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5779

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# JACOB'S SILENCE AND THE RAPE OF DINAH

ARI SILBERMANN

Jacob lived in tension, in concealment, and in flight. He entered into the world clinging to his brother and dwelled inside, in tents. His most important encounters take place at night and, to borrow Auerbach's phrase, he is a character 'fraught with background.'

He conceals things from his blind father under animal skins and things are concealed from him. He stumbles on a hidden "gateway to heaven," and fights a mysterious man, not knowing his name.

We learn that he was *tam* – perfect, simple, unblemished – but he is occupied his whole life with efforts to retain Esau's blessing. He overcomes his *demons* yet gains a limp - a blemish. With all this seemingly behind him, he arrives at Shechem unblemished, whole. And then he experiences headfirst the rape of his daughter, Dinah. The rape of Dinah and pillaging of Shechem (Gen. 34) is a difficult story with an unclear ending. Was Jacob right to criticize Simeon and Levi, or were they right to defend their sister's honor? Until Jacob's contrary blessing of Simeon and Levi, in which Jacob states that he wishes not to enter their council and that they be scattered in Israel (Gen. 49:6-7), their rhetorical question, 'Shall our sister be made a whore?' lingers, powerfully asserting that the brothers may have been right... It is a story of rape, power, and violence, and much ink has been spilled in trying to understand or justify the actions of Dinah's brothers in response. Many modern writers have noted that in focusing on the brothers' reaction to Dinah's rape rather than on her own experience and reaction, we perpetuate the silence enveloping Dinah.<sup>1</sup> She is taken against her will, her brothers negotiate *about* her and defend her, yet we don't hear from Dinah herself. Although some modern writers have tried to reconstruct her experience,<sup>2</sup> they face a genuine challenge in doing so.<sup>3</sup> It might be possible to find a window into Dinah's experiences through another largely silent character in the story, namely her father Jacob. In this article, I will attempt to understand Jacob's passivity, and in so doing, attempt to reconstruct Dinah's experiences.

Although Jacob does play a role in the story, he is mostly passive. His sons negotiate and hatch a scheme; Simeon and Levi slaughter the Shechemites while they are in pain, and his sons pillage the city – all seemingly against Jacob's wishes. Whereas Dinah's silence is implied, the text highlights that 'Jacob heard that he [Shechem] had defiled his daughter Dinah; but since his sons were in the field with his cattle, Jacob kept silent until they came home (Gen. 34:5).' This verse implies that he spoke with his sons about the incident after they returned from the field, but the order of events is blurred by Gen. 34:7 which describes his sons hearing about the incident *before* their return, 'Meanwhile Jacob's sons, having heard the news, came in from the field.'

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline Blyth, "Terrible Silence, Eternal Silence: A Feminist Re-Reading of Dinah's Voicelessness in Genesis 34," *Biblical Interpretation* 17, no. 5 (September 2009): 483–506.

<sup>2</sup> See Blyth and, for a popular example, see Anita Diamant, *The Red Tent* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Meir Steinberg, "Biblical Poetics and Sexual Politics: From Reading to Counterreading," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992): 480.

Jacob's silence is sharpened by the negotiation scene, in which Shechem and Hamor leave the city to 'Take for me this girl as a wife.' (Gen. 34:4). Genesis 34:6 describes Shechem and Hamor coming to speak with *Jacob*. Instead of the negotiations taking place with Jacob alone, his sons return in the next verse and we have an encounter between the two families – fathers and sons. Shechem and Hamor refer to Dinah in Gen. 34:7 as 'your daughter', and in Gen. 34:8 refer to intermarrying between 'daughters'. Although *bat* may refer to a young woman and not daughter in the strict sense,<sup>4</sup> the use of the term at the very least suggests that Jacob is part of the conversation. Indeed, in Gen. 34:11 Shechem addresses Dinah's 'father and her brothers,' but only Jacob's sons respond (Gen. 34:14-17).<sup>5</sup> Thus, at every stage, Jacob seems to be present but silent.

Jacob's silence here can be contrasted with his strong reactions to another event. Gen. 37:34-35 describes his response upon identifying Joseph's bloodied coat:

Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and observed mourning for his son many days. All his sons and daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, saying, "No, I will go down mourning to my son in Sheol." Thus his father bewailed him.

