

Videos & Photos: Novominsker Rebbe Issues Direct Plea to President Obama

May 12, 2015



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“Our tefillos, of course, are directed to Avinu shebashamayim, but I also feel compelled to address the leader of this great country.

A deafening silence overtook the cavernous grand ballroom of the Hilton New York, as Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, the Novominsker Rebbe shlit”a, Rosh Agudas Yisroel of America, spoke these words during the organization’s 93rd annual dinner on Sunday evening.

The subject that prompted the Rebbe to address his words directly to President Obama was the impending “deal” with Iran regarding the rogue nation’s nuclear development. The Rebbe expressed deep concern about the threat an invigorated Iran poses toward Israel.”

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The Rebbe passionately invoked the 70th anniversary of the culmination of the Holocaust when discussing Iran’s “open declaration of genocide.” He bluntly stated that the diplomatic agreements currently being contemplated between the United States and Iran could well enable the radical regime to attain nuclear weapons “one way or another.”

“Mr. President, rise to the challenge of history,” the Rebbe implored, “and preserve life and freedom for a people who have been the whipping boys of

history.”

In his far-ranging address, the Rebbe also spoke forcefully about the imperative of enhancing k’vod shomayim and the importance of kiruv rechokim. He explained that although we must continue to speak out against the movements that threaten Torah life and Jewish continuity, we must also ramp up our efforts to reach out to non-Orthodox Jews on an individual basis and attract them closer to Torah. “One question that I cannot answer is, ‘Why have we not done more (kiruv)?’” the Rebbe said.

The Pinch-Hitting Senator

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Later in the dinner program, Senator Charles Schumer – a last minute “pinch hitter” for Senator Cory Booker from New Jersey, who had been scheduled to address the Agudath Israel conclave but had to cancel at the last moment due to an illness in the family – acknowledged the Novominsker Rebbe’s remarks, and offered his own analysis of the Iranian threat. He emphasized his insistence upon congressional oversight of any Iran deal, despite the objections of many in his party.

The senior Senator from New York, who is set to become leader of the Senate Democrats upon the impending retirement of Senator Harry Reid, declared that any deal must offer the U.S. the right to inspect anywhere in Iran, at any time; must keep sanctions in place until Iran follows through on its promises; must allow for sanctions to ‘snap back’ if Iran violates its commitments; must tackle Iranian military capabilities; and must satisfactorily ensure that Iran’s 10,000 kilos of enriched uranium pose no harm.

Senator Schumer also spoke of the “eerie” rise in European anti-Semitism, as well as the anti-Semitic foundation of the anti-Israel BDS movement here at home. He urged the Jewish community to stand up and fight these consequential fights, and volunteered that he is once again eager to work with Agudath Israel on these fronts. “The relationship between Agudath and the senior Senator of New York, as long as I’m here, will be strong and productive,” he vowed, to thunderous applause.

[Click [Here](#) if you are unable to view this video.]

Although Senator Booker did not appear in person, he did send a special video message through Agudath Israel of America Trustee and New Jersey *askan* Raphael Zucker (view special message [here](#)). Mr. Zucker spoke about the accomplishments of Agudath Israel's New Jersey "ball of fire", Rabbi Avi Schnall, and the friendship that exists between Senator Booker and the rapidly growing New Jersey Orthodox Jewish community.

Representing Jewish Values to the World

In the spirit of the evening, the address delivered by Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, Agudath Israel's executive vice president, bespoke urgency and the need to be proactive.

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Rabbi Zwiebel briefly mentioned some of the top accomplishments of the year – including freeing bris Milah from government regulation, working with the de Blasio administration to help ease the bureaucratic process for parents of children with special education needs, and breaking ground on affordable housing in Brooklyn – before expounding upon his main focus: the threat posed by the rapid advancement of the redefinition of marriage.

Though many of us are tempted to believe that the radical redefinition that is sweeping the nation won't affect us, Rabbi Zwiebel warned that it is doing so already. He listed a range of examples of how religious institutions and people who believe in the traditional definition of marriage are now being ostracized across America as if their religious beliefs are bigotry. Perhaps most chillingly, during the recent oral arguments in the U.S. Supreme Court regarding the constitutionality of the traditional definition of marriage, the U.S. Solicitor General acknowledged that religious institutions and schools may lose tax-exempt status if they do not agree to redefine the parameters of marriage.

