

Yated Ne'eman

The Editor's view

As I waited patiently for my flight which kept on being delayed, my attention switched to the TV screen broadcasting to the spaced-out people at the airport gate. I thought I heard someone say the name Postville, so I looked up. It was CNN Representative Louis Gutierrez (D-IL) was railing against the owners of the Agriprocessors plant in Postville, Iowa. He was calling for authorities to bring them to justice in the wake of the recent raid by the U.S. Department of Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE].

In that raid, almost four hundred people were arrested on suspicion of being illegal aliens. Hundreds were summarily formally charged and incarcerated, prior to their slated deportation.

The congressman, for good measure, also lashed out at the federal government for its “dehumanizing” treatment of illegal aliens.

The interview captured the lynch mob mentality

Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

that has been gathering momentum against the Rubashkins in the press, led by the *New York Times*. The *Times* has run a spate of one-sided articles painting the meat-plants’ owners as unscrupulous people intent on criminally exploiting immigrants for their own personal profit.

to secure jobs in the plant. The newspaper’s transparent effort to whip up public outrage against the meat-plant owners has given a tremendous boost to secular Jewish organizations and agencies that have their own ax to grind against the Rubashkins.

In particular, the JTA,

out last Wednesday night on an eleven-hour journey to Postville. After writing several articles defending the Rubashkins, owners of the beleaguered plant, I wanted to see for myself what really goes on there. The leadership mission was organized by Rabbi Pesach Lerner of the National Council of Young Israel. I agreed to participate only after being promised that I would not be expected to write an article about my visit.

I am no stranger to slaughterhouses. My father has been involved in the field of *kashrus* for decades and has taken me with him to visit several facilities. During the years I was learning for *semi-cha*, I visited a couple of places on my own. Killing is never pretty, even if it’s only cows and chickens under the knife.

The *New York Times*, in its lead editorial this past Friday, August 1, described the Agri plant as “A slaughterhouse in Postville, Iowa, develops an ugly reputation

A Tale of Two Cities

LYNCH BY MEDIA

A prominent front-page article in their Sunday, July 27 edition, and another one the following day on page 11 tried to recast a recent demonstration in Postville protesting the government’s mistreatment of the illegals as a demonstration against the Rubashkins.

The *Times* article played up the complaints of a few aggrieved former Agriprocessors employees, some of whom had lied about their age and their sta-

the Jewish news agency that supplies dozens of local Jewish newspapers with news tidbits to stick between the ads, has been generating a stream of anti-Agri articles, as they promote the Conservative “*Heksher Tzedek*.”

What is this all about? Why is so much attention being focused on this kosher plant located in Postville, Iowa, in the middle of Nowhere, USA?

To answer these questions and many more, I set

for abusing animals and workers. Reports of dirty, dangerous conditions at the Agriprocessors kosher meatpacking plant accumulate for years... The plant has been called "a kosher 'Jungle'... The conditions at the Agriprocessors plant cry out for the cautious and deliberate application of justice...

Is it possible that they are really that wrong? Can it really be true that the *New York Times*, CNN, Representative Gutierrez, the *Des Moines Register*, the Associated Press and everyone else is making it all up?

Having read much about Postville, I sort of expected to find a picture-perfect little town of homes surrounded by beautiful lawns and gardens which could be featured on stunning postcards depicting idyllic life. I was also led to believe that the Agri Jews were ruining this fine picturesque town with their unkempt homes and unmowed lawns. In addition, the impression is made that their strange and poor habits are on display as they parade around town and drive their old jalopies as if they own the place.

Well, not exactly. Driving through Iowa is indeed a special treat. As far as the eye can see, all one encounters is growing corn. You see a lot further in Iowa than you do in New York, because the land is flat and there are no hills

or tall buildings to block your view. You can literally see from one end of the horizon to the other. The simple, pristine beauty is breathtaking. There are miles and miles of nature's bounty, interrupted only by a farmhouse, silo, barn or tree here and there.

And then you enter Postville, not even a one-stop-light town. Downtown is all of two blocks long. The homes are neat and much closer to each other than you would expect. They are nothing grand; many are old and weathered. Though the Jews live on the same blocks as the indigenous population, you cannot tell which homes are Jewish and which are not. All the lawns are trimmed, and the outsides of the homes are clean. So much for yet another lie which began to spread when the *chassidim* came to town and was perpetuated in print and made the official truth for years thereafter.

Nobody is double-parked. Nobody is seen speeding through the town or seems to be in any rush at all. And the "pushy, money-grubbing" Jews, as the media paints them, are the nicest people in the world.

Perhaps we can understand the need to vilify Agriprocessors in part by pondering the controversy surrounding Wal-Mart. This chain store has become the all-around scapegoat for media and

liberal Democrat bashing. Despite all the decent jobs they provide and all the products they sell at lower prices, which make them affordable for the lower-class families, the media and politicians profess to care so much about, they have been virtually demonized. Politicians and demagogues who seek a cause and a headline have set up Wal-Mart as their convenient whipping boy.

