

HALF FULL

So we start a new year. The last one seemed to be something of a disaster. The next one promises to be even worse. The gloom is thick. So are the gloom-sayers.

But as one jingle goes: "If all the world looks drear, perhaps the meaning/ Is that your windows need a little cleaning."

Israel, for example, is in trouble on a couple of counts. But we really shouldn't overlook the fact that the first Arab-Israel peace treaty was signed. No one would have believed it a few years ago. The largest Arab country, the one with the troops, actually acknowledged Israel's legitimacy. And Egypt stood firm with Israel against the U.S. State Department's attempt to fiddle with UN Resolution 242.

This was not a Golden Year for America's relationship with Israel. The State Department fiddled; the President waffled; and Andy Young, the Third World's Ambassador to the United States, swashbuckled. However, most of the Congressmen held their ground. Both California Senators strongly attacked the Administration's flirtation with the PLO. The foreign aid bill passed its first test.

The logic of America's support for Israel remains strong. The polls show that the American public's opinion of the PLO continues to be very low indeed. Israel is still the key to America's defense against Soviet hegemony in the Middle East. Most Americans and their Congressmen still recognize that.

What about anti-semitism within the United States? There certainly seem to be some troubling signals. However, those signals are mainly disturbing because they are coming from unexpected quarters. Mainstream America has not followed suit. A clue is the fact that more Jews have been elected to the U.S. Senate than ever before. They are not silent Jews either; one of them is well known for his support of the Chabad movement.

Earl Raab
"Half Full"
page 2

A few anti-semitic episodes in San Francisco have been very disturbing. On the other hand, we know that anti-semitism becomes most dangerous when officialdom supports it. In San Francisco, an under-manned police department has set up some special and unique mechanisms to try to deal with any future problems of the kind. And in San Francisco, both major candidates for Mayor are well-identified Jews, which doesn't seem to bother the electorate at large.

Local television has not only re-run the Holocaust series, but has cooperated with the Jewish community's Mass Media Project in doing special prime-time local programming on the subject. Local television and radio also cooperated with the Mass Media Project recently to do some special programming on Soviet Jewry.

And speaking of Soviet Jewry, we mourn the continued imprisonment of Shcharansky, Nudel and others, but must note that the emigration rate has been at its highest level. We must also note the success of our campaign to prevent the statute of limitations from being applied to Nazi war criminals.

All of this, a partial list, is by way of saying that the glass can be seen as half-full instead of half-empty. Jewish public affairs agencies, their speakers and writers, are in the business of emphasizing how empty the glass is, how foreboding things are. They spread gloom partly because they are afraid that otherwise the Jewish populace will become complacent and apathetic.

But there is a danger in not balancing the picture on occasion. People can become so discouraged that they just thresh about in panic, rather than engaging in effective action.

Earl Raab
"Half Full"
page 3

The fact is that things are pretty bad. They will probably get a little worse in the year ahead. But we are not helpless. All in all, we are not in a hostile environment. We can continue to have some successes, if we keep our wits about us. They are both troubled at the moment, but we have an Israel and we have an America; and that's much, much more than we have usually had in the last two thousand years.

(Syndicated by the San Francisco Jewish Bulletin)