

I was recently speaking with a relative on the phone while waiting in line to get my passport renewed. It had been years since I traveled overseas and I let it expire. In fact, when my wife and I last went on vacation, we decided to go to the US Virgin Islands, specifically so we didn't have to deal with the hassle of getting a new passport. In preparation for a trip to Israel I took last year, I knew I needed to expedite this process to renew it so that I could travel. Filling him in on my errands of the day, I told my relative that this was on my to-do list and he quickly scolded me. "How could I ever let my passport expire?," he wondered. "Have I learned nothing from history?," he asked. He is of the belief that every Jew must be ready to live the country that they are in at a moment's notice. A new Hitler is always waiting in the wings, he would always say. When such fear would be shared around festive meals and holiday tables, I would always roll my eyes. It must've been a generational thing, I thought. He lived through World War II and while – Thank God - he, nor any of his relatives experienced the Holocaust, he knew all too well the hatred that existed in this world.

I would roll my eyes because I took for granted walking the streets in America with a yarmulke on my head. Sure, I had experienced so-called casual anti-Semitism, but it mostly came from ignorant kids or bullies. I still grew up as an observant Jew, in a not-so-Jewish neighborhood, and I had never experienced the fear that I heard in the tone of his voice when he spoke. I had never experienced the fear that would lead me to grab my passport and flee. And admittedly, none of our three children have passports. But please don't tell him that.

Upon the birth of each of my children, while holding them in my arms for the first time, I promised them I would protect them. Each Shabbat, I reiterate these words by reciting Birkat Kohanim, asking God to bless them and guard them, knowing as all parents do, that you cannot be there at all times. But on that first day of their lives, in the hospital room, I made a promise to each of them, that I will make sure that this is a better world for them, better than the world that I was brought into. They are still so young and have a lifetime ahead of them. But I

worry that this promise has already been broken, witnessing the hate, violence, and bigotry of recent months.

Last year on Rosh Hashanah, I spoke about the rise of hateful rhetoric in this country, specifically surrounding last year's election. I also jokingly said how much all of us were looking forward to the end of the election season, and such rhetoric coming to a close. I never could've imagined, a year later, experiencing the hate in this country that we experience now. Over the summer, seeing hundreds march the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, holding torches and Nazi flags, chanting Nazi slogans and publicly celebrating with the Nazi salute, I finally experienced that fear that my loved one always speaks of.

It's not that I was ignorant. It's not as if I thought white supremacists and neo-Nazis didn't exist. It's that I believed we lived in a society, in 2017, where such hate should remain in the gutter where it belongs, and that hate and bigotry has no place in public discourse or debate.

Claiming that a single race, religion, or ethnicity is above anyone else has no place in society. These Charlottesville protesters claimed to come to protest the removal of a statue of confederate leader Robert E. Lee, a statute that in and of itself represents our country's racist roots.

However, their racist slurs and chants, and their anti-Semitic signs and slogans revealed the true mission of this gathering: to add fuel to the fire and empower each other; to believe that hatred and bigotry in broad daylight, in public, was not only socially acceptable, but was to be celebrated. And when the day turned violent, we continued to see what my relative feared. Hate becoming normalized. This march in Charlottesville was the largest gathering of the KKK and Neo-Nazis in this country in forty years, since the controversial Neo-Nazi march in Skokie, Illinois.

Forty years ago, Frank Collin, the leader of the Neo-Nazi Nationalist Socialist Party of America announced a march through Skokie, Illinois.

A Neo-Nazi March in general is deeply concerning. But in 1977, one in six residents of the Chicago-suburb of Skokie were also Holocaust survivors. And when the city initially cancelled the March, the ACLU sent Jewish lawyer Joseph Burton to defend the Neo-Nazis, arguing their right to march, no matter how hateful it is. The irony is that in the end, when the march was finally permitted to be held, in June of 1978, only about 20 or so Neo-Nazis attended, and after about ten minutes, they dispersed, realizing that they were being drowned out by the hundreds of counter-protesters, many of whom were Jewish, who showed up as well.

