



Between Civil War and Nonviolent Demonstrations: How Best to Respond to Discriminatory Decrees?

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I. The Discriminatory Decrees of the 25th of Kislev

*Read the following description of the discriminatory decrees against the Jews by the Greeks?
How would you respond to these decrees?*

I.1	<p>I Maccabeus, chapter 1:41-64</p> <p>41 Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, 42 and abandon their particular customs. All the Gentiles conformed to the command of the king, 43 and many Israelites delighted in his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath. 44 The king sent letters by messenger to Jerusalem and to the cities of Judah, ordering them to follow customs foreign to their land; 45 to prohibit burnt offerings, sacrifices, and libations in the sanctuary, to profane the sabbaths and feast days, 46 to desecrate the sanctuary and the sacred ministers, 47 to build pagan altars and temples and shrines, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals, 48 to leave their sons uncircumcised, and to defile themselves with every kind of impurity and abomination; 49 so that they might forget the law and change all its ordinances. 50 Whoever refused to act according to the command of the king was to be put to death. 51 In words such as these he wrote to his whole kingdom..... 53 They drove Israel into hiding, wherever places of refuge could be found. 54 On the fifteenth day of the month Kislev, in the year one hundred and forty-five,*the king erected the desolating abomination upon the altar of burnt offerings, and in the surrounding cities of Judah they built pagan altars. 60 In keeping with the decree, they put to death women who had their children circumcised, 61 and they hung their babies from their necks; their families also and those who had circumcised them were killed. 62 But many in Israel were determined and resolved in their hearts not to eat anything unclean; 63 they preferred to die rather than to be defiled with food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die.</p>
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How did Mattathias and his sons respond to the decrees? What do you think about their response?

I.2	I Maccabeus, chapter 2:16-44
	<p>16. The officers of the king in charge of enforcing the apostasy came to the city of Modein to make them sacrifice. Many of Israel joined them, but Mattathias and his sons drew together. 17 Then the officers of the king addressed Mattathias: “You are a leader, an honorable and great man in this city, supported by sons and kindred. 18 Come now, be the first to obey the king’s command, as all the Gentiles and Judeans and those who are left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons shall be numbered among the King’s Friends,* and you and your sons shall be honored with silver and gold and many gifts.” 19 But Mattathias answered in a loud voice: “Although all the Gentiles in the king’s realm obey him, so that they forsake the religion of their ancestors and consent to the king’s orders, 20 yet I and my sons and my kindred will keep to the covenant of our ancestors. 21 Heaven forbid that we should forsake the law and the commandments. 22 We will not obey the words of the king by departing from our religion in the slightest degree.” 23 As he finished saying these words, a certain Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein according to the king’s order. 24 When Mattathias saw him, he was filled with zeal; his heart was moved and his just fury was aroused; he sprang forward and killed him upon the altar. 25 At the same time, he also killed the messenger of the king who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. 26 Thus he showed his zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did with Zimri, son of Salu. 27 Then Mattathias cried out in the city, “Let everyone who is zealous for the law and who stands by the covenant follow me!” 43 And all those who were fleeing from the persecutions joined them and supported them. 44 They gathered an army and struck down sinners in their wrath and the lawless in their anger, and the survivors fled to the Gentiles for safety.</p>



II. The Discriminatory Decrees of the 28th of Adar

Read the following description of the discriminatory decrees against the Jews by the Romans. How would you respond to these decrees if you were Judah b. Shammu'a or a supporter of his?

II.1	Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashana 19a ¹	תלמוד בבלי ראש השנה יט:א
	'On the 28th [of Adar] came glad tidings to the Jews that they should not abandon the practice of the Law.'	בעשרים ותמניא ביה אתת בשורתא טבתא ליהודאי דלא יעידון מאורייתא
	The Roman Government issued a decree that they (the Jews) should not study the Torah and that they should not circumcise their sons and that they should profane the Sabbath. What did Judah b. Shammu'a and his colleagues do?	שגזרה המלכות גזרה שלא יעסקו בתורה ושלא ימולו את בניהם ושיחללו שבתות מה עשה יהודה בן שמוע וחביריו?

