



## FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER

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# Responding to Antisemitism with Prosemitism

Jews are the targets of a disproportionate amount of hate crimes, especially those who visibly identify as Jews and frequent specifically Jewish activities and spaces, including shuls, schools, kosher stores, and Jewish neighborhoods. This has been true for years, well before the dramatic surge in antisemitic activity since October 7. Some would therefore conclude that engaging Jewishly is simply too dangerous.

While there are certainly challenges and dangers that we face specifically because of our engagement in our faith, we view faith as life itself, “*ki heim chayenu*,” and there is nothing that would endanger us more than weakening our commitment and connection to Torah life.

Our Parsha (Shemos 20:14-16) tells the story of Sinai, where we received the Torah and truly became G-d’s people. The experience was both awesome and frightening, and Klal Yisrael responded by pulling back for fear that they could not survive such an intimate engagement with G-d. Moshe responds by reassuring them that the event would forever uplift and transform them. He acknowledged the intensity of the experience and even its risks but underscored the opportunity.

There is a classic Talmudic story (Brachot

61b) regarding Rabbi Akiva:

*Once, the wicked government [of Rome] decreed that the Jewish people were forbidden to study Torah. Pappus ben Yehuda saw Rabbi Akiva convening gatherings in public and studying Torah [with them]. Said he to him: “Akiva, are you not afraid of the government?” Said [Rabbi Akiva] to him: “I’ll give you a parable. A fox was walking along a river and saw fish rushing to and fro. Said he to them: ‘What are you fleeing?’ Said they to him: ‘The nets that the humans spread for us.’ Said he to them: ‘Why don’t you come out onto the dry land? We’ll live together, as my ancestors lived with your ancestors.’ Said they to him: ‘Are you the one of whom it is said that you are the wisest of animals? You’re not wise, but foolish! If, in our environment of life we have cause for fear, how much more so in the environment of our death!’ The same applies to us. If now, when we sit and study the Torah, of which it is said (Devarim 30:20), ‘For it is your life and the lengthening of your days,’ such is our situation, how much more so if we neglect it . . .”*

The same Rabbi Akiva observed the ruins of the Mikdash and a fox wandering out of the Holy of Holies (Makkos 24b). Some have noted that perhaps the fox that he saw then was representative of the fox of his parable. When the Temple was abandoned

and destroyed, when the Jewish people “checked out” of the Mikdash and ceased to be actively engaged and present within it, that was an indication that the fox had prevailed, luring us away from the Torah, our source of our life, under the pretense of offering us safety. We must never repeat that mistake. Our response to this terrible surge of hate is not to run from Torah but to strengthen and deepen our commitment to it. *Eitz chaim hi lamachazikim bah*. It is a tree of life for all who grasp it. ■