Forty years later, the march in Charlottesville was significantly larger, with two hundred KKK members and Neo-Nazis carrying tiki torches to the University of Virginia campus on the night before the rally, chanting "Jews will not replace us" and "blood and soil," a popular Nazi slogan, referring to ethnic cleansing. We know the aftermath of those events already. I don't need to rehash them. We know about the hate, and we

know about the silence from our supposed elected leaders. But this summer, on that mid-August evening watching the news in horror and disbelief, for the first time, I felt that same fear that my relative always speaks about, a fear that I was always too quick to dismiss.

Last week, the Anti-Defamation League reported that Identity Evropa, one of the many White Nationalist hate groups that partnered to plan the hateful March in Charlottesville, is planning a campaign on college campuses across the country. Their campaign involves more than just fliers and posters on university campuses stating their goals. Their campaign is about intimidating students on campus. During last school year, the ADL identified 65 incidents of their propaganda popping up on campuses. Their intention is for that number to skyrocket this year.

The ADL also shared that while there was an unbelievable 86% increase in anti-Semitic incidents during the first half of 2017, compared to the first half of 2016, New Jersey has the third highest number of anti-Semitic attacks, behind only New York and California.

In our own community, we have grappled with this, as I and my rabbinic colleagues in the area have worked with schools in the district following incidents of anti-Semitic graffiti and worked with the county sheriff's office following similar anti-Semitic graffiti found in the South Mountain Reservation. But this all is a reminder, from the ADL's statistics to etchings of swastikas on bathroom stalls in middle schools, that this is not about a single rally. This is about the risk of hate bubbling over in society, and in our lives.

I get it -- on Rosh Hashanah, I'm supposed to be inspirational, to say something about how this year will be better. About how we will focus on the best version of ourselves. And I also get it that there are those here that come to synagogue for a respite from all that is going on in the world around us. But I fear that we cannot do that. And I worry what it means for us as a community. I worry about what we will teach our children. And I worry how will we respond not just at this moment, as hateful rhetoric towards Jews has climbed out of the gutter and into

the public sphere. I worry how will we respond to hateful rhetoric, even if we feel it isn't directed at us. What is our responsibility when such hate is directed towards anyone?

On this day, *Hayom Harat Olam*, the birthday of the world, a day when we are taught that we can and must build this world anew, but we must also talk about the realities of the world we are to rebuild. For if we stand here and pray to be written into the book of life, then we must ask ourselves what that life is, and what that life will look like. We must ask ourselves what this world will look like in the coming year.

Eric Ward, the Executive Director of the Western States Center, writes that Anti-Semitism forms the theoretical core of white nationalism. Jews function for today's white nationalists, he wrote, as they often have for antisemites through the centuries: as the demons stirring an otherwise changing and heterogeneous pot of lesser evils.

According to Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, in his book "The Devil that Never Dies," which explores the rise and threat of global anti-Semitism, he explains what we all know: anti-Semitism never dies. It may seem dormant at times, but it's one of the oldest forms of hate. And how we struggle with it when it seems dormant and then bubbles up to the surface reminds me of one of the most well-known commandments in the Torah.

We are told on multiple occasions, both in the book of Exodus and in the book of Deuteronomy, about how one should deal with the Amalekites, seen as the most hateful of all peoples because of how they snuck up on the Israelites in the wilderness and attacked the most vulnerable among them. The Amalekites weren't interested in a military battle. They were interested in preying on those that were different. They were guided by hate. The impact of this experience on the communal memory of the Jewish people is not just found in its occurrence in the biblical narrative in Exodus. It is repeated in

Deuteronomy, and again in the books of the Prophets. And on Shabbat Zachor, the Shabbat prior to Purim, we reread the biblical command:

"Remember what Amalek did to you, when you left Egypt. When you were weary they met you in your path and attacked those who were lagging behind. Therefore, when God gives you rest from the presence of your enemies, you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under Heaven. Do not forget! "

Admittedly, this was a text that always made me feel uncomfortable.

