

There are some musicals that just stick in your head. You'll be in a special place and someone will say something that all of a sudden brings a song to mind. Just ask our kids: Matt and I will hear a word and we will break out in song, totally embarrassing our children. But then again, I think that's our mission in life, to find new ways of embarrassing our children.

*Fiddler on the Roof* - now, there is a musical that causes most of us to break into song. *Jada, Paul, and Cantor Reinwald* shared some of their favorites and Jerry, her favorite quote.

Throughout the musical, Tevya gives us so many words of advice, but none so powerful as when he speaks to God and says: "I know, I know. We are Your chosen people. But, once in a while, can't You choose someone else?"

Tevya, and the whole community of the small Russian shtetle of Anatevka, know how hard it is to be the chosen people. The chosenness during the time of the pogroms of Eastern Europe, the anti-Semitism of every age, including today, can cause anyone to ask, 'why should I be Jewish?' It's so hard.

Each time I meet with a student studying toward conversion, I ask, 'why do you want to be a part of a people who have been persecuted generation after generation?' This is even a question we have to ask ourselves – why do we remain a part of a people who are persecuted, teased, ridiculed, generation after generation? In our world in which religion seems to be taking a back seat to all the other commitments of our day, wouldn't it just be easier to turn our backs and walk away from the name calling, the stereotypes and challenges of being a Jew?

But we don't! We don't walk away, we don't turn our backs. We might hide for a bit or hope that the storm will just blow over, but ultimately, we as the Jewish community do not turn our back on our religion, our people, our identity. Being Jewish is not just a religion, it is being a part of a people, religiously and culturally.

Unfortunately, the waves of anti-Semitism are growing in our community and the time is for us to stand up, take notice and speak out.

Israel Apartheid Week has been a regular event on college campus' for the past seven years, including at the University of California, Irvine. This movement began in Toronto and has featured extreme anti-Israel rhetoric, including accusations of Israeli racism and apartheid. There have been renewed movements to boycott, divest and sanction Israel and Israeli products throughout the country and there are allegations that Israel is committing war crimes and genocide against the Palestinian people. During the Israeli Apartheid week, anti-Israel and anti-Semitic speakers are brought to the campus' to spew lies and create a very tense atmosphere for students, especially our Jewish students. Thankfully, as in here in Orange County, the Jewish Federation has partnered with Hillel to support our Jewish students on campus during the week and to promote Israel during a separate week of events.

But imagine if you will, having to be a student walking through your college campus with walls and pictures of hate against not only Israel but against Jews. How would you react? What would you say? How would you feel? Our college students have to experience this each year, and it is not only here in Irvine, but it is starting to show up on more and more college campus' throughout the country.

We must ask ourselves – how are we preparing our high school students for these years when they will be away from home and have to confront these critical identity issues on their own? Will we encourage them to just be silent or will we encourage them to embrace who they are as Jews? Sure, it's easy to be silent, but is this the response that we should give? Silence can suggest acceptance. It's not to say that our students should confront those on the college commons, but rather we need to encourage our students to embrace their Jewish identity, join communities such as Hillel and Jewish organizations on campus, so that they know that they are not alone and so that they can collectively speak out against those who speak about hate.

Anti-Semitism has also crept into an effort for a ballot proposal in San Francisco and a discussion for one in Santa Monica. In May, backers for the ban of circumcision on minors, received enough votes to put it on the ballot. While the request has since been denied by Judge Loretta Giorgi, the publicity that came forward regarding this ban were reflections of anti-Semitic propaganda from World War II. Lloyd Schofield and Matthew Hess, the bill backers, call themselves human rights activists. In an article in the Los Angeles Jewish Journal, Hess was quoted as saying, "We do what we do because we strongly believe that no one has the right to cut off part of another person's body without their consent. We believe that amputating part of a boy's penis is no different in principle than amputating part of a girl's vulva. If you ask any activist in Africa why she is trying to stop the practice of female genital mutilation, I suspect that her answers would be very similar to ours."

But when confronted about the charges of anti-Semitism, Hess said, "I might understand such an accusation if our proposed legislation applied to everyone except Jews. That would be like saying we care about all boys except the Jewish ones."

However, in an issue of a comic book produced by Hess and Schofield, a blond haired, blue eyed muscular super hero, complete with cape, called Foreskin Man, was there to defend a small baby from his parents and the evil Monster Mohel, drawn as a dark-haired, wild-eyed man toting glistening scissors. Baby Glick is saved from his father who insists on the Bris while his non-Jewish mother, damsel in distress image, is locked in her bedroom so as not to disturb the ceremony. Foreskin Man sweeps in, saves Baby Glick and ends up taking Baby Glick away from not only his father, but his mother and entire family so that he can be raised in peace and fully intact by the Inactivist (sic) Underground.