From the day Wal-Mart decided to keep their expertly managed stores union-free, they have been targeted. Vicious rumors are continuously fabricated about the company. The jobs, products and convenience they provide, and the charity they give, are negated. The wealth they create is ignored. The unions lobby against them relentlessly, while a rumor-mongering media and self-promoting politicians throw in their punches wherever possible.

Is what is going on in Postville akin to what happens in Bentonville, Arkansas, home of Wal-Mart, or is there something even more sinister transpiring here?

Did you ever wonder how a blood libel works? When reading stories of blood libels from years gone by, did you ever wonder how people fell for those stories? Did you ever wonder where the people of goodwill were and why they didn't speak up? Did you consider that

perhaps the stories were just fairytales that were overblown by writers eager to sell books?

It wasn't that long ago that pogroms were perpetrated against the Jewish population by illiterate peasants egged on by the Church and government authorities.

Today, thankfully, the gentiles don't come after us with sticks, knives and guns; today, blood libels are a thing of the past. However, as I was walking through the Rubashkin plant last week, I could not help but think that today, blood libels and pogroms are still being perpetrated against us. Today, the pastor preaches to illiterate aliens who benefit from a lifestyle they could only dream of back home and encourages them to battle the Jewish boss who is the source of their largesse.

Today, instead of knives and spears, the warmongers' implements of battle are the *New York Times*, CNN, JTA, and every other media outlet looking for a good story and willing to twist the facts wholesale in order to fabricate one.

What can be a better story than illegal aliens employed by Hasidic Jews in a Bible Belt lily white corner of Middle America? Who will rise to the defense of the Jews? Who will cast doubts on the story of "Jungle" savagery perpetrated by the rich, money-obsessed New York Jews everyone

knows only care about money? It's a perfect real-life illustration of the rich taking advantage of the poor and downtrodden.

Everyone buys into it - even our own people - as the Hasidic Jews are portrayed as wild-eyed, fanatic, money-grubbers straight out of Shylock, taking advantage of a lower class population to further enrich themselves, and destroying a pristine American town in the process.

We have previously exposed the hypocrisy of Jews who couldn't care less about *kashrus*, having the temerity to lambaste the kosher standards of the finest kosher meat plant in the world. What is perhaps sadder is when people who ought to know better scratch their heads and wonder if perhaps they should also be boycotting the company and its products. They don't realize that they have been hijacked by fraudulent individuals who have poisoned their minds with the steady drumbeat of their propaganda. They don't realize that they have fallen victim to a cleverly laid trap.

Ever since I toured the plant, it has been gnawing at me: How do I say what I want to say about what I saw without people suspecting that I was paid off?

I can only report the unvarnished facts and hope that people will be influ-

enced to take a closer look at an epic injustice unfolding there.

The story of Agriprocessors and the Rubashkins of Postville is a tale of two cities, two factories, and two owners. Incredibly, the same people the mainstream media wants to lynch are hailed as heroic, charitable, kind-hearted, decent bosses and honest businessmen by those who deal with them on a daily basis.

I had never met any of the Rubashkins prior to my visit to Postville. I found them to be eminently loveable, *geshmakeh*, *heimishe* people you'd want for neighbors and friends. They are full of *chein* and seem to possess good doses of *seichel tov*.

You see the distinct pride they take in the place that their family built up through many years of hard work and much *siyata diShmaya*.

Yossi Rubashkin, together with the *rav hamachshir*, Rav Menachem Meir Weissmandel, both repeatedly went out of their way to point out the many *hid-durim* in the *shechitah*, *bedikah* and salting process at the Agriprocessors plant. There is no cutting of any corners. You see how calmly the *shochtim* and *bodkim* go about their work with patience and precision.

You realize how important it is to keep this operation humming and supplying *Klal Yisroel*

with *mehadrin* meat. This is not a potato chip factory, which we can all live without. It contributes the most vital component of a kosher home.

It is a priceless gift to have such a large enterprise supplying American Jews - and Jews the world over - with the finest in kosher meat. We need to recognize the worth, quality, importance and magnitude of this gift, or we may very well lose it, *chas veshalom*.

As you walk through the modern, clean, state-of-the-art facility, all the employees you witness seem happy with their jobs. They smile as they work and mill about during breaks outside and in the clean, air-conditioned lunchroom, which the media alleges doesn't even exist.

Every worker you meet speaks in glowing terms about his employer. They say that they like the hours, are satisfied with the pay, and yes, Mr. New York Times, they are satisfied with the overtime pay they do receive.

Everyone is so nice, friendly and chatty, it seems like a big, happy family. You begin to wonder, what is going on here? How can this be? According to media reports, the workers are supposed to be disgruntled, mistreated malcontents working in a filthy, dirty, primitive plant overseen by cruel overseers, who force them

to work long hours performing inhumane tasks.