We are told to hold grudges. We are told to let past wrongdoings

influence our future. At a time of year when our entire being is focused

on clean slates and fresh starts, the idea of blotting out an entire

people and what that means, was always deeply disconcerting to me.

Yet, it is read the Shabbat prior to Purim because tradition teaches that

Haman, whose hatred towards Jews is no different than the anti-

Semitic rhetoric that we have experienced today, and no different than the actions of Amalek, is a descendant of Amalek.

I believe that Amalek is not a people, but rather an idea -- a concept -- of baseless hatred in which a group of people single out a vulnerable minority specifically because of their differences.

And this biblical text thus always made me wonder: how do we blot out the remembrance of Amalek and not forget. The essence of this is that remembrance is the key to making sure hate does not repeat itself. It is an important lesson for all of us in this season of repentance. Blotting out the memory of hate, allows for the opportunity to change, understands that we don't judge one person based on their past actions, or worse, based on the actions of those who have come before them. But blotting out such a memory also means blotting out all that that memory represented. Blotting out hate and declaring that it has no place in this world and in our lives.

But the promise to not forget is an important and necessary one as well. It is not that the past defines us, but rather that we should never forget the past, lest it repeats itself. As Rabbi Yitz Greenberg puts it, "Naïveté and amnesia always favors the aggressors." Let us blot out the memory of Amalek. Let us blot out hate. But let us also be reminded that it never goes away. So let's instead just send it back in the gutter where it belongs.

I have a lawn sign in front of my home, as many in our community do: "Hate Has No Home Here." While we proudly say that hate has no home in our own homes, or in our houses of worship, in our schools, or in our businesses, hate has clearly found a new home here and a megaphone in this country. So how do we find inspiration in this High Holidays season when we clearly need it? By continuing to blot it out. By being louder and more vocal. By making sure that our voices drown out the hate, just as the hundreds of counter demonstrators did in 1978 in Skokie, sending a dozen or so Neo-Nazis packing.

Rabbinic Literature often speaks of Satan, the adversary, who attempts time and time again to undermine the blessings in this world and the Holy One, Creator of these blessings. The Adversary is a rabbinic attempt to make sense for that which is impossible to understand, the hate that seems to be the opposite of all that God teaches. Satan represents the hatred in this world, the consequences of us acting on our evil inclinations. And seeing Rosh Hashanah as Yom HaDin, as Judgment Day, the rabbis saw that this was the day and the moment, that this celestial adversary acts as the accuser, accusing us of the wrongdoings in front of the Judge, the Holy One Blessed be God.

The Talmud teaches in *Mesechet Rosh Hashanah 16b* that we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah to confuse the Satan. When the adversary hears the blasts of the Shofar - the Tekiah, the Shevarim, the Truah - the loud noises and varying notes, he becomes so confused that he cannot remember the hate that he has spread, nor can he remember that which we have done wrong. So let us be loud like the shofar. Let

the Tekiah drown out hate. Let the Shevarim silence their speech. And let the T'ruah confuse such bigotry so that it ceases in our world. Let the Tekiah Gedolah be what we strive to be in the year to come: louder, more vocal, and continuous -- never stopping, never giving a beat for the hate of one's evil inclination, for the effects of the adversary in this world to get a hateful word in. Or as Elie Wiesel, of blessed memory, put it: "there may be times when we feel powerless, but there must never be a time when we fail to speak up and protest."

Last November, I attended the ADL's Never is Now conference on the rise of hate. The name of this conference was an acknowledgement that we say "Never Again" all the time. And yet, when we get to this point where we fear that hate returns, what will we do? So, we blow the shofar. To give us hope. To give us marching orders. And to drown out the hate around us. May the new year begin as a clean slate for all of us. And may we all work to change not just ourselves, but the whole world around us.

We are finally getting passports for our kids. We have forms filled out, pictures taken, ready for our appointment at the post office. May they always be used to see the world's beauty and never, as my relative fears, to flee for the world's most disgusting blemishes. May we all be inscribed in the Book of Life, in a life of peace and love, in the year to come. Shana Tova.