So much is wrong with this comic book but especially the portrayal of the hero and the mohel, drawn just as the propaganda posters of 1939 Eastern Europe.

Judge Giorgi ruled that this ballot measure could not remain on the ballot since it is "expressly pre-empted" by state law because the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that "circumcision is a widely practiced medical procedure" and California law prohibits local governments from regulating medical procedures. (Intermountain Jewish News, Dan Klein; August 5, 2011) However, just the nature of the energy that went toward supporting this ban should cause us to pay attention to the nature of public opinion and misrepresentations of Jews and the Jewish community. We would be foolish to think that misrepresentations of Jews in words and pictures no longer exist. We would be irresponsible to not notice that there are those in the world who still consider Jews as having horns.

Locally, we have become more aware of anti-Semitic acts against individuals. The beginning of this summer, the Anti-Defamation League posted reports about recent events here in Orange County.

A young Jewish boy came home from playing in a local park claiming that he had been beaten up by two brothers. The boy's mom took her son to the boys' home and tried to speak to their mother, but she refused to talk to her. The victim's mom contacted the school and asked the principal to try and resolve the issue. The night the principal got involved, the father of the two brothers went over to the Jewish family's home and started screaming profanity and anti-Semitic slurs. The Jewish father tried to calmly speak to the father but was met with more slurs. Unfortunately, the brothers continued to pick on the young Jewish boy and made fun of his Star of David. All of this came to a point that the boy was afraid to leave his house. Again, he was beaten up by the brothers so badly that the parents called the police. Later, as the family left their home by car, the neighbor followed them, pulled up beside them and yelled anti-Semitic slurs. The Jewish family pulled over to the side of the road and the father got out of the car to confront his neighbor. The neighbor attempted to attack him with a hammer while screaming anti-Semitic and racist slurs and making other statements that identified him as a white supremacist. He left before police arrived and was sought by law enforcement.

Kevin O'Grady from the ADL contacted the family and assured them that the ADL would work to protect them. He contacted the police to follow-up on the search for the attacker, he contacted the hate crime unit of the Victims' Assistance and the family was assigned an advocate who would work with them to get a restraining order and advocate for them as the process moves forward. But the family was so distraught by these events that they decided the best solution for them was to move out of state to be near extended family. The move was costly for this family whose father is a disabled vet of the Iraq War and the Jewish community rallied together to help them with their moving expenses.

There is so much that is shocking and sad to this story. The idea that a family would be pushed so far as to have to move from their home is shocking and heartbreaking. But this is not the only incident recently in Orange County. There was another Jewish boy bullied and beaten so badly he left school; a Jewish high school student was bullied and received death threats; a 6th grade girl in Long Beach was shown a picture of Hitler and told it was the last thing she would see before she died; our children are being called anti-Semitic names and pennies thrown at them so other students "could watch the Jews pick up the pennies."; and a Jewish middle school student in Villa Park was kicked to the ground by a fellow student and had his glasses knocked off when he refused to take a bible from an evangelist outside of the school. And finally a local business man, whose wife's family has been a part of the Santa Ana business community for over 100 years, and he, a son of Holocaust survivors, was likened to Hitler and accused of engaging in Ethnic cleansing just because he strives to reawaken a sleeping city to the potential of business and community growth. And when the city official who used these heinous slurs on public record issued her inadequate apology, it was met by other city officials with, 'she's apologized, let's move forward' and voted that there should be no consequences for her actions.

Unfortunately, anti-Semitism is on the rise. The most recent ADL audit, reports of anti-Jewish vandalism, harassment and physical assaults rose 8% in California. This is the first time we have seen an increase in anti-Semitism, not only in California, but in the United States since 2004. And we have a choice, to lower our eyes and pay no attention to it or to stand tall and speak out. No one said that it is easy to be Jewish. No one said that we would never be met with racial slurs and hate speech. But no one said we could just lower our eyes and walk away as if nothing was wrong.

Over Rosh Hashanah and last night, I shared with you what it means to be a part of peoplehood and the responsibilities we share in creating our future. We have outlined ways in which we are going to strive to be a more compassionate and caring congregation. We have asked the important question regarding why it is so important for us to be together as a community and a synagogue family. But we must also examine how we might be able to be more visible and vocal as Jews in our community and not hide our identity when outside the safety of our home and congregation. We must consider how, as the Jewish community, we might be more active and present outside, out there. And how we might also remember that we not only stand up against hate crimes in our own community, but also speak out against hate crimes against others, such as that which took place on Sunday, October 2. A mosque in the Israeli Galilee Arab village of Tuba Zangaria, is burned by Israelis with the words, “price tag” and “revenge” on the walls, we cannot turn our backs when our own people engage in such hate crimes. It would be hypocritical for us to call out against anti-Semitism and not call out that these actions in Israel against Israeli Arabs is just. No, these too are hate crimes and I am ashamed that fellow Jews would engage in such an act.

