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Trump is an anti-Semite;

We ignore that to our peril

Shammai Engelmayer

I am not sure whether I am disloyal to America because I usually vote for Democrats, or whether I am disloyal to America because I am loyal to Israel. Donald Trump, it seems from yet another of his contradictory series of statements, maintains I am disloyal for both reasons.

Trump’s “love” for Israel has nothing to do with loving Jews. He supports Israel to curry favor with the Evangelical Christian community, which believes Jesus cannot return until the Jews possess all the Land of Israel. At the Second Coming, we either convert or die. There is nothing friendly to Jews about Christian support for a Jewish state. If Christians come to believe we are standing in the way of the Second Coming, as they did early in the First Millennium C.E., they will turn on us now as they did then.

Trump is an opportunist, of course, always playing to his base. Yet he also is an anti-Semite. He always has been. The Babylonian Talmud tractate Sota 22a teaches us that once a person commits a transgression and repeats it, it becomes something he or she finds acceptable to repeat. For Trump, anti-Semitic behavior and statements are acceptable to repeat. To those who excuse Trump by saying he is just pandering to his racist and anti-Semitic base, thereby enabling them, but that he himself is not anti-Semitic, the record screams otherwise.

ITEM: On August 14, hundreds of Jewish protestors were demonstrating against Trump’s anti-immigrant policies outside the gates of an Immigration and Customs Enforcement center in Central Falls, Rhode Island, when a pickup truck deliberately rammed into the crowd, sending several people to the hospital. Trump, the tweeter-in-chief, has yet to make mention of the incident, much less condemn it.

ITEM: After the pro-Nazi riots in Charlottesville, Trump at first denied that the “Unite the Right” protestors were evil. He later backtracked and attacked race hatred and especially anti-Semitism. The backlash from the alt-right, however, gave him second (actually third) thoughts. As Bob Woodward reports it in his book “Fear,” based on interviews with White House staffers among others, Trump later called the speech “the biggest [expletive] mistake I’ve made.” He had just cause for saying that. The rise in white supremacist violence is in large part due to his rhetoric, if not to some of his policies. So says David Duke—the anti-Semitic conspiracy theorist, Holocaust denier, and onetime KKK Grand Wizard. Trump, he says, embraces “most of the issues…I’ve championed for years.” At Charlottesville, Duke vowed, “We are going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump,” adding that “we voted for Donald Trump, because he said he’s going to take our country back.”

ITEM: Last December, at a White House Chanukah party, Trump told the assembled Jewish guests that Israel is “your country.” He makes a habit of saying such things. In April, speaking to Jewish Americans at an event sponsored by the Republican Jewish Coalition in Las Vegas, Trump referred to Benjamin Netanyahu as “your prime minister” and said that Democratic policies could eventually “leave Israel out there all by yourselves.”

ITEM: Trump often references anti-Semitic tropes. In December 2015, he invoked a most egregious anti-Semitic stereotype at an RJC event: “I’m a negotiator like you folks, we are negotiators. Is there anybody that doesn’t renegotiate deals in this room? This room negotiates them—perhaps more than any other room I’ve ever spoken in.” He also told the audience, “You’re not going to support me because I don’t want your money. That’s okay; you want to control your own politician.” Late last century, Trump was reportedly upset when he saw black people working in the Trump Plaza and Casino accounting department. “The only kind of people I want counting my money are short guys that wear yarmulkes every day,” he said to John R. O’Donnell, the Trump Plaza president at the time.

ITEM: From his first day in office on January 20, 2017, until he spoke to Congress on February 28, Trump refused to address a wave of anti-Semitism the Anti-Defamation League called the worst since the 1930s. So blatant was his failure to condemn anti-Semitism that it made headlines around the world. Trump remained silent even after his own vice president, Mike Pence, grabbed headlines (usually a Trump no-no) by traveling to St. Louis to help clean up a Jewish cemetery that had been badly damaged by anti-Semitic vandals.

