



April 1, 2019

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

Last March 9th, during my dvar Torah on Shabbat morning, I shared my dismay at the remarks of Congresswoman Ilhan Abdullahi Omar, a Somali-American politician serving as the U.S. Representative for Minnesota's 5th Congressional District since early 2019.

Congresswoman Omar's remarks, accusing Jews who support Israel of dual loyalty, reminded many of us of a type of anti-Semitism we thought belonged to the past, or at least to a different continent. In the words of Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt, "this accusation that Jews have a dual loyalty or require people to pledge allegiance to a foreign power, it is an anti-Semitic charge that has been used against the Jewish people literally for hundreds of years, long before there was a state of Israel."

Many leaders tried to soften Omar's remarks by saying that she "did not 'fully understand' the 'weight' of her comments" (House Speaker Nancy Pelosi), or "She comes from a different culture. She has things to learn" (Democratic Representative Jan Schakowsky). However, Congresswoman Omar didn't retreat into silence after her unfortunate remarks. On the contrary, she felt emboldened by long time recognized anti-Semites who welcomed her as their new-hero, including "former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard, David Duke, who spoke out strongly in favor of the Muslim Congresswoman who has accused Jewish lawmakers of dual loyalty" (*The Washington Times* - Thursday, March 7, 2019).

Personally, I believe we shouldn't spend too much time explaining why Congresswoman Ilhan Abdullahi Omar thinks the way she thinks or says the things she says.

However, two questions must be asked and answered: how did we get to this situation, and how do we change it?

You may not agree with my answers but here they are. I believe we, Jews in America, were so very busy fighting among ourselves on the same line of the political divide in our country, that we forgot there are those out there, both on the right and on the left of the political spectrum, who hate all Jews equally. We were so busy discussing immigration, President Trump, the wall, and health care, that we forgot the forgotten question: what is it that is good for the Jews?

And the answer to this question is also the answer to my previous question: how do we change this situation, where do we go from here? The answer, however, is not mine. It belonged to Queen Esther, and she shared it with her cousin Mordechai, over 2500 years ago: "Go and gather together all the Jews who are in Shushan..." (Esther 4:16). In other words: How do we fight anti-Semitism? There is only one way: together!

I would like to suggest that we should make alliances with everyone who will be ready to tackle this issue, which I believe should be at the front of our many concerns. We should resist the temptation to point the finger towards Jewish community leaders and elected officials who disagree with us, as long as they are on the same page on this central issue.

We need to bring back the old-time question: "Is it good for the Jews?" and put our money and our votes with those who will get us an overwhelming positive answer to the above question.

We must make fighting anti-Semitism an American priority and a bi-partisan issue. We also must resist the temptation to write off every Jew who criticizes the Israeli government, as long as they believe in the right of the Jewish people to a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. In other words, to fight anti-Semitism and the delegitimization of Israel, we must broaden our umbrella to include those who don't think exactly the way we do about many issues we consider important, but agree to fight anti-Semitism and to defend the right of the Jewish people to a Jewish state in the Land of Israel.

Challenging times may lie ahead of us, and these times must find us united. As Patrick Henry said, "United we stand, divided we fall."

Let's remain vigilant. Let's get involved. Let's agree to pick together the important battles on which we all agree, and to respectfully disagree on the other ones.

And let's never forget that what brings us together is much bigger and important than what sets us apart.

Rabbi Manes Kogan