Yet the same Jacob who is distraught when his son, Joseph, is supposedly killed is silent when his daughter, Dinah, is kidnapped, degraded, and defiled.<sup>6</sup>

Jacob's silence has been read in different ways: as a delaying tactic allowing his sons to return and help him, as R. Hirsch suggested, or as the mark of a wise man in the face of the wicked, as *Midrash Tanhuma* suggests. Or perhaps it was a combination of both of these factors, or, as Malbim explains, Jacob understood that rushing out to fight could not help, since Dinah had already been defiled.

Still, Jacob's passivity and silence remain puzzling. Why does the Torah not share with us Jacob's feelings or plans? Why did he not negotiate himself, instead allowing his sons to do so in his place?

The question of Jacob's passivity also ties in to how Jacob responds to the massacre perpetrated by his sons. He says, "You have brought trouble on me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my men are few in number so that if they unite against me and attack me, I and my house will be destroyed."

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ruth 2:8.

<sup>5</sup> Although the brothers too use the term 'our daughter' in Gen. 34:17, there is a wider usage at play here and actually a wider interplay of the term together with 'our sister' throughout the story. For instance, Dinah goes out to see the 'daughters of the land,' and the brothers mimic Shechem and Hamor's deal of intermarrying with each other's daughters.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 2 Sam. 13:21 and David's reaction to Tamar's rape by Amnon.

(Gen. 34:30b) Does Jacob's pragmatic critique, which seems to be lacking moral censure, imply that he agreed in principle with their actions?<sup>7</sup>

The fact that these questions persist has a lot to do with the silence surrounding Jacob throughout the narrative. According to *Midrash Sekhel Tov*, the plene spelling of *ve-heherish* indicates Jacob's complete and total silence.

I believe that part of the answer to these questions lies in reading Jacob as a secondary victim. Others have assumed that the traumatic nature of the rape affected Dinah and would have led to her fate as a silenced rape victim... As Caroline Blyth writes,

By being denied the opportunity to share her experiences with her family and community, by being faced only with social disgrace, devaluation, and shame, Dinah suffers perpetually the fate of the silenced rape victim, isolated, stigmatised, and deprived of a supportive audience.<sup>8</sup>

Whether her exclusion from the story is related to this we cannot know. However, Jacob's silence is pronounced because it takes place in the narrative and I suggest that it stems from secondary trauma.<sup>9</sup>

One significant element of trauma is the silence surrounding it. Judith Herman writes in the introduction to her classic study, *Trauma and Recovery*, that, 'the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word unspeakable.'<sup>10</sup>

At times, the silence surrounding rape is even more difficult because the event often takes place in private, in a way that protects the perpetrator and can lead the victim to blame or question themselves.

In traumatic events, and particularly rape, there can also be secondary victims. Researchers note that, following a sexual assault, family and friends may experience emotional distress, including shock, helplessness, and rage, which can parallel the response of the victim. They too may feel violated, guilty, devalued, and may engage in self-blame. As Herman chillingly formulates,

Witnesses as well as victims are subject to the dialectic of trauma...it is even more difficult to find a language that conveys fully and persuasively what one has seen. Those who attempt to describe the atrocities that they have witnessed also risk their

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ramban to Gen. 34:13 for his approach to these issues. Notably, Jubilees 30 has Jacob taking part in the action against the Shechemites.

<sup>8</sup> Blyth, "Terrible Silence, Eternal Silence," 505.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that we need to be cautious in using modern Western psychology to address issues in the Biblical text. Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* is an extreme case in point and should serve as a warning.

<sup>10</sup> Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence -- From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (Basic Books, 2015), 1.

own credibility. To speak publicly about one's knowledge of atrocities is to invite the stigma that attaches to victims.<sup>11</sup>

Jacob has no power, no ability to act, and few options. When Joseph is supposedly taken by a wild animal, there is no stigma at play and so he is free to mourn publicly. But in our case, Jacob does not say anything because he has undergone the trauma of having his daughter raped and kidnapped. He is powerless to stop what is going on, a shepherd in a field he bought from the Hittites, his daughter in their palace, his sons away from home. In many ways, Jacob mirrors Dinah; his silence is also her silence. As his sons negotiate on Dinah's behalf, they are also negotiating for Jacob. Perhaps like Dinah, Jacob is shocked into silence by the violence committed against his daughter.

