

The One Against the Many – Photo Essay

#1) Photo of a Nazi rally in 1936 – The one folding his arms as Hitler spoke is August Landmesser.



#2) Photo of Greta Thunberg, 15, taken at Swedish Parliament, August 2018 – First School Strike



#3) Lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abraham Smith, 1930, Marion, Indiana (Lawrence Beitler, photo)



#4) Tiananmen Square, 1989 (Washington Post photo)



The One Against the Many: Jewish Sources

- 1 "Ben Azzai used to say: Do not despise any person, and do not discriminate against anything, *for there is no person that has not their hour*, and there is no thing that has not its place." (Avot 4:3)
- 2 "In a place where there is no humanity, strive to be a human being" (Avot 2:5)

יג וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל-נָתָן, חָטָאתִי 3 לַיהוָה; {ס} וַיֹּאמֶר נָתָן אֶל-דָּוִד, גַּם-יְהוָה הִעֲבִיר חָטָאתְךָ--לֹא תָמוּת. 2 Samuel 12:13 And David said unto Nathan: 'I have sinned against the LORD.' {S} And Nathan said unto David: 'The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.'

- 4 Why were *so few voices raised* in the ancient world **in protest against the ruthlessness of man?** Why are human beings so obsequious, ready to kill and ready to die at the call of kings and chieftains? Perhaps it is because they worship might, venerate those who command might, and are convinced that it is by force that man prevails. The splendor and the pride of kings blind the people. The Mesopotamian, for example, felt convinced that authorities were always right: "The command of the palace, like the command of Anu, cannot be altered. The king's word is right; his utterance, like that of a god, cannot be changed!" **The prophets repudiated the work as well as the power of man as an object of supreme adoration.** They denounced "arrogant boasting" and "haughty pride" (Isa. 10:12), the kings who ruled the nations in anger, the oppressors (Isa. 14:4-6), the destroyers of nations, who went forth to inflict waste, ruin, and death (Jer. 4:7), the "guilty men, whose own might is their god" (Hab. 1: 11). (Abraham Joshua Heschel's *The Prophets*)

לֹא-תִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵי-רַבִּים, לָרַעַת; וְלֹא-תַעֲנֶה עַל-רַב, לְנִטַּת אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים--לְהַטֹּת. Exodus 23:2 Thou shalt *not follow a multitude to do evil*; neither shalt thou bear witness in a cause to turn aside after a multitude to pervert justice.

- 5 *But I think that if one wishes to explain the verse so that everything should fit in properly, its exegesis must be as follows: לא תהיה אחרי רבים לרעת, If you see wicked persons wresting judgment do not say: since they are many I will incline after them.* (Rashi's commentary on Exodus 23:2)
- 6 When one of the judges in a case involving capital punishment rules to acquit the defendant or to hold him liable, **not because this is his own opinion** which he arrived upon the basis of his own decision, but rather **he was swayed** after his colleague's words, **he commits a transgression**, as implied by Exodus 23:2: "Do not respond to a dispute with an inclination." According to the Oral Tradition, this command is interpreted to mean that, when the judges are determining the verdict, a person should not say: "It is sufficient for me to adopt so-and-so's understanding." Instead, he should say what he thinks himself. (Rambam, *Mishna Torah, Sanhedrin* ch.10)

8 Pe'ah (a corner of the field that is left for the poor) is given from [the crop] while it is still connected with the soil. But in the case of hanging vine-branches and the date-palm, the owner brings down [the fruit] and distributes it among the poor. Rabbi Shimon says: the same applies to smooth nut trees. Even if ninety-nine [of the poor] say [to the owner] to distribute it and one says to leave it in the field, this latter is listened to, since he spoke in accordance with the halakhah. (Mishna Pe'ah 4:1)

9 Sharansky crossed from East Germany to West at the Glienicke Bridge, where at its Berlin terminus of Wannsee, Nazi chiefs affirmed the "Final Solution" in 1942. As he began to **walk alone across that bridge** to freedom, when we might have expected him to virtually run, to at least walk as directly and quickly as possible

to the other side, he did something very different which bewildered all of those who watched, those waiting for him at the other side and all of those watching on televisions around the world. **The newly freed prisoner took a long, slow, zigzag course** across the bridge. Beyond the deep, existential questions of survival, of faith, of hope that would become the primary questions over time, answers to inspire and challenge, the immediate question was obvious. Asked by newscasters and loved ones, by common folks and famous, the question was the same, asked with incredulity, the answer awaited with bated breath. Why had he walked that zigzag course across the bridge? The answer was as startling as it was simple. The KGB agents who had brought him to the bridge had told him to walk quickly across in a straight line. And so, of course, **as his one last act of defiance in the face of his oppressors, turning to the right and turning to the left, he walked in a slow zigzag course across the bridge to freedom.** (Rabbi Victor H. Reinstein)



10 “No man is an island; but everyone is a peninsula, half attached to the mainland and half attached to the ocean, half connected to family and friends and culture and tradition and country...and the other half wants to be left alone to face the ocean.” (Amos Oz)

11 It was a missed opportunity to save tens of thousands of lives from Hitler’s archipelago of death that eventually led to a radical, albeit temporary, rethink of US refugee policy. And it was only thanks to a brave band of government whistle-blowers that Washington’s deadly foot-dragging was exposed. The story is a reminder of the high stakes involved in two seemingly unrelated fields: whistle-blowing and refugee policy. In January of 1944, the US approach to those fleeing Hitler underwent dramatic change with the creation of an independent government agency charged solely with rescuing victims of enemy oppression, primarily European Jews. The War Refugee Board, established through Executive Order 9417, saved approximately 200,000 potential victims of the Nazis. The creation of the board was the direct result of the courageous efforts of a small group of public servants. While conducting their normal duties to process a license request, the Treasury men discovered that officials in the State Department were not only failing to implement specific refugee rescue proposals favored by President Franklin D. Roosevelt but were also actively using their power to prevent Jews from escaping to the United States. They had suppressed information about the Holocaust, delayed the processing of rescue initiatives, and refused visas to Jews. Further, they had hidden or altered documents to cover their actions. Treasury’s six-month effort to document and expose State Department malfeasance culminated in a meeting with Roosevelt on Jan. 16, 1944. In the 20-minute discussion, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. presented the president with a detailed report of Treasury’s findings, urging him to create a new government commission responsible for refugee issues. Roosevelt agreed. In less than one week, he issued the executive order establishing the War Refugee Board. On Jan. 13, three days before the Treasury gang approached Roosevelt, Morgenthau had described the kind of people he wanted involved in the whistle-blowing effort: “What I want is intelligence and courage — courage first and intelligence second.” (Amanda J. Rothschild: “The forgotten whistle-blowers who saved Jewish lives,” Boston Globe, 10/31/15)

12 It's like the story of the man outside the gates of Sodom, warning the people to stop their sinning: “He went on preaching day after day, maybe even picketing. But no one listened. He was not discouraged. He went on preaching for years. Finally, someone asked him, ‘Rabbi, why do you do that? Don't you see it is no use?’ He said, ‘I know it is of no use, but I must. And I will tell you why: in the beginning I thought I had to protest and to shout in order to change *them*. I have given up this hope. Now I know I must picket and scream and shout so that they should not change me.’” (retold by Elie Wiesel)