

## WALLENBERG CITATION ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Rabbi Steven Garten

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Left to right in photo: Naima Sidow, Merle Haltrecht-Matte, Imam Mohamad Jebara and Rabbi Steven Garten

I FIRST HEARD THE WORD WALLENBERG 62 YEARS AGO. IT WAS 1956. WE WERE ALL STILL LIVING IN THE BRONX AND I WAS PART OF LARGE EXTENDED HUNGARIAN FAMILY.

MY MOTHERS FAMILY HAD FOUND THEIR WAY TO THE NEW WORLD FROM BUDAH AND PESHT IN THE LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY. THREE HUNGARIAN SIBLINGS HAD MARRIED THREE HUNGARIAN SIBLINGS AND THE MYRIAD OF COMBINATIONS LED TO WONDERFUL IF NOT FRENETIC WEEKENDS VISITING ONE AUNT OR UNCLE EACH SUNDAY.

THIS PARTICULAR SUNDAY WE WERE AT LILLIES APARTMENT. THE ADULTS EATING POLICHINTA, HUNGARIAN CREPES WITH APERICOT JAM AND THE CHILDREN DRINKING SELTZER WITH SOME ULTRA SWEET CHERRY SYRUP. IN THE MIDST OF THE EATING THE DOOR BELL RANG. I DON'T REMEMBER ALL OF THE DETAILS BUT SHORTLY THERE AFTER WE CHILDREN WERE HERDED INTO A BACK BEDROOM. EVENTUALLY WE WERE RETURNED TO THE LIVING ROOM

AND INTRODUCED TO ABBY, OUR NEW COUSIN. HE WAS TALL, GAUNT, BLACK HAired AND DID NOT SPEAK A WORD OF ENGLISH. MEMORIES CAN BE DISTRUSTED AT MY AGE BUT I VIVIDLY REMEMBER HIM WEARING A TAG PINED TO HIS SHIRT. WRITTEN ON THE TAG WAS HIS NAME AND LILLIES NAME AND ADDRESS. THE ADULTS SPOKE IN WHISPERS ALL THAT AFTERNOON.

YET IT BECAME CLEAR THAT ABBY WAS THE SURVING CHILD OF RELATIVES NOONE REMEMBERED. THE RED CROSS HAD TRACED HIS ROOTS TO THIS APARTMENT AND HE WAS NOW STANDING IN LILLIES LIVING ROOM. I DID NOT COMPREHEND ALL THE CONVERSATION AND CERTAINLY NOT THE NUANCES AND GLANCES. BUT I REMEMBER THE WORD WALLEMBERG. LATER THAT DAY IN OUR HOME I HEARD MY PARENTS SPEAKING OF ABBY AS A WALLEMBERG CHILD.

IT WOULD BE NEARLY 15 YEARS BEFORE I KNEW RAUL WALLEMBERG AS A NAME AND A STORY THAT WOULD BE CONNECTED TO MY FAMILY. IT IS A CIRCLE COMPLETED THIS EVENING. WALLEMBERGS' ACTIONS SOME HOW SAVED ABBY AND HIS COURAGE BECAME A MODEL FOR ALL THOSE WHO WHEN FACED WITH MORAL DILEMMAS TAKE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED.

IF WALLEMBERG WAS COURAGEOUS, SO TOO WAS MARTIN LUTHER KING, MALCOLM X, DAVID BEN GURION, MOSES, GAHNDI AND ROSA PARKS. ALL INDIVIDUALS WHO WERE MOTIVATED TO ACT AGAINST THEIR OWN SELF INTEREST IN THE NAME OF ALL THAT WAS MORALLY JUST AND RIGHTEOUS.

IF THESE ARE THE EXEMPLARS OF MORAL COURAGE, THEN I AM NOT IN THEIR CLASS. BUT SOMETIMES IN THE LAND OF THE BLIND THE ONE EYED PERSON IS HEROIC. IN A TIME WHEN ANTI SEMETISM HAS MUTATED INTO A DISEASE NOT KNOWN BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL, IN A TIME WHEN ANTI SEMITISM HAS BECOME A COVENIENT EXCUSE TO WITHDRAW FROM INTERFAITH DIALOUGUE , IN A TIME WHEN DEATH OF JEWS AT THE HANDS OF TERRORISTS IS IGNORED OR WORSE BECOMES THE SECOND LINE OF THE STORY AFTER THE DEATH OF THE TERRORIST, IN A TIME WHEN EVEN THE LEADERS OF THE FREE WORLD HAVE TO CAJOLED AND EMBARRESED INTO COMDEMNING ANTI SEMETIC REHTORIC, IT BEGINS TO SEEM COURAGEOUS TO STAND UP AND PROCLAIM THAT THE EVIL OF ANTI SEMITISM DID NOT DIE AT THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

