

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center:

A police officer sees a drunken man intently searching the ground near a lamppost and asks him the goal of his quest. The inebriate replies that he is looking for his car keys, and the officer helps for a few minutes without success. Then he asks whether the man is certain that he dropped the keys near the lamppost.

"No," is the reply, "I lost the keys somewhere across the street."

"Why look here?" asks the surprised and irritated officer.

"The light is much better here!"

This old joke (we have the same version of it in Spanish) encapsulates a deep truth: regardless of the light, weather conditions, and personal convenience, it only makes sense to look for what we lost where we lost it.

As I write this article, Israel is facing a fearsome attack of Hamas from Gaza along with the silence and indifference of the international community all over the world.

In the context of these developments, former Israeli ambassador to the US Ron Dermer suggested that Israel should prioritize the "passionate and unequivocal" support of evangelical Christians over that of American Jews, who he said are "disproportionately among our critics." In the words of Ambassador Dermer, "People have to understand that the backbone of Israel's support in the United States is the evangelical Christians. It's true because of numbers and also because of their passionate and unequivocal support for Israel."

When I read Ambassador Dermer's words I can't but sympathize with him. His reading of the *matzav* – the situation – is probably correct. With the exception of American Israelis, Orthodox, Sephardic, Russian, and Republican Jews (still the minority among Jews in America), the majority of American liberal Jews have been harsh critics of the Israeli government and have distanced themselves emotionally from the Jewish state, and this is even more evident among the millennials.

Ambassador Dermer's public remarks were his first ones since he ended a marathon seven-year term in January as Israel's ambassador in Washington, where he, according to the *Times of Israel*, became known for having the ear and "brain" of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Indeed, Ambassador Dermer knows the American Jewish community very well, and yet, when he affirms that Israel should prioritize the "passionate and unequivocal" support of evangelical Christians over that of American Jews, he is wrong.

Ambassador Dermer is wrong not because he misreads the situation, but because he forgets the *raison d'etre*, the reason for being, of the State of Israel.

The State of Israel was conceived and established as a Jewish state for the Jewish people. In Israel's Declaration of Independence, the founding fathers and mothers of the modern State of Israel, not only began the declaration by reminding us that the Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people, but formally declared the

establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, and immediately opened the doors of the new state, unconditionally, to every single Jew around the world.

To prioritize the “passionate and unequivocal” support of evangelical Christians over that of American Jews, will be, paraphrasing the above joke, like looking for our car keys near the lamppost only because the light is better.

While thanking the evangelical Christians for their support, Israel must prioritize its efforts in engaging all the American Jews (and all the Jews around the world), including those who don't wish to be engaged, those who are indifferent, and the critics of the Israeli government. It is a daunting and frustrating job and the return for the investment may not sound very promising, but Israel, and all of us who are committed to its existence, don't have any option. The State of Israel was not created for the evangelical Christians, but for the Jews –all of them- and the efforts and focus should go there. In other words, I am not sure we will find our car keys in the dark where we lost them, but I can tell you for sure, we won't find them by the lamppost, no matter how bright the light is there.

As Israel is striving to regain peace and a sense of normalcy in a hostile environment, the rest of the Jewish people outside of Israel should redouble their support and never lose focus of what the *raison d'etre* of the Jewish state is.