

**1st Day Rosh Hashana 5768**  
**Rabbi Heidi M. Cohen**

*Al Tifrosh Min HaTzibor* - Not turning our back on our community

As Jews, we have lived in every country throughout the world. We have embraced each culture and we have empowered ourselves to be productive members of each people we find ourselves among. We live under every possible condition and embrace the ultimate goal of daily survival while coping with the challenges of diversity and misunderstanding. As Jews, we either choose to blend into our surroundings, assimilating into the local culture while still maintaining our religious autonomy discretely or openly display our Jewish heritage through our dress or how we adorn our bodies. We choose how we label ourselves publicly and privately.

However, there are times when we are labeled, much to our chagrin, by others who misunderstand or misrepresent our identity. Think about a time when you were labeled, either as a Jew, or female or male. Maybe you were labeled in school as a jock, nerd, preppy. Maybe you were labeled at work as the 'go to' person who will always say yes to that extra task, or labeled as the gullible one who will believe anything someone tells you. How did it feel to get the label and did you feel it was true to who you are? What about that time that you were labeled with a derogatory name, how did you feel about that?

Growing up in a small community outside of Denver, with five Jewish kids, two of whom admitted it, I was labeled all sorts of names I cannot repeat from here on the bima. These labels hurt and seemed unfair. I was mislabeled because no one really knew what a Jew was and they kept looking for my horns. Thank you Michelangelo for creating the statue of Moses with beams of light coming from his head, that when carved in stone can only be represented by what seem to be two horns coming from his head.

What hurt more about these labels, however, were not so much the words themselves, rather, it was that those who were around and heard the names being thrown did nothing to stop it. They chose to turn their ear and ignore it. And honestly, short of socking the bully in the mouth, I don't know what I should have expected.

But today, here we are, adults who are still being labeled and still misunderstood. But as adults, we now **can** do something about it, to follow the one line dicta from Rabbi Hillel, *al tifrosh min hatzibor* – do not turn our backs on our community. From within our own community, such as the events at the **University of California, Irvine**, to recent developments in the readmittance of certain **Latin liturgy** into the Catholic services, and finally, to the Sudan and **Darfur**, there still remains misunderstanding and mislabeling. Ultimately, our question is, what do we do? How do we handle it?

Since 2001, the Muslim Student Union has organized dinners and events honoring speakers who speak out against the Jewish community and Israel.

Along with bringing speakers to campus, many of whom are anti-Semitic, the group produces "Al Kalima," the UCI Muslim student paper. In some of the editorials found in the paper, there is

justification for the use of terror as it is used in defeating Satan by Allah. The paper states that the only way to deal with Zionists is by force and that the entire community should participate in jihad which will have two blissful outcomes – either victory and the establishment of justice or the reward of martyrdom and Paradise.

The past few years, the Muslim Student Union has organized what are termed, “weeks of hate.” These weeks were titled “Holocaust Memorial Week” in reference to the situation in the Middle East regarding the Palestinians and “Israel: Apartheid Resurrected.” These events feature speakers such as Imam Abdul Alim Musa, the founder of Sabiqun – Vanguard of Islam, a movement that propagates a radical and anti-Semitic ideology. This movement builds mosques in major cities such as Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Washington DC, in poorer neighborhoods where they claim to provide a service to the communities. When [Imam Alim Musa spoke in Baltimore](#) he said, “Islam went everywhere in the [ancient] world...so why can’t Islam take over America...we are on the right road.”

While at UCI this past May, Alim said,

Who ran the slave trade...who funded [it]? You’ll study and you will find out: the Jews...It was the Jewish bankers...in Vienna, with pockets full of money, funding and insuring, that’s who did it.... you can’t tell us about no holocaust. Between the African Americans and the Native Americans, everybody else’s stuff was small potatoes.

Other speakers at this recent event in May, included Mohammed Al-Asi, a radical Washington DC based Islamist known for his pro-Iranian and pro-Hezbollah positions; and Rabbi Yisrael Dovid Weiss, a spokesman for Neturei Karta, an anti-Israel fringe Jewish sect. Neturei Karta are a black hat miniscule group on the fringes of Judaism who advocate for the dismantling of the State of Israel until the arrival of the Messiah. This group supports anti-Semites and Islamic extremists and are known for meeting with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.<sup>2</sup>

This year’s event, “Israel: Apartheid Resurrected” was held in the amphitheater in the center of campus. A sixty foot replica of the security fence was erected with anti-Israel slogans and misinformation, such as claims that Zionists are racists and that Jews control the United States government; Hamas are freedom fighters, not terrorists and that Israelis are the new Nazis. Information was distributed suggesting a UC Intifada detailing how students could help Palestine.