The story in Gen. 34 ends with Dinah's silence, and with Jacob's. A silence which too often accompanies the victims of violent crimes and their families. As research has shown, secondary victims may experience feelings similar to the direct victim, including feelings of guilt, devaluation, and anger.<sup>12</sup> The shock of a father who questions whether he was to blame, who feels guilty over his inability to act, who may want to act and negotiate on behalf of Dinah but is simply unable to do so.

Just as some traditions blame Dinah for 'going out,'<sup>13</sup> others blame Jacob, either for not fulfilling his vow (*Kohelet Rabbah* 5:1), or for his over-cautious treatment of Dinah when meeting Esau.<sup>14</sup> I believe that these sources are best read as expressing Jacob's and Dinah's thoughts of self-blame, as they are roiled by the concern that each of them did not do enough to prevent this horrible event from occurring.

Although Dinah's voice is not heard in the narrative, Jacob's silence is evidence of his trauma and may also offer a window into Dinah's pain. Perhaps trying to understand Jacob – and by extension Dinah – can be a starting point which begins to break the silence.

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<sup>11</sup> Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance P. N. White and J. C. Rollins, "Rape: A Family Crisis.," *Family Relations* 30 (1981): 105. In this sense, the violent response of the brothers is also a characteristic response. Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 65 notes that such reactions can sometimes hamper the ability to discuss the trauma. She brings the following testimony of a rape survivor and her husband's reaction, "When I told my husband, he had a violent reaction. He wanted to go after these guys. At the time I was already completely frightened and I didn't want him exposed to these people. I made myself very clear. Fortunately, he heard me and was willing to respect my wishes." Quoted by Lewis Herman from "If I can survive this..." (Cambridge, MA, Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, 1985). Videotape.

<sup>13</sup> *Gen. Rabbah* 80:1.

<sup>14</sup> *Gen. Rabbah* 76:9.

# ADVOCACY OF THE FAITHFUL: A VIEW FROM WASHINGTON, DC

NATHAN J. DIAMENT

## Introduction

In 2012, President Barack Obama was aggressively pursuing a policy with which many members of the Orthodox Jewish community vehemently disagreed; it was the nuclear deal with Iran. The impending deal was seen by the OU's leaders as running counter to the security interests of the United States as well as Israel. The challenge facing the OU was how to respond to the President's effort. While some Orthodox (and other) Jewish organizations issued press releases stating harsh critiques of the President and those in his cabinet pursuing the policy, the Orthodox Union took a different path.

Having carefully cultivated relationships with senior Administration officials, and even the President himself, the OU leaders sought and held meetings with the President and senior Cabinet members wherein we attempted to persuade the President and his team to change course. The meetings were cordial; they focused on the substance of the matter and the Orthodox Union leaders made their case on the basis of an assessment of American interests as well as an appeal to values taught by Judaism and incorporated into the American ethos.

The meeting with the President concluded with the OU leaders wishing the President well and taking a photo with him. The meeting was reported in the press (both mainstream and Jewish) and, among other things, sparked some members of the OU community to telephone and e-mail the organization to express their criticism that the OU did not denounce the President for his actions but, they said, seemed to give this politician who was acting contrary to the community's interests, in their words "the OU's *hekhsher*."

This dynamic was not new then,<sup>15</sup> has occurred since,<sup>16</sup> and no doubt will occur again.<sup>17</sup> No organization dedicated to political advocacy could ever achieve any success if it only engaged with policymakers with whom they agree all the time; you have to advocate to those in power. Nonetheless, political advocacy and engagement – especially by a religious

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<sup>15</sup> OU leaders met with George H.W. Bush despite his opposition to providing loan guarantees to Israel, and with Bill Clinton and George W. Bush despite their refusal to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

<sup>16</sup> In June, 2018, OU leaders hosted then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions at the OU's annual Mission to Washington at which Mr. Sessions delivered an important address on the topic of religious liberty. See <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-sessions-delivers-remarks-orthodox-union-advocacy-centers-annual> This meeting occurred despite the OU's objection to his enforcement of the "zero tolerance policy" at the U.S.-Mexico border. For more on the controversy surrounding that event, see my essay in *Mishpacha Magazine* <http://www.mishpacha.com/Browse/Article/10534/The-Way-I-See-It>.

