

LIVING (AND DYING) IN BAD TIMES: THE FLOOD, THE HOLOCAUST, THE PANDEMIC, AND MORE

by Howard Rotberg



In my 2003 novel, *The Second Catastrophe: A Novel About a Book and its Author*, a Canadian Jewish professor, son of a survivor of the Shoah, becomes obsessed with the idea that Iran is pursuing a Second Holocaust against the Jews, this time against the 6 million plus Jews of Israel.

When I look around the world today, I am appalled at the resurgence of anti-Semitism, some of it based on anti-Semitic strains in anti-Israelism, some now more often emanating from the Left rather than the extreme Right. The submission of the Left to the racist and anti-Semitic Black Lives Matter

movement parallels the submission of the Left to militant Islamism and to globalist transfers of power to the same United Nations whose General Assembly is obsessed with passing anti-Israel resolutions and promoting the terrorists who would “drive the Jews into the sea.” From black rappers like Wiley and Scarface to self-hating anti-Israel Jews like Peter Beinart and the rest from J-Street and Jewish Voices for Peace, there seem few popular restraints against the crime we hoped would end with the Shoah.

The bad times, however, are not just man-made, but extend to the Coronavirus and the puzzling response by conflicted Public Health Officials, including leftist political interference to prevent the use of a clear life-saving drug (when taken early in the illness) – Hydroxychloroquine. An out of control pandemic when our leaders seem confused, is another reason that bad times are here.

A pro-Israel president of the United States, with Jewish children and grand-children, is hated by Jewish members of the American Democratic Party, and is absurdly painted as having authoritarian impulses – when it is the Left which has the totalitarian and authoritarian policies of censoring opposing viewpoints on Facebook and Twitter.

An emergency room physician, in New York, Simone Gold, with an additional degree in Law, is fired from her hospital for joining with a group of physicians promoting the use of hydroxychloroquine. We are left shaking our heads when Governors take over the role of physicians and ban a long-used drug with few side-effects that hundreds of doctors are using successfully in early stage (or as a prophylactic) treatment of Covid19.

Universities, even elementary education are now promoting the anti-Semitic aspects of Islamism, and the *New York Times* has become nothing except a mouthpiece for the leftist, now dominant, wing of the Democratic Party; yet many Jews still

virtue-signal their Leftism and Globalism, by their persistent reading of the biased news from the *NYT*, or its allies on television, such as CNN, MSNBC and PBS. Jewish columnists of the *New York Times*, like Roger Cohen, Thomas Friedman and Michele Goldberg, regularly portray President Trump as authoritarian and Nazi-like while refraining from calling out the anti-Semitic words and actions of Black Lives Matters, and the Islamists Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib. They are in fact following the playbook of the *Times*' failure to object to the Holocaust and failure to report on it. They also fail to cover the "Cancel Culture" and the clear abuse of process in the fake Russian collusion matter and the ridiculous attempted impeachment by Democrats like Adam Schiff, Gerry Nadler and Chuck Schumer.

I am certain that if the Democrats led (sic) by the elderly figure-head, Joe Biden, with true power in the Marxists, including both economic and cultural Marxism, then America as a force for good will be mortally wounded and will witness enhanced fighting in the streets. It is worrying when prominent supporters of the Leftist-Islamist-Globalist alliance, are Jewish intellectuals or politicians.

How do we understand the resurgence of "bad times"?

My father, Leon Rotberg Z"L, a survivor of Auschwitz, who lost his parents and then 8 year old sister in the gas chambers there, would have turned 100 this upcoming November. He lived a long life, passing away seven years ago at 93.

What occurred to me when writing my novel *The Second Catastrophe* during the anti-Israelism and anti-Semitism of the Second Intifada (2001 to 2002), was that Survivors like my father would surely be especially upset to witness the murder of more Jewish children and other Jewish civilians, this time in Israel, and the apparent support for same among Jewish leftists and others in America. And so, I began to wonder if sometimes it is better that certain people pass away before

they can see some terrible event, whether political, cultural or financial.

As I read the news (from the few reputable sources), I sometimes think that it is good that my father is no longer alive to see this or that. Certainly, I wanted him to enjoy life with his children and seven grandchildren as long as possible, even though his later years were marked with some physical maladies and the common Survivor illness of Depression. But were he alive today, I would hate for him to see the moral and political chaos, including that within the Jewish community.

I wrote my novel in Israel during the worst of the Second Intifada, with near-daily attacks by suicide bombers at restaurants, disco-clubs, Passover Seders in old-age homes, school buses, and wherever Israelis might be gathering. Few tourists were coming to Israel then, and I was staying at the *Maiersdorf Faculty Club Hotel*, at the Mount Scopus campus of Hebrew University.

I wanted my novel to deal in some way with the modern fate of the Jewish people: the issue of how a just G-d, could allow the six million deaths of the Shoah was therefore a central concern. When I was writing, this problem seemed to be intellectually beyond me, and I felt incapable of finishing the novel.

One afternoon, I wandered over to the Bloomfield Library, just across the court-yard from the Maiersdorf. For some reason, right after I started browsing a book title seemed to jump off the book spine and grab my attention; it was by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, formerly Chief Rabbi of Britain, and it was called *Crisis and Covenant*. I immediately realized what was stopping my writing was an inadequate understanding of the covenant between G-d and the Jewish people. In just one hour, I read most of the book.

The issue of the covenant, and then what is called the "Tochacha" – the blessings in the Torah for following the commandments in the covenant and the curses for rejecting them, seared itself into my mind.

