33 years), and more. I marched against the war in Vietnam, protested the bombing in Cambodia, and advocated for affirmative action.

In terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I met with the Palestinian leadership, including Yasir Arafat, as part of my peace activism. I believed, up to a point, in Oslo, and maintain that while a failure, it was not a mistake. I am hopeful that the two sides will keep talking until there is a deal.

Still, I have not elevated liberalism to the status of religion. I do not blindly follow the liberal agenda and my convictions take a backseat to my commitment to the well-being of Israel and the Jewish people. Unfortunately, this is not the case for the majority of U.S. Jews, who have substituted liberalism for Judaism and whose actions are often governed by misguided priorities. In lieu of traditional Jewish belief or value systems, many American Jews have adopted what is essentially a theology of universalism and tikkun olam, or social justice. In doing so, much of American Jewry has essentially become de-Judaicized.

When the lives of my family, my friends, and my people are in jeopardy because we are Jewish, when there are very real threats to the continued existence of the State of Israel and by extension the Jewish people, when our enemies have declared that their intention is to annihilate us and are acquiring tools to this end with the world standing by, then my pro-humanist beliefs give way to my commitment to the sanctity and security of Israel and the Jewish people.

American Jewry's loyalty to the liberal political dogma is disturbing when things are going well for the Jews. But when things are not going well, this behavior is self-destructive and helps our enemies.

The future of Israel is at stake. Not only is Israel threatened by the soon-to-be nuclear Iran and its satellites, but its right to exist is being questioned by a virulent, global delegitimization campaign that is being led and energized by the academic left and supported by the elements of the liberal

wing. In not speaking out, many Jews are, in effect, endangering Israel and abdicating their responsibility as Jews.

Many American Jews have become distanced from Judaism's larger core values and are uncomfortable making moral judgements concerning the distinction between good and evil, which is an inherent part of our heritage. In addition, many are uncomfortable with the notion of the exceptionalism of Israel, and even with the exceptionalism of the U.S.

Historically, the vulnerability of diaspora Jews led many to make a habit of ingratiating themselves to their non-Jewish hosts. For some Jews, this knee-jerk accommodation, while no longer a survival technique, seems to have become integrated into the genetic code — hence, the quintessential galut (diaspora) Jew. History has shown us over and over again that this approach is ultimately unsuccessful. Witness the tragic outcomes of previous golden ages of Jewry in Spain, France, and Germany. We must not allow these genes to express themselves; we must show strength and become proactive.

When our ancestors were permitted to exit the ghetto, they gravitated towards those expressing universalist ideas, which were most often part of the ideology of the left. It was from the universalists that they experienced the first indications of tolerance. It's therefore not surprising that they proceeded to derive intellectual sustenance and a modicum of physical security from the left, hence our historic loyalty. But today it is the American right that has evolved to the point where it is much more philo-Semitic and more pro-Israel than the left. The hawks and the evangelicals among them are the most fervent supporters of the State of Israel. From the perspective of our own survival, we must gravitate to, and work with, those who wish us well and support our standing in the world.

Despite the pacifist attitude espoused by many children of Holocaust survivors, despite the anti-war rhetoric spouted by many of the Jewish baby boomers, and despite what for many of us is an innate opposition to war, ultimately it is only the strength of Israel that earns us the respect of our enemies. It is not our intellect, not our Nobel prizes, not our supposed financial acumen. As the Italian-Jewish intellectual Alain Elkann noted, the only antidote to Auschwitz is Israel — and its military might. As such, Israel is fighting not only for itself, but for all Jews. I would argue that by extension, it is fighting for the well-being of the Western world and its values.

Liberal Jews should be making the case for Israel as a bastion of liberal values. Israel is the only country in the Middle East with a free press. It is the only true democracy in the Middle East, with equal rights for women and, in practice, a refuge for gay Arab men from neighboring countries. In Israel there are no honor killings, no stonings, no capital punishment, no cutting off of the hands of thieves.

Throughout our history there have been Jews who have opted out, and this is an acceptable reality. What is not acceptable is that today, entire legions of Jews, in the name of liberalism, are in effect working against the survival of the Jewish people, whether out of ignorance, different priorities, or a lack of understanding of the global perspective.

Confronted with both old and new enemies seeking to destroy us, and vilified by anti-Zionism — anti-Semitism in new clothes — the majority of American Jewry needs to look in the mirror, re-examine its convictions and make a shift.

Abiding by one's political philosophy, values and convictions is a noble way of living — but not when they are coming to chop your head off. At that point, and I believe we are there now, one's moral and political compass needs to revert to survival mode.

*Aryeh Rubin is the managing director of The Maot Group, an investment boutique in Miami, and president of the Targum Shlishi Foundation.*