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, OU leaders were the only Orthodox organizational leaders who met with President Obama and his cabinet secretaries to press our concerns about the nuclear deal with Iran. Similarly, OU leaders were the only Jewish organizational leaders to meet (twice) last summer with then-Attorney General Sessions to raise our concerns about the policy of separating parents and children illegally crossing the US-Mexico border. Those who call for religious leaders and organizations to "speak truth to power" must learn to recognize it when they see it.

organization representing a community that is not monolithic – presents challenges and opportunities worth contemplating.

### **Why the Faithful Must Engage**

Politics, as noted by political philosopher Michael Sandel, should be thought of as “applied philosophy.” Politics is the arena in which people put forward their competing visions of what constitutes a good society. Decisions are made about the share of resources that will be allocated to support the poor, provide healthcare to the ill, educate the young, how the justice system will function, and more.

Viewed from this perspective, it’s obvious that people of faith and their denominational organizations will be compelled to engage in politics, for religion certainly prescribes the vision of a good society and we know well that the Torah (upon which America’s Judeo-Christian values are based) as well as Christianity and other faith traditions have plenty to say. Indeed, over the last half-century, as the scope and impact of the federal government has grown, more religious organizations have opened representative advocacy offices in Washington, DC than ever before.<sup>18</sup>

The recognition of an obligation to engage in advocacy for the welfare of society<sup>19</sup> has been articulated by leading rabbis of the last generation. In his seminal essay “Confrontation,” Rav Joseph Soloveitchik posited an obligation upon Jews – on the basis of their humanity – to engage in the struggles that all people are involved in. He insisted that we must act as “human beings committed to the general welfare and progress of mankind...interested in combating disease, alleviating human suffering, in protecting man’s rights, in helping the needy, etcetera.”<sup>20</sup> Following in this vein, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein interpreted a passage in Talmud *Shabbat* (54b) to impose responsibility upon those with the ability to influence society at large to take action to do so,<sup>21</sup> while Rabbi Lord Immanuel Jakobovits derives the “Jewish mission to the Nations” from verses in the book of Genesis.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, in the context of public policy advocacy in the United States, it is worth considering whether Orthodox Judaism brings a set of values unique among faiths to the endeavor. While Torah Judaism, like other religious traditions, believes in the absolute truth of its creed, we are unlike other religions in that we do not have as a fundamental tenet that all people must come to embrace *Yahadut* in order to fulfill what God asks of them. We are a non-proselytizing religion that believes all people possess human dignity by virtue of being

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<sup>18</sup> See *Lobbying for the Faithful*, available at <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/11/21/lobbying-for-the-faithful-exec/>.

<sup>19</sup> See the many essays in the Orthodox Forum volume edited by Shatz, Waxman, and Diamant, *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* (Maryland: Aronson, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Confrontation,” *Tradition* 6:2 (1964): 5-29. Recently republished in *Confrontation and Other Essays* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> See Diamant, “A Comment on Tikkun Olam and Political Activity,” 220-221, in *Tikkun Olam*.

<sup>22</sup> See Immanuel Jakobovits, “The Jewish Mission to the Nations,” *Jewish Action Magazine* (Fall 5751/1990): 29-30.

created in the image of God, and believe people of other faiths can achieve righteousness in the eyes of God.<sup>23</sup> The view of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe that Jews ought to actively exert whatever influence they have to compel non-Jews to observe the *sheva mitzvot b'nei Noach* is arguably the exception that proves the rule; in a secular state we do not seek to have the provisions of the *Shulkhan Arukh* incorporated into the U.S. Code.

This is a different philosophy than those of the majority, traditionalist faiths (Evangelical Christianity, Catholicism, and others) in the United States; and it is uniquely suited for a pluralistic constitutional democracy which guarantees, among other fundamental rights, an expansive freedom of religion for people of all faiths. American Orthodox Jews can uniquely articulate our religiously informed values in the great debates of the public square without religious coercion in mind. We can ally ourselves with others who believe in the “Judeo-Christian ethic” while advocating for the benefit of similarly situated minorities.

