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Teshuvah time for the trumpeteers

Shammai Engelmayer

New Year’s Day is in no way equivalent to Rosh Hashanah. New Year’s is a day for raucous partying. Rosh Hashanah is the day that ushers in a period of introspection leading to doing teshuvah, repenting of the sins we committed during the past year.

This New Year’s, however, offers one group among us especially the opportunity to give similar meaning to New Year’s, because its adherents need to do teshuvah regarding the terrible things they said about President-elect Joe Biden during the 2020 campaign.

Among their other falsehoods is that Biden would be bad for Israel, and that he would populate his government with people who were anti-Israel and anti-Jewish. They also echoed the charge our defeated president trumpeted over and again that Biden is a ”puppet of Bernie Sanders and AOC,” meaning Rep. Alexandria Orcaso-Cortez (D-NY). They will be the ones pulling the strings if Biden is elected.

Another false charge that continues to be levelled is that Biden is nothing more than Obama-light, and that this is truly bad for Israel because Barack Obama, as president, was no friend of Israel. As proof, they cite the fact that 80 percent of Biden’s White House and agency appointments “have the word ‘Obama’ on their résumé,” as a Washington Post analysis put it.

What these anti-Biden trumpeteers need to repent are the sins of lashon hara—spreading disparaging information about someone, whether true or not—and motzi shem ra, or defamation of character, the spreading of false information in order to harm someone.

Neither before the election nor since have the facts supported any of these claims.

Take the whole puppet thing. In the words of Charlie Cook of the non-partisan Cook Political Report, “anyone who thinks that Biden will be anything but his own man hasn’t watched him closely. During the campaign, President Trump and his allies argued that if elected, Biden would just be a figurehead, that the likes of [Sens.] Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), [and] Bernie Sanders (I-Vt,)., and the ‘Squad’ [AOC and three of her House colleagues] would actually be running the administration. Those folks are mistaken….”

And so they certainly are. It is an open secret, for example, that Warren wanted to bring her economic views to bear by being appointed Treasury Secretary. That job, however, went to Janet L. Yellen, the former chair of the Federal Reserve. As CNN Business’ lead writer, Matt Egan, put it, “Yellen checks all the boxes in President-elect Joe Biden’s quest to find a Treasury secretary who won’t spook Wall Street, alienate progressives or forget about Main Street’s plight.”

Warren, on the other hand, checks none of those boxes. Although she praised the choice of Yellen, she has a history of being sharply critical of the former Fed chair. In 2014, she challenged Yellen’s handling of issues related to J.P. Morgan. In 2016, she publicly excoriated Yellen for continuing the Fed’s penchant for appointing only white males as its regional presidents. For much of 2017, she publicly pressured Yellen to get tough with Wells Fargo “for its fake accounts scam,” as Warren put it.

As a puppeteer, Warren falls flat. So does Sanders. On a local Vermont television news program, Sanders was blunt about what he expected of Biden, “What I have made clear is I want progressives—strong progressives—who are prepared to fight for working families in this country, in the administration.” In a subsequent interview with CNN’s Wolf Blitzer, he said, “if you’re asking me if I’ve seen that at this point, I haven’t.”

Sanders, who has been privately pushing himself to be Labor secretary, a post he is not likely to get, apparently is not even being consulted on appointments that could be brought before Senate committees on which he serves, such as the appointment of Neera Tanden as director of the Office of Management and Budget. Other senators have been asked their opinions on such appointments, but Sanders has not.

Some puppet this Biden is.

As for Biden choosing a cadre of anti-Israel anti-Jewish nominees, that would come as a surprise to his cadre of Jewish nominees—Yellen, Alejandro N. Mayorkas (secretary-designate of homeland security), Avril Danica Haines (director-designate of national intelligence), and Ron Klain, the incoming White House chief of staff, among others.

And then there is Secretary of State-designate Anthony Blinken, the son of Holocaust survivors. His appointment has been hailed by Jewish organizations here and by politicians in Israel. In the words of American Jewish Committee president and CEO David Harris, Blinken is well-known for his “full-throated support of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, widening the growing circle of Arab-Israeli peace, the fight against global anti-Semitism and the danger posed by Iran and its proxies.”

For the record, Biden himself is well regarded as a staunch friend of Israel. As Israel’s Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi noted, the president-elect’s “friendship and distinguished record of support for Israel dates back nearly half a century.”

An aside: Not included in the list of Biden’s Jewish appointees is former Secretary of State John Kerry, Biden’s new climate czar. It is Jewish blood that runs through his veins, not Irish. His paternal grandparents were Fredrich and Ida Kerry, only they were not born with those names. As the Boston Globe revealed in 2003, Fritz Kohn and Ida Lowe came here in 1905 from Czechoslovakia after converting to Catholicism in order to escape “a violent strain of anti-Semitism.”

As for President Barack Obama, the Jewish trumpeteers demonize him as the worst president ever when it comes to all things Israel. The record says otherwise. As the late Shimon Peres once said—and speaking “in a clear voice,” as he put it, as president of the State of Israel—“President Obama is a friend of the Jewish people and the State of Israel, and there is no doubt in this matter....President Obama represents the tradition of deep friendship between Israel and the United States, not only in words, but in actions, and he has emphasized that Israel’s security is a top priority of the American government — and he has acted thusly.”

That Israel and the United States do not always agree does not negate Peres’ words. As Israel’s then-Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren wrote in a 2011 article in the journal Foreign Policy, “The United States and Israel could not…realistically be expected to concur on all of the Middle East’s labyrinthine issues. Ronald Reagan, for example, condemned Israel’s attack on an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981, and Israel objected to his sale of advanced jets to Saudi Arabia.”

On the other hand, according to Oren, a Benjamin Netanyahu appointee, the Obama administration brought about an unprecedented uptick in the level of security cooperation between the United States and Israel. “In the intelligence field, in particular, the cooperation between Israel and the United States is vast,” Oren wrote in his 2011 article.

This was confirmed by then Defense Minister Ehud Barak a few months later when he told a Fox News interviewer, “I can hardly remember a better period of support, American support and backing and cooperation and similar strategic understanding of events around us than what we have right now.”

Obama also was not afraid to go into the lion’s den, so to speak, to defend Israel and chastise the Arabs, as he did in 2009 when he chose Cairo as the site for a major Middle East policy address. Speaking directly to the Arab world, Obama said: “America’s strong bonds with Israel are well known. This bond is unbreakable. It is based upon cultural and historical ties, and the recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a tragic history that cannot be denied….Threatening Israel with destruction—or repeating vile stereotypes about Jews—is deeply wrong, and only serves to…[prevent] the peace that the people of this region deserve….

“Palestinians must abandon violence. Resistance through violence and killing is wrong and it does not succeed….It is a sign neither of courage nor power to shoot rockets at sleeping children, or to blow up old women on a bus. That’s not how moral authority is claimed; that’s how it is surrendered….”

Over five percent of the Torah’s 613 mitzvot involve things we say or write, or things we listen to or read. Over 20 percent of the sins about which we confess on Yom Kippur involves them. The Talmud equates this kind of sin with homicide, because what we say about people can kill their reputations.

From a Jewish law standpoint, it is a very big deal.

The trumpeteers should use New Year’s Day to do teshuvah.