I made the professor in the novel recall his talks as a teenager with an elderly Shoah survivor who developed a Torah-based theory of why G-d allowed the murder of six million Jews including about one million children. In part he explains that the Biblical curses come not merely for failing to keep the commandments but from a rejection of the covenant itself.

The old man's theory revolves around the Biblical figure, Chanoch, or Enoch in English. From the time of Adam up to Noah and the flood, humans were living 800 or 900 years, but Chanoch "only" lived to 365. According to the first two parshas or chapters of the Torah, Chanoch was a particularly righteous man, so why did G-d take him so early? It also says that Chanoch is the great-great-great-great-great grandson of Adam, and the great-grandfather of Noah.

We are told that mankind became very evil in the time of Noah, so G-d decided to destroy the world, except that Noah and his family together with two of every animal, would survive the terrible flood in an ark that they were instructed to build.

By scrutinizing the names of the men after Adam and up to Noah, he establishes that Chanoch would have been 434 years old when Noah was born, and had he lived the usual 800 or 900 years, he would have witnessed the growing immorality around him, which resulted in the flood. And so, shocking as it might seem, this elderly Holocaust survivor, comes up with a theory that G-d took Chanoch earlier than usual for the times, because he was righteous and because G-d wanted to spare him from seeing the terrible immorality and perhaps from seeing how that immorality might bring the curses. The character in my novel worries that the old man is correct: that the death of the six million spared them, like Chanoch, from seeing the

immorality ahead.

Are those who are passing away from Coronavirus being spared the experience of living through the bad political and cultural times of today? Is Coronavirus a contemporary “flood”? Aren’t we told in the Torah that G-d establishes another covenant with the Jewish People – this time to never again wipe out the Jewish people?

In fact we are reminded of this as every time we see a rainbow, as Noah did, we should recite the blessing: Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who remembers the covenant, and is faithful to God’s covenant, and keeps God’s promise.

And remembering is really what a rainbow is about, at least for God. After the flood, God establishes a covenant with Noah and sets the rainbow as a sign of this covenant “between Me and the earth” ([Gen. 9:14-15](#)). Does this apply to all major destructions of Jewish people or just one, the flood, where almost all of our people are destroyed? Does this apply only to *natural disasters* but not to man-made events?

I later wrote a book called *The Ideological Path to Submission ... and what we can do about it*. In this book, I canvas all the ideologies, such as cultural and moral relativism, postmodernism, denialism, excessive tolerance (which I call Tolerism), multiculturalism, Islamophilia and inclusive diversity, which seem to be promoting bad times by causing a western submission, especially to Islamism, but also to Leftism and Globalism. But in that book, I looked at ways to slow down or stop this submission and I wrote a chapter on how Israel has been able to achieve, despite the terrorism and anti-Semitic anti-Israelism, a kind of *social resilience*, which puts Israel in a different category than other western nations.

Terrorism and the other violence we see now in America is

meant to so frighten a target society that it submits to the agenda of the domestic terrorists, like Antifa or Black Lives Matter, or the international Islamist terrorists. This result is clear from the situation in Europe, where the more that Islamists abuse their host nations, the more these nations seek more Islamist immigration and special privileges for the Islamists.

Professor Dov Waxman of City University of New York, wrote in an essay called, "Living With Terror, not Living In Terror" that the purpose of terrorism is to alter the political and cultural reality and change the political agenda of the targeted population by creating a sense of hopelessness and fear and demoralization, which has indeed happened in Europe and America, but not, as I can attest by my time in Israel, to the Jewish State. Professor Waxman writes:

"Palestinian terrorism during the second Intifada was ineffective because it did not succeed in demoralizing the Israeli-Jewish public. While Israelis were certainly fearful of terrorist attacks, they did not become despondent and dispirited... Instead of panic and public hysteria, there was stoicism and fortitude. Israelis did not allow the threat of terrorism to dominate their lives. Although they experienced high levels of stress and fear, they went on with their lives."

Waxman and others have written about various coping mechanisms that arose in Israel but don't seem to be present in an increasingly fragmented U.S.A., to withstand adversity and cope effectively with change.

Social resilience is key: if we react to Leftist violence and manipulation of the Rule of Law and Islamist terrorism and dangerous globalist empowerment of institutions that hate us, by appeasement or naive attempts at friendship, or a Cultural Stockholm Syndrome, or a guilt that turns into masochism or depression, we shall not deal well with the Bad Times that

have arrived.

The U.S. and in particular the leftist, improperly educated, university students, and the media, have chosen to submit to the Leftist-Islamist-Globalist enemies. Jews in America should stop their infighting and submission – and unify enough to achieve social resilience to pass successfully through these Bad Times. Israel, for all its problems, and political fights, still manifests a social resilience in a nation that is far from giving up or rejecting the Jewish role in history. I suggest that there is nothing good about dying in bad times, and we should, like the boy in my novel, *choose life*, to further our mission, and not aspire to leaving the bad times without doing our best to remedy them. Bad times then require us to double-down on our obligations in the Covenant made with our creator. Bad times should remind us that we have a role in preventing another Flood, another Shoah, and another pandemic, and hopefully in saving lives of some of the most moral among us.

Howard Rotberg writes on political culture, values and ideologies. His books are *The Second Catastrophe: A Novel about a Book and its Author*, *Exploring Vancouverism: The Political Culture of Canada's Lotus Land*, *Tolerism: The Ideology Revealed* and *The Ideological Path to Submission... and what we can do about it* He has written for *New English Review*, *Jewish Voice of New York*, *Israpundit*, *Israel National News*, and *Frontpage Magazine*. He is president of Canada's sole conservative and pro-Israel publishing house, Mantua Books – www.mantuabooks.com. -