In addition to these noble reasons for engagement, there are very practical ones.<sup>24</sup> Government decisions will impact - either positively or negatively - how religious people and how religious institutions function. Civil rights laws can protect the ability of Orthodox Jews to take off time from work for Shabbat or Yom Kippur or could permit an employer to fire a Jew for that reason and leave that individual without recourse. Tax law can support religious institutions by treating them favorably or not.<sup>25</sup> Legislators can decide to allocate funds to support Jewish (and other nonpublic) schools or not. There are countless examples, all of which compel religious communities and their representatives to engage with political leaders for the same purposes of self-preservation and self-interest as all other constituency groups and, what the Federalist Papers called, “factions” that exist in society.<sup>26</sup>

### **Balancing the Parochial and the General**

Even with the imperative to engage – whether on the basis of social responsibility or self-interest – there are significant challenges the OU must navigate in its advocacy work. One question often raised to the Orthodox Union (and I presume other parallel organizations) is how we balance the imperative to advocate for the parochial needs of the Orthodox Jewish community with the responsibility to advocate for the welfare of broader society.

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<sup>23</sup> See Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference* (Continuum, 2003), Chapter 3.

<sup>24</sup> For a broad survey of issues and accomplishments OU Advocacy focuses on, see our most recent Annual Report at [https://advocacy.ou.org/https-issuu-com-jp948-docs-ou\\_advocacy\\_2018-5778\\_\\_annual\\_repor/](https://advocacy.ou.org/https-issuu-com-jp948-docs-ou_advocacy_2018-5778__annual_repor/)

<sup>25</sup> As this essay is being written, we are confronting an unprecedented situation – *shuls*, day schools and the religious non-profit entities of other communities may have a new tax liability imposed upon them for providing certain fringe benefits to their employees. We are working in coalition with the broad spectrum of the non-profit sector to address this matter. <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/06/26/republican-tax-law-churches-employees-670362>.

<sup>26</sup> See The Federalist, No.10, available online at <https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/The+Federalist+Papers#TheFederalistPapers-10>.



First, one is hard pressed to find an issue of interest to the Orthodox community whose defense or advancement of does not benefit other segments of society. In a highly impactful, but little known incident, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe's interest in serving the poor people of Brooklyn was credited by Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm as the genesis for the creation of an expanded United States food stamp program that serves millions of women and children.<sup>27</sup> In another arena, in 2005, the OU spearheaded the creation of a federal grant program to assist non-profit organizations make their buildings more secure in the face of potential threats.<sup>28</sup> While we primarily had in mind threats against Jewish institutions -- a threat tragically realized in the recent assault upon a Pittsburgh synagogue -- we have also advocated for this program to help all houses of worship be safe; something we highlighted in the wake of the attack on a church in Charleston, S. Carolina.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, expanding the legal protections for religious exercise benefits people of all faiths; increasing the funding government allocates to support parental choice in education benefits countless families beyond our own community. Even issues that seem highly parochial - protecting the practices of male circumcision and ritual animal slaughter - benefit our fellow citizens in the Muslim community. The Orthodox Union conducts virtually all of its advocacy work through coalitions as either a member or a leader.

Of course, it is true that the positions the OU takes and the coalitions we join put us on the opposite side from some organizations or other segments within the broader Jewish community. Liberal groups such as the ADL and Union for Reform Judaism consistently oppose our efforts to increase government funding for Jewish and other nonpublic schools. But that does not define our advocacy as purely "parochial" when we have Catholics, Muslims, and Evangelicals on our side.

Beyond the issues that obviously impact the Orthodox Jewish community's parochial interests (and those of other aligned faith groups), there are issues with broader impact on which the OU might choose to advocate. The issues where it makes the most sense for the OU to do so is where there is a prospect of meaningful impact. While there may be a temptation to weigh in on all sorts of issues, what our experience has shown is that the further away from issues which most Americans intuitively sense carry a moral/ethical dimension a religious entity gets, the less influential the religious advocate will be. Thus, rabbis expressing a view about the merits of ethanol subsidies won't have much sway on the matter. On the other hand, in 2002 the debate over government funding for embryonic stem cell research was on the front burner and Americans were keenly interested in the views of various faith traditions on this matter because of its moral dimensions. The OU announcing its support for the funding of this research, counter to the Bush Administration policy, was [front-page news in The Washington Post](#).

