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Angel for Shabbat HaGadol

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

“And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians…” (Shemot 12:36).

For centuries, the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites with malice and cruelty. But when the Israelites were about to gain their freedom, the attitude of the Egyptians changed dramatically. The Israelites now “found favor in the sight of the Egyptians,” who showered gold, silver and garments on their erstwhile slaves. Last year they hated us; today they love us; is this for real?

This strange phenomenon came to mind when I re-read an article I wrote in 2017, reporting on the results of a survey by the Pew Research Center. The survey showed that Americans expressed more positive feelings toward Jews than any other group! “Warmer feelings are expressed by people in all the major religious groups analyzed, as well as by both Democrats and Republicans, men and women, and younger and older adults.” They loved us!

But the situation today seems so radically different. We are constantly barraged by statements and surveys that point to increased rates of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. Anti-Semitic violence is on the rise. Did all the goodwill cited in earlier polls simply evaporate?

The bad news: people are fickle. Attitudes can—and do—change due to media bias, publicity campaigns, statements by celebrities etc. Public opinion can be—and is—manipulated through many sources. Not everyone has the clarity of mind or solid facts to make informed judgments. The crowd moves with the crowd. Demagogues know this and depend on this. By generating a non-stop flow of anti-Jewish and anti-Israel propaganda, they insidiously infect public opinion.

The good news: people can change for the better. They are able to overcome past negative stereotypes and come to see things more realistically. Most Americans, as reflected in earlier polls, admire the Jewish community as a highly educated, idealistic, charitable and constructive group. They respect the dynamic democracy of Israel and its amazing creativity and strength. When the anti-Jewish/anti-Israel fulminations die down, so will public opinion veer back in a positive and honest direction.

The haftara for Shabbat HaGadol is drawn from the prophecies of Malachi. He foresaw a day when righteousness will prevail over wickedness, when goodness will be rewarded and evil will be overcome. “But unto you that fear My name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings; and you shall go forth and gambol as calves of the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I do make, says the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:20-21).

During this season, the ancient Israelites were freed from bondage. During this season, may our generation be saved from haters, oppressors and perpetrators of violence against us. "In Nisan the Israelites were redeemed; in Nisan the Israelites will be redeemed."