One would most likely not be shocked if these events were happening in a European college campus, or among the students at an Iranian college – from the ‘killing of Mickey Mouse’ on Hamas-sponsored television we know how the propaganda machine works in these countries.

The question that first comes to mind is, how can such an event take place on a college campus in **this** country? Where is the university administration and why are they allowing this to take place? The answer is simple, the First Amendment rights of our Constitution that prohibits the government from suppressing speech of individuals, groups or organizations. Part of what makes this country great is that we **are** allowed to express ourselves without fear of control by the

government. Hateful speech is protected, yet speech that is criminal in nature such as harassment, threats or intimidation are not. But as we can see, this is a fine line.

Public Universities cannot prohibit protests or rallies even when the content offends administration or others on campus. And as Chancellor Michael Drake of UCI has reminded gatherings within the Jewish community over the past couple of months, there is little that the administration can do except restrict the time, place and manner of the event. While he is opposed to hate speech it is the right of the individuals to have freedom of speech as long as it does not turn violent.

This has been a hot issue over the past few months and there have been numerous calls on Chancellor Drake to condemn these events and prevent future gatherings. However, time and time again, Chancellor Drake will only state that he must defend the freedom of speech and ensure that all groups are given equal opportunity to secure the over 1000 speakers who participate in on-campus activities.

This past spring, in an effort to support tolerance and diversity, Chancellor Drake and community leaders joined in a rally affirming UCI's diverse spiritual and religious practices and showing respect for the right of free expression.

Unfortunately, this affirmation does not extend unilaterally throughout all college campuses. Recently, the University and College Union in Britain voted in favor of a boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions and scholars. The motion stated that the passivity or neutrality of these Israeli institutions and scholars is not acceptable at a time when Palestinians are not able to receive a full education. The UCU condemns Israeli academics for "complicity in the occupation" of Palestine and the members are urged to "consider the moral implications of existing and proposed links with Israeli academic institutions."<sup>3</sup>

Students and faculty within our Orange County Jewish community are faced with these weeks of hate and find themselves often alone and isolated from the rest of the community. Much of the Orange County Jewish community is unaware of the events happening at UCI and now in other University of California campuses, and it is easy to disconnect since many of us are not active in college life. However, if we remain uninformed or passive with these instances of mislabeling and hate speech, do we become complacent to other forms of misrepresentation? We must become involved, for our sake as well as for others. *Al tifrosh min hatzibor.*

In July, Pope Benedict XVI, in response to numerous conservatives, agreed to the return of the Latin Mass, which among its other provisions, includes the prayer for the conversion of the Jews in the name of taking them out of the darkness. The church has made great strides over the past four decades since the Second Vatican, in building relations with the Jewish community and fighting against anti-Semitism, but this decision imperils this progress.

Abraham Foxman, the National Director of the Anti-Defamation League stated:

The main reason to be disturbed by the return of this Vatican-sanctioned prayer is that it threatens to undermine the conceptual underpinnings of so much that has happened over 40 years

– Pope John Paul II's eloquently expressed statement that Judaism is "the elder brother" of Christianity; that it has a legitimacy and validity of its own; that it has an unbroken covenant with God. It is this conceptual breakthrough – one that has provided the framework for all the specific, positive steps to emerge – that is now being challenged.<sup>4</sup>

For the past forty years, relations between the Jewish and Catholic community have grown in very positive steps including the significant action of the establishment of diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. And these positive relations are evident in the number of Interfaith programs here in Orange County, and directly between the Archdiocese of Orange County and Temple Beth Shalom.

Unfortunately, anti-Semitism is still found at high levels in European countries, especially in Poland and Spain, and can be attributed to the survival of old church prejudices and teachings. The reintroduction of these prayers could give strength to those who are fighting against better relations between Jews and the Catholic Church.

The challenge is, how are we to respond to this decision? As a people, we have been on the receiving end of those who would tell us how to pray on many occasions during our history. It is as wrong for us to tell another what or how to pray as it was for our oppressors to do it to us. However, through communication and understanding of what is happening within the church and our community, are we able to continue to promote positive relations between our Catholic and Jewish Communities.

In response to concern from the Orange County Board of Rabbis, Father Al Baca, the Director of Inter-religion for the Diocese of Orange sent the following message: Pope Benedict has decreed for the Catholic Church, the normal use of the Mass as it was celebrated before 1962 alongside the Mass as it is celebrated today. Any prayers of invocation thought offensive to the Jews and others were removed, especially prayers during Holy Week which were amended. Pope Benedict does not want to damage Catholic/Jewish relations in any way. He has stipulated that any prayers in the old Missal offensive to the Jews or other religions are not to be revived with the normal use of the Latin Mass.