ITEM: On the first International Holocaust Remembrance Day after he took office, Trump could not bring himself to mention the word Jew in his statement marking the day. “It is with a heavy heart and somber mind,” his statement said, “that we remember and honor the victims, survivors, and heroes of the Holocaust,” but the statement never mentioned that Six Million Jews were the prime “victims, survivors, and heroes” of the Shoah. Make no mistake. This was deliberate. Trump’s statement was drafted by the State Department’s Holocaust issues office, and it specifically singled out our martyred Six Million. Trump deleted all such references before issuing his statement.

ITEM: While visiting Poland, Trump did not go to the monument honoring the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto. Ever since the fall of Communism in 1989, every president and vice president of the United States who visited Poland went to the ghetto to pay tribute, but Trump could not make the time to do so himself. (His daughter Ivanka did find the time to go, although the White House sought to keep her visit private, so no media were invited along.)

ITEM: After first denying it, Trump finally admitted to owning a copy of Adolf Hitler’s book of speeches, a book Hitler titled “My New Order.” (Trump originally said it was “Mein Kampf,” which is bad enough.) This is a book his former wife Ivana Trump told a Vanity Fair reporter that Trump kept by his bed and read from on many nights. She said this in 1990—29 years ago, long before Trump needed to pander to anyone on the right. This probably explains why Trump’s rallies, including his body language and pumping up the crowds to chant offensive slogans, invoke images of Hitlerian rallies during the Third Reich, or why July’s appearance at the Teen Student Action Summit invoked images of the Hitler youth movement. Many of the so-called “Trumpkins” even wore racially tinged T-shirts that read, “they hate us cuz they ain’t us.” Trump defended owning the book by saying it was given to him by a Jewish friend in the film industry, as if that made it okay. The friend, however, was not Jewish, and said as much to reporters who asked him to confirm giving the book to Trump.

ITEM: Why did Trump think his friend was Jewish? It was because the friend was Martin Davis, head of Paramount Pictures and its parent Gulf + Western, and, as the White Supremacist world will tell you, the Jews control the film industry and the media. It follows that someone heading a media conglomerate must be Jewish. (An e-mail soliciting campaign contributions for Trump’s re-election carried the headline, “Don’t let Hollywood buy this election.”)

ITEM: On the same day last week when Trump questioned the loyalty of Jews, he tweeted his admiration for the late automaker and virulent anti-Semite Henry Ford, the man whom Adolf Hitler once said was his “inspiration.” He also tweeted a comment by a rabidly evangelical commentator who referred to him as “king of the Jews.”

Once a person has committed a transgression and repeated it, says BT Sota 22a, it becomes something he or she finds acceptable to repeat. Trump commits anti-Semitic transgressions as a matter of routine. He is a racist generally and an anti-Semite specifically. Supporting Israel has nothing to do with his liking Jews; it has everything to do with pandering to the religious right that supports Israel because it is a part of his base.

This is not about politics—and Jewish Republicans should be ashamed of themselves for claiming that it is. This is about “Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you”—an injunction repeated several times in the Torah portions being read currently, including once on August 24 (Shof’tim) and twice on August 31 (R’ei). In many ways, it is one of the Torah’s prime directives, right alongside preservation of life.

We must not stand silent any longer. When a racist and an anti-Semite occupied the German chancellery, we closed our eyes for much too long—until it was too late. We must not make that same mistake now, while a racist and anti-Semite sits in the Oval Office and gives succor to those who would see us in our graves.

It is time for us as individuals and as a Jewish community—Republicans as well as Democrats and Independents—to unite to demand of Congress that it formally censure Donald Trump, to let him know his racist and anti-Semitic leanings have no place in our society.

Write letters. Make phone calls. The time is now because, as history teaches us, if not now, when.

If we do not stand up to hate today, there may not be a tomorrow for us to wish we had.