What did Judah b. Shammu'a actually do? Why was his response different from that of Mattathias?

II.2	Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashana 19a	תלמוד בבלי ראש השנה יט:א
	They went and consulted a certain noble lady (<i>matronit</i>) whom all the Roman notables used to visit. She said to them: "Come and demonstrate at night time". [Commentary of Rashi: <i>hafginu</i> ("Demonstrate"): Scream out in the marketplaces and in the streets in order that the (Roman) ministers should hear and have compassion upon you]. They went and demonstrated (<i>lit.</i> cried out) at night, saying, "Alas, in heaven's name, are we not your brothers, are we not the sons of one father [and are we not the sons of one mother?] Why are we different from every nation and tongue that you issue such decrees upon us?" [They did not move from there until] the decrees were thereupon annulled. And that day was declared a feast day'.	הלכו ונטלו עצה מן מטרונית אחת שכל גדולי רומי מצויין אצלה. אמרה להן. בואו והפגינו בלילה. עמדו והפגינו בלילה. [רש"י, ראש השנה יט ע"א הפגינו - צעקו בשוקים וברחובות כדי שישמעו השרים וירחמו עליכם. אי שמים - כלומר: למען הקדוש ברוך הוא.] אמרו אי שמים לא אחים אנחנו לאו בני אב אחד אנחנו. מה נשתנינו מכל אומה ולשון שאתם גזרים עלינו גזירות. וביטלום. ואותו היום עשאוהו יום טוב.

¹ MS Parma edition of the Scholio on Megilat Ta'anit, 28th of Adar (Noam, Megilat Ta'anit pp. 128-129) with some variants.



1. *In what way was Judah b. Shamu'ah's method of nonviolence successful?*

II.3	Sharp, G. (1973), <i>The Politics of Nonviolent Action, vol. III</i>, Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers, p. 706
	In <i>conversion</i> the opponent has been inwardly changed so that he wants to make the changes desired by the nonviolent actionists. In <i>accommodation</i> , the opponent does not agree with the changes... and he could continue the struggle... but... has concluded that it is best to grant some or all of the demands.... In <i>nonviolent coercion</i> the opponent has not changed his mind on the issues and wants to <i>continue</i> the struggle, but is <i>unable</i> to do so; the sources of his power and means of control have been taken away from him without the use of violence. This may have been done by the nonviolent group or by the opposition and noncooperation among his own group (as, <i>mutiny</i> of his troops), or some combination of these.

2. *What does this legend teach us about the relationship between Jews and non-Jews?*

II.4	Moshe Rosensohn, <i>Shalom aḥim, Vilna, 1870, sh'ar rishon.</i>	משה רוזנשין, שלום אחים (וילנא 1870)
	It is an obligation from the Torah and the books of the Talmud and the rabbis to love all people as brothers, and friends, without distinction of which nation or religion they are!	החייב מן התורה וספרי התלמוד והרבנים לאהוב כל אדם כאח וכרע בלי הבדל מאיזה עם ואיזה דת הוא!"

3. *What may we learn from this legend regarding the role of the Roman noble lady, and the need for third-party peacemakers?*

II.5	M. J. Mathey, et. al. "The role played women of the Central African Republic in the prevention and resolution of conflicts", in <i>Women and Peace in Africa: Case Studies on Traditional Conflict Resolution Practices</i>, Paris, UNESCO, 2003, pp. 41-42.
	The elderly woman was respected by all, and played a key role in crisis management and conflict resolution. Thus, when a conflict degenerated into armed violence, an appeal would usually be made to a third party of mature years to calm the tension and reconcile the combatants. Such an appeal for mediation was usually made to a woman who enjoyed the consideration and respect of all who knew her.... "We are your mothers, We not want war, We do not want bloodshed. Do not fight with your brothers. They have sent us to sue for peace".

Discussion Questions:

1. *How do you respond when a harsh and discriminatory decree by a government is made against your identity group or others you identify with?*
2. *Are there trusted "third-siders" to whom you can turn to help in deescalating the situation?*
3. *When and how can nonviolent demonstrations succeed in canceling such decrees? How do you respond when they cannot?*