The Role Played By The New York Times During The Holocaust

In the past, and in a different context, I've written about the mistake of conceiving Judaism as a "religion", instead of understanding it as the "Constitution of the Jewish People." This may seem like a simple and superfluous game of words, but when we understand the origin of this distinction, and especially the terrible direct or indirect consequences of taking away from Judaism its national aspect, we can better appreciate its magnitude.

The story of the differentiation between Jewish people and Jewish religion began around 1840 in Germany, when the first Reform Jews deliberately renounced to any idea that could relate them to the land of Israel, a fundamental element of the people of Israel. In a famous declaration signed in Frankfurt de Main in 1845, the first Jewish reformers explicitly renounced to a Messiah who would take them back to Israel and rebuild the Bet haMiqdash; they also renounced to pray for their return to Jerusalem or to cry for its destruction. All these element, which constitute the "national" aspect of Judaism were deliberately eliminated from the prayer books and from the new Reform ritual. The idea was very clear: Reform Jews saw themselves as "patriotic Germans", an integral part of the German people and their heroic history and destiny. And as a matter of loyalty to their "mother country" they openly and explicitly renounced everything that could be perceived as an expression of double loyalty. The first Reformers (I must mention that this has changed in our days) called themselves proudly "Germans" of "Mosaic religion" (they tried to use as little as possible the word "Jewish" or "Jewish religion"). They sought to compare themselves with other religious groups such as Catholics or Protestants, who had no alternative allegiance, national or geographical.

The terrible consequences of this seemingly innocent paradigm shift were not long in coming. One example: In 1840 there was a blood libel in Damascus, Syria. The Jewish community of that

city was falsely accused of killing a Christian child to use his blood to knead the Matsot de Pesah (sic!). Several community leaders were imprisoned, tortured and forced to "confess" this crime. The Jewish leaders of Europe, like Sir Moises Montefiore of London, Adolphe Crémieux of France, Eliyahu Picciotto of Austria and many others, moved heaven and earth to help free these poor Jews, and after an inexhaustible struggle they managed to get them out of prison. There was an exception to these efforts: rabbi Abraham Geiger, the most important leader of the Jews of Germany. Geiger, considered by many historians as the founder of the reform movement, refused to help those Jews because he had nothing in common with those "Arabs". This had nothing to do with Sephardi / Ashkenazi distinctions. Geiger, rather, saw himself as belonging exclusively to the German people, and for him, consequently, there was no national (or emotional) link with any other Jew outside of Germany. The fact that these "Syrians" practiced the same creed as him, was totally circumstantial and secondary. Geiger owed nothing to them. Geiger surely was not the first Jew who refused to help other Jews; but as far as I know, he was the first Jew to use this new argument, renouncing the idea of □□a Jewish people, to disassociate himself from "Israel", the land and the nation, and justify in this way his lack of action, his apathy and his indifference towards other Jews. All this was done in pursuit of being perceived as an exemplary and patriotic German citizen, and being accepted as equals in their society (I don't need to tell you the rest of the story…).

But what does this have to do with the Shoah and the New York Times?

Unfortunately, very much.

As painful as it is to talk about this matter, I think that it teaches us a very important lesson, relevant for our days, where information and deliberate misinformation carries so much power and influence

Let's see. Between 1939 and 1945 there were around 5 million Jews living in the US. Many of them very influential in the government and in American culture. However, there was very little that American Jews actually did to influence Roosevelt and save their brothers in Europe, when they needed it most. Europeans Jews were desperately asking for the Americans to

bomb the railroad tracks that took millions of Jews to death. Or to bomb the concentration camps. And as we all know, none of this happened … until it was too late.

But why?

One of the reasons to explain this silence and inaction is that the vast majority of American Jews (and non-Jews, as admitted by Eisenhower himself) DID NOT KNOW what was happening: they had no idea of the magnitude of the massacre that was taking place in European soil …

Why? A book called “Buried by The Times” by Laurel Leff, explains this enigma. Leff concludes that the man responsible for this deliberate misinformation was one of the most influential men in the USA at that time: Arthur Hays Sulzberger, editor in chief and owner of the New York Times (his family still owns this newspaper), the most important newspaper in the world.

BH, will continue tomorrow.