RABBI JONATHAN SACKS REMINDS US THAT ANTISEMITISM IS NOT ABOUT JEWS. IT IS ABOUT ANTISEMITES. IT IS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO CANNOT ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN FAILURES AND HAVE TO BLAME SOMEONE ELSE. HISTORICALLY, IF YOU WERE A CHRISTIAN AT THE TME OF THE CRUSADES, OR A GERMAN AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR, AND SAW THAT THE WORLD HAD NOT TURNED OUT THE WAY YOU BELIEVED IT SHOULD, YOU BLAMED THE JEWS. THAT IS WHAT IS HAPPENING TODAY. THIS IS A

DANGEROUS PATH TO BE WALKED, NOT JUST FOR OUR PEOPLE BUT FOR EVERYONE WHO VALUES FREEDOM, COMPASSION AND HUMANITY.

LET ME REMIND US ALL THAT NOT LIKING JEWS IS NOT ANTISEMITISM. WE ALL HAVE PEOPLE WE DON'T LIKE. THAT IS OK. THAT IS HUMAN IT ISN'T DANGEROUS. CRITICIZING ISRAEL IS NOT ANTISEMITISM. I WAS RECENTLY WITH A GROUP OF ADULTS TEACHING ABOUT THE ROOTS OF THE CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ONE PERSON ASKED ME: "IS CRITICIZING ISRAEL OR THE GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL ANTISEMITISM." I SAID NO AND EXPLAINED THE DIFFERENCE. I ASKED: "DO YOU BELIEVE YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO CRITICIZE THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA ABORIGINAL POLICIES?" ALL NODDED YES. THEN I ASKED IF ANYONE BELIEVED THAT CANADA HAD NO RIGHT TO EXIST BECAUSE OF ITS POLICIES. NONE BELIEVED THAT. THE DIFFERENCE IS WHAT MAKES THE CASE FOR A NEW FORM OF ANTISEMITISM, WHICH REQUIRES COURAGE TO STAND UP AGAINST.

TODAY WE DO NOT ARGUE ABOUT WHETHER THE JEWS KILLED CHRIST, NOSTRA AETATE THE RESOLUTION OF VATICAN 2, ITS SUBSEQUENT GUIDELINES AND NOTES PROCLAIMED THAT THE DEATH OF JESUS" CANNOT BE BLAMED UPON ALL THE JEWS THEN LIVING, WITHOUT DISTINCTION, NOR UPON THE JEWS TODAY. THE DOCUMENT PROCLAIMED THAT "CATHOLICS SHOULD ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND THE JEWISH ANCESTRY OF JESUS, HIS MOTHER, THE APOSTLES AND THE MANY DISCIPLES PROCLAIMING THE GOSPELS."

FINALLY THE DOCUMENT PROCLAIMED; "CATHOLOICISM PROHIBITS HARBORING, EXPRESSING OR CONDONING ANTISEMITISM OF ANY KIND." THOUGH THAT DOCUMENT CANNOT RESURRECT THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF JEWS SLAUGHTERED UNDER THE BANNER OF THE CHURCH, IT BEGINS THE REPENTANCE LONG OVERDUE. TODAY WE DO WORRY ABOUT THE STATUS JEWS HAD IN MUSLIM LANDS. WHERE JEWS REMAIN IN MUSLIM LANDS OR EVEN CHRISTIAN EUROPE LEGAL PROTECTION IS EXTENDED TO THEM AS IT IS TO RELIGIOUS ALL MINORITIES. IT IS TOO BAD THAT HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF JEWS BORN IN MUSLIM LANDS OR GERMANY, FRANCE OR HUNGARY NEVER SAW THAT LEGAL SWITCH, EVEN IF SOME INDIVIDUALS WITHIN THOSE COUNTRIES HAVE NOT CAUGHT UP WITH THEIR COUNTRIES LAWS.

NO ANTISEMITISM TODAY IS NOT ABOUT SECOND CLASS STATUS IN A RELIGIOUS WORLD. ANTISEMITISM TODAY MEANS DENYING THE RIGHT OF JEWS TO EXIST COLLECTIVELY AS JEWS WITH THE SAME RIGHTS AS EVERYONE ELSE. IN THE MIDDLE AGES WE WERE HATED BECAUSE OF OUR RELIGION. IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY WE WERE HATED BECAUSE OF OUR RACE. TODAY WE ARE HATED BECAUSE OF OUR NATION STATE, THE STATE OF ISRAEL.

