

Howard Stern, Pink Floyd & Israel

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I can't believe I am about to say this, but many rabbis can learn from Howard Stern. The rabbis that can learn from Stern are the ones that chose not to talk about the Iran deal in a substantive manner over the High Holidays. Stern, during a seven minute rant on XM Radio, asked "What is with Roger Waters (of Pink Floyd) and the Jews?" This was in response to Waters' accusation that, by performing in Tel Aviv, Bon Jovi was "standing shoulder to shoulder" with "the settler who burned the baby," referring to the arsonist, thought to be a Jewish extremist, who firebombed a Palestinian home in August, killing a toddler and several family members. Stern continued, "The Palestinians are these Arabs that could live in Egypt; they could live in Saudi Arabia; but guess what? Those countries don't want them either.... Where do you want the Jews to go Roger? Back to the concentration camps ... To the dark side of the moon," referring to the Pink Floyd album.

First of all, Waters misses the obvious. While Palestinian society by and large celebrates terrorists as heroes, the vast majority of Israelis including the government harshly condemn terrorist acts committed by Jews. Second of all, Stern raises valid points such as the fact that the Arab countries have used the Palestinians as political pawns in order to sully Israel's reputation. They have protested Israeli attempts to improve living conditions and medical care (lest they no longer appear to be beleaguered refugees), while discriminating against them themselves. The Arab world has also encouraged the Palestinians not to take "yes" for an answer in negotiations with Israel. Multiple times they have encouraged the Palestinians to walk away from generous Israeli peace offers. And, of course, Stern reminds us that being a stateless people led to immense persecution.

From an internal Jewish point of view, those rabbis that chose to avoid speaking about the Iran deal, lest they offend anyone, can

learn from Stern's example. They can learn that when your people's homeland is under attack and you have the ability to speak up you better be willing to, for that is your job as a spiritual leader. The job of a leader is not just to avoid controversy and tell people what they want to hear, but at times it also means telling people what they need to hear. In this case, though many did not want to hear criticism of the administration's Iran policy, they needed to hear it from their spiritual leaders, for the survival of the Jewish state is not solely a political concern but is a religious one as well.

Those rabbis who remained silent took the approach of Noah. Noah can be translated as "rest, wellbeing or comfort." If G-d told you to build a huge ark and you began building one on your front lawn, undoubtedly your neighbors would ask why you were building it. Certainly, Noah was asked but did not use it as an opportunity to encourage the wicked to repent, as our sages point out. Though Noah was a good man, he was at rest spiritually just going along for the ride and not willing to rock the boat.

By contrast Abraham was willing to rock the boat. If G-d had told Abraham that he was going to destroy the world, Abraham would have encouraged the wicked to repent. When Abraham hears that G-d is planning to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, he challenges G-d by declaring "Would it not be sacrilege for you? The judge of the entire earth shall not do justice?" Of course, this is what G-d wanted Abraham to say, this is leadership! This is why Abraham and not Noah is the first Jew. When your homeland's existence is threatened, one cannot take the attitude of Noah--all is well, let's not make waves and let's just go along for the ride. We must speak up like Abraham!

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations has designated this Shabbat, "Sabbath of Solidarity with Israel," and it is heartening to see that Jewish groups from across the spectrum are joining together in support of Israel just as a wave of terror has again swept over the Jewish state. However, it is easy to be opposed to terror; a decent but passive man like Noah could support that. But will we be willing to speak up if the administration again pressures Israel to make dangerous concessions, while asking virtually nothing of the Palestinians in

return? Will we be willing to speak up if the administration looks the other way as Iran breaks the agreement?

As descendants of Abraham our mission is to confront evil and to teach goodness, and Israel has been a beacon of goodness in a very bad region. G-d declares that he loves Abraham because “he teaches his children and household the ways of the Lord.” Senator “Scoop” Jackson of blessed memory was once asked why he had championed the issue of Soviet Jewry being that there was not much incentive for him to do so as a representative of the state of Washington. He explained that as a teenager he had worked in a store owned by a Jewish man and that this man was subjected to much anti-Semitism. Despite this, the man had always treated him well. Therefore, Jackson decided that whenever he had the opportunity to ease the suffering of Jews, he would. This is a great example of how small actions can change the world for the better. The next time you hear someone criticizing Israel, speak up. For all you know the next “Scoop” Jackson may be listening and you may be helping to create a powerful friend of the Jewish people.

I would like to conclude by asking you to join me in the singing of the Hatikvah (Israel’s national anthem), not as a political statement but as a prayer. The Hatikvah is a modern psalm. It expresses the Jewish longing to return to Zion just as Psalm 126 expresses the desire of the ancient Jews of Babylon to return to Zion. Let us take action and unite in prayer with Jews around the world as we pray for the wellbeing of the Jewish state. And let us remember that we are not spiritual descendants of Noah but of Abraham and we must act!