

Weekly Teaching

July 14, 2017



Today is Bastille Day, the beginning of the French Revolution and the European Emancipation of the Jews.

Our own *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) should be celebrated as part of Bastille Day because the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity were for the first time in European history extended to the Jews.

In 1791, after the French Revolution, the French Jews were emancipated and granted full citizenship.

This was the first time in history that European Jews were granted equal legal status, and Jews understandably dreamed that they would be accepted as equals in European society.

With major exceptions, most notably the Dreyfus affair of the 1890's, the Jews of France did enjoy 150 years of previously unknown civil rights.

But, with the Nazi invasion of France in 1940, French Enlightenment soon was drowned amidst the darkness of Nazi tyranny.

First, French Jews had their civil rights stripped from them, and ultimately 25% of French Jewry (90,000 French Jewish men, women and children) was to be murdered as part of Nazi Germany's "Final Solution."

There were notable French Righteous Gentiles who risked their own lives to save French Jews, but there were many French non-Jews who stood silently aside as their Jewish neighbors were targeted, and many more French citizens who collaborated with the Nazis to assist with the implementation of Jewish extermination.

After the Nazis were finally defeated, the hope was that French Jewry would be able to rise from the ashes.

But, as I speak with former French citizens now living in Israel, many anecdotally share what the numbers bear out; more and more French Jews feel unsafe in the country of their birth.

Two days after the Charlie Hebdo attack, four Jews were killed at the Paris Kosher supermarket, Hyper Cacher.

Almost 8,000 French Jews moved to Israel within the year following this incident.

When visiting Ashdod, a city in Southern Israel, it feels like you are visiting a Parisian-like city; you hear French in the streets as much as you do Hebrew.

Visit the Café Lyon, and you can easily hear the multiple tales of French Jews who speak of how their family and friends more and more feel uneasy in France, and plan to immigrate to Israel.

French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, has articulated the continued exodus of the French Jews will change the country for the worse. He declared: "Without the Jews, France is no longer France."

But French Jews feel it's unsafe to publicly wear kippot in the French public streets.

French Jews routinely now question their feelings of security.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, recognizing the modern day plight of the French Jews, called for French mass migration.

Understandably, many in France took exception with this call.

But, the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity have always been on shaky ground within Europe.

The rise of anti-Semitism/anti-Zionism exposes the many outstanding problems of modern day European Jews staying within the national boundaries of their births.

We American Jews have an obligation to remain vigilant on behalf of all world Jewry; "Never Again" the operating principle of Jewish vigilance.

It begins with our own education, and then our advocacy and financial support on behalf of our Jewish brothers and sisters throughout the Jewish world.

This Shabbat, as we celebrate, we can also recall Bastille Day; both its promises and its failures.

And, we can re-double our own efforts to be catalysts for an emancipated Jewish future where all of our People live in peace and security.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Mitch

rabbimitch@templeholom.com