LET ME ALLUDE TO RABBI SACKS AGAIN. HE WRITES: "IN THE MIDDLE AGES JEWS WERE ACCUSED OF POISONING WELLS, SPREADING THE PLAQUE, AND KILLING CHRISTIAN CHILDREN TO USE THEIR BLOOD. IN NAZI GERMANY THEY WERE ACCUSED OF CONTROLLING BOTH CAPITALIST AMERICA AND COMMUNIST RUSSIA. TODAY THEY ARE ACCUSED BY SOME OF RUNNING ISIS AS WELL AS THE UNITED STATES. OLD MYTHS HAVE BEEN RECYCLED, FROM THE BLOOD LIBEL TO THE PROTOCOLS OF THE ELDERS OF ZION. THE CARTOONS THAT FLOOD THE MIDDLE EAST AND ULTRA RIGHT WING MEDIA ARE CLONES OF THOSE PUBLISHED IN DER STURMMEER, ONE OF THE NAZI PROPAGANDA VEHICLES."

THE ULTIMATE WEAPON OF THE NEW ANTISEMITISM PROCEEDS WITH A DAZZLING SIMPLICITY. THE SHOAH MUST NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN. BUT ISRAELIS ARE THE NEW NAZIS AND THE PALESTINIANS ARE THE NEW JEWS. ALL JEWS ARE ZIONISTS, THEY SAY SO THEMSELVES. THEREFORE ALL JEWS ARE NAZIS WHOSE PURPOSE IS TO INFLICT A NEW GENOCIDE UPON THE NEW JEWS, THE PALESTINIANS. THIS PERVERSE LOGIC INFECTS THE RIGHT, THE LEFT, SOME MUSLIMS, MANY IN ACADEMIA, MAINSTREAM CHURCHES, SUCH AS THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA, AND LABOR UNIONS. I WISH THAT THIS ANALYSIS WAS AN OVER REACTION TO WORLD EVENTS. I HAVE NEVER BEEN ONE WHO SEES ANTISEMITES BEHIND EVERY ROCK. I HAVE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES OF THE OLD WORLD ANTISEMITISM; NAME CALLING, JOKES ABOUT OUR STINGINESS, OUR NOSES AND CURLY HAIR. THAT FORM OF ANTISEMITISM WAS HURTFUL BUT NOT OVERLY DANGEROUS. REASON EVENTUALLY PREVAILED AND IT HAS BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I HAVE EXPERIENCED OVERT ACTS OF IGNORANCE DIRECTED TOWARD MY IDENTITY AS A JEW.

THE NEW ANTISEMITISM MAY BEGIN WITH ANTI ISRAEL RHETORIC AND THEN PROCEED TO PHYSICAL HARM AGAINST JEWS BUT IT DOES NOT END THERE. IN NAZI GERMANY JEWS WERE NOT THE ONLY ONES WHO SUFFERED. UNDER STALIN IT WAS NOT JEWS ALONE WHO SUFFERED. IT IS NOT JEWS ALONE WHO SUFFER TODAY UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF RADICALS AND OTHERS WHO DENY ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST. ANTISEMITISM IS THE WORLD'S MOST RELIABLE EARLY WARNING THREAT TO FREEDOM, HUMANITY AND THE DIGNITY OF DIFFERENCE.

IT MATTERS TO ALL OF US.

THAT IS WHY IT IS IMPERATIVE TO REMAIN IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE GROUPS. TO SEARCH OUT PARTNERS IN OTHER FAITH COMMUNITIES AND TOGETHER PERFORM ACTS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE. THAT IS WHY IT IS SO VITAL THAT WE STAND UP AND LOUDLY DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THOSE WHO CRITICIZE ISRAELI GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES AND THE EXISTENCE OF

ISRAEL. THAT IS WHY IT IS IMPERATIVE TO REMAIN PART OF THE GENERAL SOCIETY AND NOT RETREAT BEHIND SELF IMPOSED GHETTO WALLS.

I SUPPOSE THEN THAT ALL THOSE WHO STAND UP TO THE NEW FORMS OF ANTISEMITISM AND DO NOT THEMSELVES BECOME HATEFUL OR SPITEFUL ARE WORTHY TO BE CALLED CURAGEOUS AND ON THEIR BEHALF I AM MOST PLEASED TO ACCEPT THIS AWARD AND THANK THOSE WHO NOMINATED ME AND THOSE WHO SELECTED ME.

THANK YOU.