

A Unique Opportunity for Delaware's Jewish Community!

Combining an historic American Moment with the legacy of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Rabbi Jack Riemer notes that during his pulpit career in Florida he would often get calls from adult children whose parents were members of his congregation. These adult children up north would ask the rabbi to help break up the relationship between their widowed parents and the new person they were now seeing, because the new person “mom” or “dad” was seen as a gold digger or interloper. However, after speaking with “mom” or “dad,” Rabbi Riemer often found that these new relationships eased the loneliness that they had been experiencing since becoming widowed.

In response Rabbi Riemer would share a teaching from the *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah* with these adult children. The *Torah* (Gen. 24:62) informs us that *Yitzhak* (Isaac) had just returned from *Beer-lahai-roi* right before getting married. One would think that the fact that *Yitzhak* was returning from the backwaters of *Beer-lahai-roi* is insignificant, but it is not according to our sages. *Beer-lahai-roi* was the place that God informed *Avraham's* (Abraham's) concubine *Hagar* that she would have a son. The *Midrash* teaches that *Yitzhak* was bringing *Hagar* back to remarry *Avraham* before he wed and moved out. *Hagar* is identified as *Ketura*, the woman who *Avraham* marries after Sarah's death.

Rabbi Reimer would point out, that despite being close with his mother, *Yitzhak* wanted his father to remarry to ensure *Avraham* would not be left alone after he moved on. After all, loneliness can cause immense pain.

Part of what made Biden's run successful (though there are legal challenges, it is unlikely that the result will be changed) and Trump's 2016 run successful was that they gave hope to those who felt like they'd been left behind and alone as the world changed. Trump gave voice to those who felt they had been left behind due to changing economic conditions. Biden's message of unity is built around the idea that, despite partisan differences, Americans should be able to work cooperatively to ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to pursue the American dream (it is not my place to judge whether Trump's policies were successful in achieving his aim or whether Biden's will be; I will leave that up to the pundits).

What is clear is that Americans do not want to feel left behind or alone, and American Jews are no exception. However, at times we have felt abandoned. In 2019 Minnesota Congresswoman Ilhan Omar infamously posted a tweet that I can only imagine ironically brought *nachas* (joy) to Pat Buchanan. Buchanan, formerly a prominent Republican and contender for the party's presidential nomination, is notorious for his anti-Semitism and bigotry. Playing off the anti-Semitic stereotype of Jewish influence, Omar sounded like Buchanan, tweeting “it's all about the Benjamins,” suggesting that Jews nefariously purchase political influence. Though Omar faced pushback from within her caucus, Speaker Pelosi endorsed Omar

during her recent primary contest and provided her with financial support. The fact that Omar received such support despite her anti-Semitic comments caused us Jews, particularly those who identify as Democrats, to feel abandoned by the party that is the political home of the majority of American Jewry.

Should the Buchanans and Omars of the world again start reciting their anti-Semitic tropes, we must follow the example set for us by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks *zichrono livracha* (of blessed memory), who passed away last week.

Though Sacks believed that religion and politics create a toxic mix (he harshly criticized Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky of Agudat Yisrael for endorsing Trump), he did not believe Jews could bury their heads in the sand. In response to anti-Semitic comments made by Jeremy Corbyn, the then head of Britain's Labour Party, Sacks accused Corbyn of giving "support to racists, terrorists and dealers of hate, who want to kill Jews and remove Israel from the map." The Labour leader, Sacks said, uses "the language of classic prewar European antisemitism." Sacks' willingness to speak up undoubtedly contributed to Corbyn's 2019 electoral thrashing.

The truth of the matter is that, though we Americans may disagree with each other on policy, most of us want to share a sense of kinship with our countrymen of all backgrounds. However, despite calls for unity, hate mongers from both extremes of the spectrum will continue to attempt to drive wedges between us.

We in Delaware's Jewish community find ourselves in a unique position to follow in Sacks' footsteps and give voice to the Jewish community, being that members of our community have relationships with those in Biden's circle. Regardless of where we stand on the spectrum, we must stand with President Biden, who is regarded as a *mensch* by those on both sides of the aisle, in combating hate, including anti-Semitism. Regardless of whether anti-Semitism originates from the right or left, we must follow Rabbi Sacks' example and not hesitate to remind the world that it is just as noxious as any other form of bigotry and must be stopped in its tracks.

We will only find ourselves alone if we allow ourselves to be left alone.