

## AFTER HAWARRA

Arthur Green

I went to the demonstration in front of the President's House again this past Saturday night. It was very impressive. The numbers keep growing from week to week and so does the variety of "tribes" represented. This week the speakers included both a local Arab woman and a haredi rabbi.

One of the rhythmic protest chants went: "*Yariv Levin, kan zeh lo Polin,*" telling the so-called "Justice Minister" that "This is no Poland," referring to the eclipse of democracy that has taken place there.

But now, two days later, after the terrible outrage in Hawarra on Sunday, it sure feels like Poland or the Ukraine of Jewish memory. Except, of course, that Jews are on the other side of the pogrom, perpetrators instead of victims.

As it happens, during this same week I received a call from a Polish journalist, currently living in Washington, who is writing a book on American Jews. Someone had suggested that he interview me. I agreed and we spoke for over an hour. What he really wanted to talk about, it turned out, was how American Jews feel about Poland. I tried to be nice and open-minded with him, to listen as well as talk. I shared various family stories with him. But I did not have the heart to tell him the full truth. I have never met a former Polish Jew who has fond memories of the place, certainly not of relations with Polish friends or neighbors. I'm sure there are exceptions to this, but I have not come across them – not in my grandparents' generation, that of the great emigration to America, nor among Polish Jews in Israel, whether of the 1930's, the postwar 1940's, or the 1968 generations of emigrants.

Have you ever met a Palestinian who is really happy to be living in Israel? Even among those "doing well" economically or in terms of social integration? Is that even possible after the Nation State Law a couple of years ago, declaring that only Jews have national-ethnic rights in this country?

I think about the pogromchiks of Har Bracha and the other settlements. Four hundred of them, say the police! How are they feeling now that a day has passed? Have they come to their Jewish senses? Yes, they went crazy in their reaction to the terrible murder of two brothers, innocently riding down the highway, two young lives snuffed out for no reason. Yes, it could have been any of them. It was horrible, outrageous. But that still is no excuse for what they did. As a Jew, I am still shuddering at the thought of it. They too shot an innocent man in cold blood. They burned the homes of innocent people, terrified and traumatized their children. How long will those wounds affect them? What do you think some of them will do when they grow up?

We Jews like to think of ourselves as people with long memories, stretching all the way back to Sinai, to the patriarchs, and all the rest. But we also need to admit how ridiculously short our Jewish memories can be. I wonder how many of those four hundred are grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. Are they not ashamed, looking at themselves in the mirror? Or has that memory disappeared already?

I remember the 1980's, when we American and Israeli Jews first met emigres from the Soviet Union. We were shocked about how little they knew about anything we thought of as Jewish. After all, most of them, although coming from Moscow and St. Petersburg, were grandchildren of Jews who grew up in shtetlekh, just like our own grandparents. Yet there they were, with no Yiddish, no knowledge of Jewish customs, little sense even of the calendar. How could it all have disappeared so quickly, we asked. I'm sure there are Israelis who think the same of American Jews, the ones who get up to receive an Aliyah in the synagogue and read from the transliteration, pronouncing Baruch like the Ch in "Cheeseburger."

But the Israeli forgetfulness seems different, much more morally outrageous. Jews have such a long history of understanding what it means to belong to a defenseless minority. Indeed, Israel was created precisely because of that, as a nation state that would give us a way to emerge from constant victimhood. Could we ever have imagined that a few decades would be enough time to have Israeli Jews – "religious" ones at that – perpetrating the sort of event with which we are all too familiar?

Will they be brought to justice? Will Smotrich – seemingly now in charge of the region – provide the funds to rebuild Hawarra? Don't hold your breath.

But if they are not punished, what will they do next time? Where do we go from here?