On Good Friday, the Church prays for all people and groups. In the Latin Mass the prayer for the Jewish people began, "Let us pray for the perfidious Jews..." The Church has deemed now that the specific prayer should read, "Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the Word of God, that they may continue to grow in the love of His name and in faithfulness to His covenant. Almighty and Eternal God, long ago you gave Your promise to Abraham and his posterity. Listen to Your church as we pray that the people You first made Your own may arrive at the fullness of redemption."<sup>5</sup>

Every year, our congregation joins with the Archdiocese of Orange County as TBS hosts the Jewish-Latino Seder. It is during this event that over 200 people come together and share our rich traditions and culture. It is an opportunity that we as the Jewish community are able to educate our Catholic friends about our history that also blends into their beginnings. We are blessed to have such an open relationship with our Catholic community. Over the past nine years, I have been honored to be a part of an open Catholic Jewish Dialogue with clergy and laity

from the Orange County Catholic and Jewish community. It is through these events and many others that our communities chose to never turn our backs on one another and continue to build bridges of understanding and respect.

It is through concern, education and information that we do not turn our backs on our community. *Al tifrosh min hatzibor.*

Finally, we are well aware of the promise we made in light of the Holocaust : *Never Again.* Never again would we allow senseless genocide to occur throughout the world. Never again would we stand silent and turn our backs on those who are unjustly persecuted. Never again would we say, “it’s not my problem.”

In October 2004, Rabbi Harold Schulweiss of Valley Beth Sholom in Encino, established the Jewish World Watch, challenging the Jewish people to uphold the promise of never allowing for genocide again, especially in the face of the inhumanity being perpetrated by human beings against others.

Jewish World Watch is a collaboration of Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform Synagogues to never stand idly by observing acts of inhumanity.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, the Jewish World Watch mission is to educate others and ourselves about these atrocities and take action to promote caring for the victims of these senseless crimes.

Temple Beth Sholom has joined 52 Southern California synagogues in educating ourselves and speaking out against injustice in the Darfur region as well as other humanitarian and global crisis projects. Many of us have purchased bracelets and shirts to publicly promote understanding of these injustices and hence provide financial support for education and victim aid. Many of us have signed petitions or sent postcards to our leaders in government asking for congressional support for global understanding and awareness. And today, you have received booklets from Jewish World Watch with special readings and action steps that we continue to take in order that we continue work to fulfill our mission of *al tifrosh min hatzibur* – to not turn our backs on our community, in this case, our global ‘human being’ community. Please, read the stories and poetry. There are a list of projects in the back such as support for Solar Cookers, Medical Clinics and Water Projects, as well as supporting Grief Counselors. Let us become advocates and not turn our backs on the world community.

Whether it is locally in our Universities where students and faculty face hate speech and programs that mislabel and misinform, or among a related religion where old traditions are resurrected but old wounds are reopened, or globally as we are encouraged to combat genocide and global victimization, each of us are implored to educate ourselves regarding communal issues, speak out either at public gatherings or by contacting our congressional leaders and continue to dialogue with our community civil and religious leaders.

I invite each of you to learn more about Jewish World Watch by visiting our TBS Website and clicking on the Jewish World Watch link. I urge each of us to attend programs such as the ones promoted by the Muslim Student Union on the UCI campus, hear what they are saying and support our Jewish students and faculty in their pro-Israel programs. I invite us as a congregation

to remain a vocal entity within our Jewish and Interfaith Community by continuing to participate in our interfaith programs, including the Thanksgiving Interfaith Choral Festival and our hosting of the Jewish-Latino Seder at Passover. I challenge each of us to continue to stay informed and speak out when an individual is mislabeled or misrepresented.

Remember the labels that have been given to you? Remember how it felt when someone misrepresented who you are? Now is the time to stand up for who you are as an individual and who we are as a community. Now is the time to not remain silent in the face of someone misrepresenting another in our presence. Now is the time to not turn our ear but rather, listen to what is being said and ask, “what can I do to support another? How can I ensure to never turn my back on another – *al tifrosh min hatzibur?*” May each of us hear the call of the community to listen to what is being said, to stand up for those who are being mislabeled and misrepresented, and to fight against injustice even by simply staying informed and connected. May this new year bring us closer to our community and may we always enjoy the strength in standing together.

1- [http://www.adl.org/israel/alim\\_musa.asp](http://www.adl.org/israel/alim_musa.asp)

2- [http://www.adl.org/main\\_Anti\\_Israel/default.htm](http://www.adl.org/main_Anti_Israel/default.htm)

3- <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/05/30/news/brits.php>

4- [http://www.adl.org/ADL\\_Opinions/Interfaith/JTA\\_071107.htm](http://www.adl.org/ADL_Opinions/Interfaith/JTA_071107.htm)

5- Information provided by Father Al Baca, Director of Inter-religion for the Diocese of Orange.

6- <http://www.jewishworldwatch.org/aboutjww/>