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<sup>27</sup> See Joseph Telushkin, *Rebbe: The Life and Teachings of Menachem M. Schneerson, The Most Influential Rabbi in Modern History* (Harper Wave, 2014), 13-15.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.fema.gov/nonprofit-security-grant-program>

<sup>29</sup> See [https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/06/24/if-we-want-freedom-of-worship-then-we-need-freedom-from-fear/?utm\\_term=.9d9adc9b9f7d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/06/24/if-we-want-freedom-of-worship-then-we-need-freedom-from-fear/?utm_term=.9d9adc9b9f7d)

## **Maintaining Integrity**

For religious leaders and organizations to have impact and influence on policy they must speak with a voice of integrity. Their advocacy must be authentically anchored in the teachings and values of (in our case) Judaism and this must be translated into the public domain in a manner that demonstrates that connection in a way that's understandable by all. In the American political context, it is also important for a religious organization to work as hard as it can to operate in a bipartisan or nonpartisan manner. On the array of issues which implicate the interests and values of the Orthodox community, some will find us more aligned with Republicans while others with Democrats. Our principles must remain our polestar throughout our advocacy work.

There is also a critical need for the religious to not be seduced by access to the powerful. There is a long, checkered history of clerics becoming corrupted by proximity to the powerful. Religious leaders who are able to engage with presidents and senators and the like must remain rooted in their religious principles and ability to challenge those in office. At the same time, the Jewish history and legacy of the communal leader who is the *karov l'malchut*, the *shtadlan*, is a noble one.

Neither rabbis and ministers, nor knowledgeable lay leaders, are policy experts (certainly not in specialized areas), nor should they pretend to be. Moreover, centuries of diaspora life in which Jews could only hope not to be persecuted, forget about bringing Torah-based values into the public sphere, means that there are a few *explicit* halakhic sources to turn to for guidance on such matters. But rabbis and other religious community leaders do have the standing to defend the concept of human dignity; of the principle that every person was created in the image of God, and they can speak out against policies that dehumanize people. This can be applied to immigration, health care, criminal justice policy and more – endeavors that are central to the OU's advocacy work.

## **Conclusion**

In *Pirkei Avot*, the rabbis famously expressed conflicting views about engagement with the ruling government. R. Hanina exhorts us to pray for the welfare of the government, while R. Gamliel cautioned us to be wary of those in power.

Over the centuries, we know the wisest of Jewish leaders engaged with rulers to protect the community. In the United States of America, Jews enjoy a level of freedom and security unprecedented in Jewish history - not only do we not fear persecution, but we are invited and empowered to advocate for our interests and values and to do so explicitly on those terms. We are further invited to be part of the chorus of voices that shapes American society at large. This is a great privilege and opportunity.

In January, a new Congress will convene in Washington, which will contain a near-record number of new members. We can expect some legislation will be proposed that we agree with and some with which we will disagree, and the very same legislators might support both. We will work with all of them when and how we can. Our community - and American society at large - is best served when we engage in political advocacy in a principled and civil manner, focused on the issues, not personas. This is the kind of advocacy that is worthy of our effort and of being understood as advancing the common good. This is the kind of advocacy in which the Orthodox Jewish community should happily engage.

*Nathan J. Diament is the Executive Director for the Orthodox Union Advocacy Center, where he develops and coordinates public policy research and initiatives on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish community. Nathan has testified before congressional committees and works closely with members of both political parties to craft legislation addressing religious liberty issues, education reform, support for Israel and more. In 2009, Nathan was appointed by President Obama to serve as one of 25 members of the President's Faith Advisory Council. He is the author of articles and essays on issues including religion and state, constitutional law, social policy and international affairs. His writing has been featured in law journals as well as publications including The Washington Post, The Weekly Standard, The Washington Times, The Forward, and The Jewish Week and he has been a guest on CNN, FOX News, NPR and other broadcast media. He is an honors graduate of Yeshiva University and the Harvard Law School.*