You meet with Postville's mayor, Robert Penrod, and hear him say, "We are very proud of the Rubashkins... I've always had faith in the Rubashkins... We're looking at everything positive and we have the support of the community... They have helped us and helped the community. This plant is our livelihood. You are our livelihood and will continue to be our livelihood. We need to get this company back to what it was... It's gonna be a tough ballgame, but we *will* get over it."

Gary Catterson, pastor of the local Presbyterian Church and president of Postville's Food Bank, is effusive in his praise of the Rubashkin family and their charitable acts on behalf of all members of the community. He says in jest that when he hears all the stories and wild rumors swirling around about the company, he wonders how anyone survived working there.

He ascribes the root of the anger directed against the company as coming from people who want the town to revert back to the way it was in 1955 - white Anglo-Saxon protestant, and Norwegian and German Lutheran. The obvious target for their anger is Agriprocessors. It is clear that Mr. Catterson's heart goes out to the fine people under attack.

You hear from a variety of high-level managers. They are all clean-cut, intelligent, experienced, well-spoken professionals, who clearly take great pride in their jobs and the standards they have established and maintain at the company. They express their strongest support for the factory and their faith in its system and owners.

You wonder how this calamity befell them. What sin did they commit, besides being successful in a capitalist society, that they deserve to be demonized and dragged through the mud daily in the media across the country and targeted by the US Government for selective prosecution?

Pondering the bizarre unfolding of events, you realize, finally, that there's no mystery here. It's really nothing new. Because this family is successful, because they resisted the unions, because they refused to honor the sham credentials of the *Heksher Tzedek* promoters, the Rubashkins became a natural target.

But on a deeper level, it's not the Rubashkins that the world is in a frenzy about, it's what they represent - the archetypical Jew, the eternal scapegoat. We have become spoiled in this free land of plenty. Unlike our parents and grandparents, we haven't been constantly forced to defend our principles, our practices and our patrio-

tism.

We live in a country where every man is supposed to be treated equally, regarded as innocent until proven otherwise. Thus, when age-old stereotypes and canards rear their ugly heads, we are surprised and don't know how to react.

But it is all essentially just another chapter in the sad saga of the exile that we commemorate this coming Sunday on *Tisha B'Av*.

Rav Weissmandel reminded me of what his *rebbe*, Rav Berel Soloveitchik *zt"l*, would repeat from his grandfather, the *Bais Halevi*, during his *Chumash shiur*.

If a person senses that someone else hates him because of his looks, he can try to alter his appearance. He can seek to amend what it is about him that arouses the ire of the person he would like to befriend.

However, if that person despises his very existence, then all he does to transform himself will be of no avail. The other fellow will continue to despise him. In fact, the more he does to improve himself and make himself a better person, the more the other fellow will hate him.

And so it is with Eisav and Yaakov. So, too, with our unfortunate brethren who don't believe in the sanctity of Torah and *mitzvos min haShomayim* and

lead other Jews astray.

The plant can be operating smoothly with two or more shifts a day, pumping money and resources into what was a dying town, and the people who want to find fault with Jews will still try to find the horns which they know we hide under our funny-looking beanies.

We have to be upright, honest and forthright. We must fulfill the commandment of "*Vehiyisem nekiyim mei'Hashem umi'Yisroel*" [Bamidbar 32: 22]. We must never lower ourselves to the levels of those who mock and torment us. We are an *am kadosh*, and will always be, no matter what they say about us or do to us.

We must go to whatever lengths possible to help each other. "*Ish lirei'eihu yaazoru ule'ochiv yomar chazak.*" When *ehrlische Yidden* are in trouble, we must rally around them and support them so that they can maintain their stamina to be able to withstand the onslaught of the *yordei bor*.

We don't jump to conclusions and accept innuendo, no matter what the source, regardless of whether the subjects are Lubavitchers, Satmar *chassidim*, or Jews from Bnei Brak or Teaneck.

That is the meaning of *achdus*. That is what *Tisha B'Av* is all about. That is why we spend these Three Weeks and Nine Days mourning. During

this period, we must confront the fact that the reason the *Bais Hamikdosh* was destroyed, and the reason it has not yet been rebuilt, is because of the *sinas chinom* which still divides us. What can we do to bring back the *Bais Hamikdosh*? We can seek to improve our love for fellow Jews. We must increase our *ahavas Yisroel* - not just profess it, but show it, prove it and live by it.

We need to show our compassion for the poor, the maligned, and the abused, and feel their pain. We need to help people affected by the current economic downturn, along with those who worry where their children are and what they are doing, and others who can use our support.

We would do well to engage in more caring, sharing and thinking about our priorities should be, instead of being caught up with trivialities and superficial matters.

Sometimes, we become so accustomed to acting in a certain way that we think nothing of it and don't realize how our actions appear to others and how inconsiderate we appear to be. Cynicism takes over our thought process and corrupts the way we think about our fellow earthlings. There is no better time than now to replace negativity with a positive outlook and sarcasm with affirmative thought.