

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

Sherry Reisner shared with me a column in *The Commentator*, written by Yechiel Amar, a Yeshiva University student (You can find his column by searching online: "But We Did Not Speak Up" + "Yechiel Amar").

The article decries President Trump's anti-immigration policies, in which,

"...the DHS has engaged in a cruel and ruthless campaign to capture and deport as many people as they can in whatever way they can. They arrest parents picking up their children from schools, lay in wait at courts for people coming out of mandated immigration appointments, and illegally raid homes without a warrant. Their victims are then detained in gulag-like centers — and they can be moved to new locations in such a manner that they effectively disappear in the system."

Yechiel Amar points out the similarities between some of these to those perpetrated towards the Jews, before and during the Shoah.

His column was addressed to the Orthodox community, but I felt he was talking to me:

"Why does the American Orthodox Jewish community not decry this injustice? Why is it ignored? What benefit is gained by our silence? Is it because the Trump administration bends slightly more towards our community's favor on certain issues, and we are willing to sacrifice America's vulnerable for its promise of security for Israel?"

While reading the column (too long to be quoted here but worth reading in its entirety), I realized that I have been, at least until today, part of the silent majority of Jews who didn't speak up against President Trump's policies and actions on immigration.

In the past, I had said to myself, that because many of the organizations that oppose the policies of the Trump administration are also antisemitic, I didn't want to give them ammunition by criticizing the administration's policies and actions.

Yehiel Amar's column changed my perspective. While reading it, I concluded that I can, and should, be critical of the immoral policies and actions of my President, even if my president is "good for the Jews."

I do find the ICE methods, including the fatal shootings of Renée Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis deplorable, and I do hope that a thorough and independent investigation will take place. While I do believe in regulating immigration, I also believe in fairness and in compassion. Moreover, I am appalled by the debased and degraded discourse that is taking place in our country, coming from the left and from the right, from the administration, and from the opposition, from the old and new antisemites, as well as from those who support Israel and Jewish values as I do.

What can I do about it? What am I planning to do about it?

To begin with, I am sharing with you my thoughts and my feelings. I don't write or speak very often on political topics, but I concluded, not unlike Yehiel Amar, that my silence was speaking as well.

Second, I am embracing the complexity of our world, our country, the State of Israel, and the nature of human beings. Things are what they are, not what I want them to be. I wish I was proud of every policy of my President, and the State of Israel. I am not. And I don't have to be. I can love my country and protect it, and I can love the State of Israel and defend it, without lending my seal of approval to each of their policies, especially to the policies I consider immoral and wrong.

Lastly, I am inviting all of us to rededicate ourselves to the ideals of truth, love, justice, fairness, and compassion. Remember what we once were, who we are, and what we stand for.

Hoping for better days ahead,

Rabbi Manes Kogan