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My Word: From Kaddish to 'Hatikva'

By LIAT COLLINS
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Despite the ceremonies last week commemorating the victims of the Holocaust, it seems the international community is still failing to internalize its meaning.

President Shimon Peres addressing the German parliament on International Holocaust Remembrance Day last week chose to start with *Kaddish*, the memorial prayer for the dead, and end with "*Hatikva*," The Hope, Israel's national anthem.

At the ceremony at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp marking 65 years since its liberation, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu also began with the first few words of Kaddish.

Earlier in the week, Netanyahu wrote in the guest book of the Warsaw Uprising Museum that "the people of Israel have learned their lesson."

But has the world? Despite the ceremonies commemorating the victims of the Holocaust, it seems the international community is still failing to internalize its meaning. There are those in Teheran who today openly flaunt their plans to rid the world of the Jewish state.

As Hebrew University history professor Moshe Zimmerman once noted, "The lessons learned vary from place to place. For the world at large, the main conclusion to be drawn from the Holocaust is that humanity can degenerate and the human race must take steps to prevent this. For Israel, the lesson is that the Jewish people need their own free state and strong army in order to survive."

Ironically, 65 years after the end of World War II in Europe, Israeli leaders receive a warmer welcome in Germany and Poland than in Britain. There, threats to prosecute top Israeli politicians and military officials under the guise of pursuing international justice have become almost routine.

According to figures issued last week by the Jewish Agency, anti-Semitic incidents in Western Europe have peaked at a level not seen since World War II ended. In Britain, some 600 anti-Semitic incidents took place last year. There was a spike in anti-Semitic violence around Israel's Operation Cast Lead combating missiles from Gaza last winter. In Holland, for example, approximately 100 incidents were reported following the Gaza operation – the same number as the country had witnessed the entire previous year. In France, 631 incidents occurred in the first half of 2009, compared with 431 in 2008. While the international community was marking Holocaust Remembrance Day, Jewish graves were being vandalized in Strasbourg, France.

"Classical anti-Semitism is changing, and it's been replaced with a new anti-Semitism, which takes its shape in the form of unbridled attacks against the idea of a Jewish state," said Jewish Agency Chairman Natan Sharansky, a survivor of Soviet labor camps who knows more than many would want to about anti-Semitism.

The Jewish Agency study shows that, as Post correspondent in Berlin Benjamin Weinthal put it: "While Nazi racial anti-Semitism has largely drifted into oblivion, European countries fail to see that the new outbreak of anti-Semitism revolves around turning Israel and Diaspora Jewry into a punching bag.

"As the study highlighted, a broad-based coalition among left-wing and Islamic organizations is coupled with an understanding that chalks up violent attacks on Jews and Israelis as a justified by-product of the Israel-Palestinian situation."

IT HAS been suggested that Europeans realize that Iran is a threat, but have a greater fear of actually confronting it. Pacifism is almost an inevitable consequence of the age of universalism. Israel – and to a lesser extent the US – Iran's primary targets, do not have that luxury.

Whereas Europeans hope that by lying low they won't appear on the mullahs' radars, Israel knows exactly in what direction the soon-to-be-nuclearized missiles are pointing. The target is the same as the missiles and rockets launched over the Israeli border by Iran's Mideast henchmen, Hamas and Hizbullah.

British Conservative parliamentarian Douglas Carswell, visiting Israel last week as the guest of the Jerusalem Institute for Market Studies, along with Dan Hannan, a member of the European Parliament, told me over breakfast in the capital why the British Left hates Israel, in his opinion.

The conversation was fascinating, the company extremely pleasant – it's sometimes easy to forget that Israel still has friends out there – but increasingly I lost my appetite as Carswell warmed to his theme.

"A generation ago, the British Left was broadly pro-Israel," he said. "Perhaps it was the kibbutzim's utopian blend of Zionism and socialism, or maybe because Israel was seen as the brave underdog. Either way, the country could count on a fair hearing. That is not the case today."

Israel, according to Carswell, is basically a victim of its own success. Not only is it the embodiment of a nation state, encapsulating the spirit of national self-determination, it has done it well.

"Today, certainly where Israel is concerned," said Carswell, "it is fashionable among the British Left to reject the very idea of nationhood in favor of a belief in supranationalism.

"Suspicion of Israel comes not from any serious consideration as to the rights and wrongs of West Bank settlements or the security barrier. British leftists view the Jewish state in diametric opposition to the institutions of international agreement they so revere — the International Criminal Court, European Union and United Nations.

"Israel's very existence demonstrates that the Western way of life is a repudiation of cultural relativism. Within the space of a single generation, a new state turned desert into fertile land. It is a democratic state with far greater freedom and rights for women, and homosexuals for that matter, than any of the surrounding countries. Within two generations, hi-tech business parks have sprung up in downtown Tel Aviv to rival anything in California. And in the meantime what have Israel's neighbors achieved?"

Carswell rested his case for a minute, as Hannan nodded in agreement, before adding: "In the face of this, leftists have had to invent the myth that Israel is a wicked, exploitative, industrial power that has somehow bullied its way to success, and that its neighbors' failings are of Israel's making. To think otherwise would require an acceptance of the fact that some societies are more successful than others."

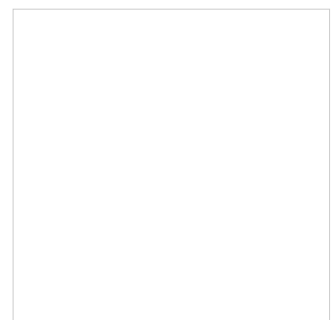
While I don't completely buy into Carswell's theory – I think a lot has to do with old-fashioned jealousy, the roots of ancient anti-Semitism – the breakfast discussion provided food for thought.

The Jews, indeed, remain quintessentially different. And strangely, it is those who most profess to cherish minority rights who feel most threatened by that absolute Jewish uniqueness. The fact that both Peres and Netanyahu spoke in Hebrew was itself a sign of what makes Jews at once special and at the same time menacing – speaking the language that has survived millennia. No wonder anti-Semitism is sometimes called "the longest hatred." The Jews have been around a very, very long time.

Naphtali Herz Imber, whose verse was adopted as the national anthem that was quoted by Peres in Germany, wrote: "*L'hivot am hofshi b'artzeinu, Eretz Zion vi'Yerushalayim* – "to be a free people in our land, the Land of Zion and Jerusalem."

It is, undeniably, the dream of an independent nation – perhaps too independent for some.

But attacking the Jewish state just because it dares to be different is a betrayal of



the struggle for true liberty anywhere. The world is free to choose: The Prayer for the Dead or The Hope.

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