Recognizing the direct threat to our religious freedom, Agudath Israel filed a legal brief in the Supreme Court in support of traditional marriage. Unfortunately, though, no other major religious Jewish organization has done the same. On the contrary, a group including the Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements has filed a brief for the other side, touting that

its rabbis perform same gender marriages.

The Agudah leader also cited a recent statement by the leading contender for the Democratic Party's 2016 presidential nomination, who stated that "deep-seated religious beliefs [about abortion] have to be changed." "We are here tonight to declare," Rabbi Zwiebel exclaimed, 'zos haTorah lo tehei muchlefos.' Torah can never be changed!"

Tribute to Rabbi Moshe Sherer

This year's dinner fell on 21 Iyar, a particularly historic day in the annals of Agudath Israel history: the 17th yahrzeit of its legendary president Rabbi Moshe Sherer z"l.

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Rabbi Sherer initially began his life's work as a young Agudath Israel activist during the Holocaust era under the wings of Reb Elimelech "Mike" Tress z"l. After being involved in the historic hatzalah work during that era, Rabbi Sherer trail blazed a path of askanus that spanned the gamut: building Torah, governmental advocacy, educational funding, Soviet rescue efforts, and much more.

To honor Rabbi Sherer's yahrzeit, his grandson, Rabbi Yehuda Langer, made a Siyum on Maseches Yevamos, followed by a moving Kaddish recited by Rabbi Sherer's son, Rabbi Shimshon Sherer. Then, at the conclusion of the program, Rabbi Shmuel Bloom – former executive vice president of Agudath Israel and recipient of the evening's [Rabbi Moshe Sherer Memorial Award](#) – delivered brief divrei azkara for the legendary Agudah leader.

[Click [Here](#) if you are unable to view this video.]

Rabbi Bloom, who worked side-by-side with Rabbi Sherer for 24 years, was particularly emotional as he explained how being around Rabbi Sherer made for constant lesson learning. Rabbi Bloom reflected upon Rabbi Sherer's leading role in shaping our community's history, and guiding the work towards a brighter future.

"We are here tonight to say "Thank you,'" said Rabbi Bloom.

The evening's other major honorees were [Moishe Chopp \(HaGaon Rav](#)

[Aharon Kotler Memorial Award](#)), [Fischel Roth \(Reb Elimelech Tress Memorial Award\)](#), and [Dr. Michael Zelefsky \(Moreinu Yaakov Rosenheim Memorial Award\)](#). [Avodas Hakodesh Awards](#) were presented to Rabbi Naftali Besser, Mr. Yerachmiel Bratt, Rabbi Benzion Leser and Dr. Elliott Samet; and the William K. Friedman Award was given to Rabbi Menashe Miller.

The dinner chairman was Dr. Irving Lebovics, president of Agudath Israel of California. In his [opening remarks](#), Dr. Lebovics relayed just how much the organization has grown since he last chaired an Agudath Israel dinner, in the same ballroom, in 1986.

[For optimal viewing experience, hover over and click the magnifying glass in the lower right corner of the picture.]

Agudath Israel has branched out so widely, with so many substantive activities and accomplishments: Torah projects and events; shiurim; Pirchei and Bnos youth programs and summer camps; COPE, PCS and other parnassah initiatives; Chayim Aruchim end-of-life care; Lefkowitz Leadership Initiative; affordable housing; constituent services; legal advocacy services; government advocacy; 13 state offices; pro-Israel advocacy; fighting global anti-Semitism; Yeshiva services, and more. "The question is not 'What does Agudah do?' but 'What does Agudah not do?'" Dr. Lebovics exclaimed.

Indeed, as was made clear throughout the evening, whether the message is to members of our community or to the broader Jewish world...to the Supreme Court or to the White House...to the media or to the legislature - Agudath Israel of America's voice is heard.

(Author: Shimmy Blum)