We have opportunities to stand together as a community and with other communities.

Just a few weeks ago, on September 10, Temple Beth Sholom created and facilitated an Evening of Light and Hope. It was meant to be an evening in which we remembered the 10th anniversary of 9/11, but it became so much more. Before I left for Sabbatical, I sat down with Soni Sanberg, our Worship Vice President, and discussed with her my vision of an evening during which we would not only remember 9/11 but that we could take this 10 year anniversary and begin the process of moving forward and journeying toward a light of peace for all people. From there, our Worship Committee took this vision and created an evening that not only fulfilled the vision I first set forth, but grew it to that which touched so many. I cannot even begin to express my gratitude to the Worship Committee for coming together to create that evening of Light and Hope.

It was during that night that we invited participation from First Christian Church of Orange, Church of the Foothills, churches from the Orange Diocese, I Am Jerusalem, Pacifica Institute and Temple Beth Tikvah. Each participant brought with them music and reflections that led us through the themes of remembrance, peace and our journey forward. And while the evening was carefully and thoughtfully constructed, none of us who shared reflections knew what the other would say. Yet, as the evening progressed each reflection shared seemed to build on the one before – it became a flowing conversation of unity and joint spirit. And when Father Al Bacca reminded us that the next day, the memorial in New York City would have no clergy participation because it was thought that it would complicate it too much, we shared

that by our participation together, in one place was not complicated but rather it was harmonious. And while there are issues that each of us might disagree upon, the evening showed us that it is possible to come together and talk, share, feel safe in disagreeing but always returning to the knowledge that every person should be treated with dignity and respect no matter their race, religion, color, sexuality or gender.

While I traveled in Jordan this summer, as we were hiking out of the canyons in Petra, I came across a most unusual sight. There, in a rock, in the 118 degree heat, grew two completely different trees. Two trees from one rock! It's the picture you have on the front of your bulletins. How was it that these two completely different species could co-exist in one rock? How could these very different trees find sustenance in one rock, from one source?

These two trees in one rock inspired me. If they could survive and thrive, why is it that two different people, three different people, all different people, cannot thrive in one world? I understand that there are issues that are complicated and cannot be solved in a short amount of time, let alone in the span of generations. I understand that issues like those that face Israelis and Palestinians is so complicated that we as Americans, try as we might, want to be arm chair politicians and suggest exactly what we think should be done to create peace in the Middle East. I understand that we cannot do this. But while there are so many complicated issues in our world and in our lives, it is not so complicated to suggest that the least that we can do is to thrive on the one rock that we all live and that one rock that sustains us.

I am not suggesting that we can create peace and bring the Messianic era to our lifetimes today – ok, it would be an awesome thought to think that we could – but what I believe and know that we can do is not turn a blind eye when someone is bullied, when someone is called names, when someone is tortured to the edge of having to move.

It is NOT easy being different, it is NOT easy being a Jew, but we are and each of us should celebrate and embrace that and understand that each of us has the responsibility to give our children the message that they should be proud of being a Jew. Each of us have the responsibility to educate not only our children, but ourselves more about what it means to be Jewish so that rather than shirking away when someone challenges how they read the Bible that we can say with confidence what it is that we believe for ourselves. We cannot expect our children to carry the burden alone. We cannot expect our children to defend Jewish peoplehood if we ourselves are not willing to do so first. If we don't stand up for Jewish peoplehood and equality for all people, than our synagogue, our Jewish community, our people will be gone in a few short generations. The demographers have shown this and we know it. If we pass the responsibility only on to the next generation without taking it on for ourselves, than the next generation will say, 'if you didn't stand up and say you were a Jew, why should I?'

We are the beginning of a new year with new opportunities. We see that there is a resurgence of hate in our world. But we have the opportunity and the responsibility to act, to learn and to speak. If you hear someone bully another or call them names, speak. If you are not sure how to answer someone who tells you your religion is wrong, then learn and ask so that you may teach. And when you walk out the doors of the synagogue today, have hope that there are two trees living in one rock in the desert, the same desert where Moses and the Israelites walked through on the way to the Promised Land, that there is hope and there are

Two Trees – One Rock  
Yom Kippur Morning, 5772

Rabbi Heidi M. Cohen

opportunities to live in peace with our neighbors near and far. And may we know that it is through peoplehood that we are made stronger, not only for our generation today, but for God willing, generations to come.