

How do you spell Haiti?

The last few days for me have been more confusing than ever. How does adversity happen? Do the tornados always target trailer parks? Do tragic accidents always befall the less fortunate? Do health calamities hurt only those unable to afford remedies?

Intellectually we know the answers to these questions. In our imperfect world there are some, just because of the luck of time, place and wealth, whose lives are less impacted by these events. However, we also know that many who start life with ease end it with trauma and just as many who begin with troubled lives end in satisfaction and reward. As Jews we know better than most. The world has looked at us as self reliant, family and work oriented, and success driven. Many of us look at ourselves as fortunate, living as our parents hoped for and expected, and realizing that what we achieve may be worthless if our legacy is only based on what we gained.

Very few Jews live in Haiti, but it wasn't always that way. As I recently learned, Judah P. Benjamin, one of America's most famous Jews in the 19th century was born in Haiti, then a British colony. Judah Benjamin rose to Secretary of State in the Confederate States of America and was Jefferson Davis' most trusted confidant. After the Civil War, he escaped to Britain where he thrived as a lawyer and legal author. His treatises are still used in many law schools.

In the 20th century, while the Jewish exodus from Europe to the United States and Israel was rampant, Haiti, for many Jews, became a conversation of limited interest. America's military became involved in Haiti periodically for a myriad of reasons and the tiny portion of the island it shares with the Dominican Republic was never a Caribbean vacation hot spot. Haiti was poor and their governments perpetually corrupt, and our connection to it was limited to contact with those Haitians who were able to immigrate into the United States for a better life.

Now, in 2010, we see Haiti in a different light. They are in need. Their status of just being poor has been turned upside down and inside out to a new level of horridness. Haitians are crippled by "a perfect storm" of everything falling apart at the same time with nowhere to go and only a black hole staring one in the face. As Jews, and especially American Jews, we see the situation in Haiti from a different perspective. We are a light to the nations and as a light we see our role as always there to help those in need, regardless of where they live, who they pray to, or whether they share our view of the world. Our Synagogue movements and our Federation have joined in our immediate and selfless support to the Jewish Distribution Committee who distributes food and water to those in need in Port O Prince. Israel, our Jewish homeland that is painted as a pariah by most of the world, was on the scene within hours, saving lives, providing medicines and doctors, and leading the way for other western countries.

As Jews, we are prophetically commanded to do justice and love mercy. We are there to literally help repair a broken world. Most definitely, many will ask "Where was God" during the earthquake. The answer, as always, is that God is where there are those who do godly things—helping to provide sustenance, healing the sick, caring for the widow and orphan. Haiti is our

most recent horrible tragedy. We know it won't be our last. But as Jews we also know that to do God's will, we will be there always to help. We were strangers in the land of Egypt. We needed help. In our ancient days, God provided for the Israelites. Today, as God's partner, it is our job. That is how I spell Haiti and why the Federation I help lead is there leading those people out of their wilderness to hopefully, a new Promised Land.

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