

The Board of Deputies of British Jews
1 Torriano Mews
Kentish Town
London NW5 2RZ

11th February 2019

For the attention of Marie van der Zyl, Deputies President

Dear Marie,

Your secret meeting with the Labour general secretary (JC, 8 Feb 2019) was done without the agreement or knowledge of the main Jewish communal organisations who should have been informed. This may be surprising to some - who are reported as being angered and confused - but not to me. In over twenty years of you being my daughter-in-law I have learnt that you are prone to doing things your own way without consideration or consultation or regard to good manners, common civility or accepted protocol.

Your current transgression puts me in mind of the occasion when you visited, uninvited, an elderly, frail lady living in retirement in Mallorca. She was the grandmother of your future husband and, at that time, you had no family or professional connection with her whatsoever. You had not sought permission to discuss with her, her financial affairs or her will, from her immediate family - chiefly her daughter Nikki van der Zyl. She, together with *her* daughter Kerry, fortuitously arrived on one of their regular visits. Grandma's carer told them that upon you learning of their imminent arrival - via the lift - you fled furtively down the stairs. If your visit was not one of dishonest intent why did you not stay and greet them?

Your reported reaction to the CST figures on antisemitic incidents (Board newsletter) was: "We must strive to make our country a just, safe and respectful society. There can be no room for racism and hatred." So why do you not, unequivocally, condemn the racist and hateful contents of the letters your father sent to me?

In 2015 The Independent newspaper reported on the teaching at Orthodox Jewish schools in north London. A whistle-blower said that "It's not uncommon to be taught non-Jewish people are evil in ultra-Orthodox Jewish schools. It is part of the prayers, teaching, their whole ethos." Kindergarten worksheets written in Yiddish asked questions like "What did the goyim (non-Jews) want to do with all the Jews?" - to which the answer, according to the worksheet, is: "Kill them."

"It doesn't explicitly refer to the Holocaust," the source said. "It's a document that teaches very young children to be very afraid and treat non-Jews very suspiciously because of what they did to us in the past." The Independent said that a spokesperson for the school agreed that the worksheets would be amended and apologised for any offence.

The extreme attitudes portrayed in that article are not dissimilar from those which were held by your father Barry Kaye. He had no other compelling reason to write to me as he did,

except to give vent to his hatred. In the hate letters he sent to me he wrote disparagingly of me as a “non-Jew”; celebrated the values of “Yiddishkeit”; declared himself to be “mentor, teacher and guide” to your young, impressionable, children; and threatened me with violence “... in the good old fashioned East End Yiddshe way, blood on the floor etc.”

In her book *Raising Children with Jewish Values*, Lois Shenker says:

Most parents are concerned about raising their children with good values: parents of Jewish children not only want good values, they want Jewish values. If this is so, then what Jewish values are important in raising Jewish children, and how does one go about it?

When I think of teaching children, I realize that the most important thing is to be aware that our children learn by example. To instill values in children effectively, we must model the kind of behavior we want them to acquire.

As Jonathan Sacks puts it, “It’s in the home that we are tested, there that we learn the love that is respect, consideration, gentleness, the capacity to listen as well as speak, sensitivity, graciousness and the willingness to make sacrifices for one another.” In other words, home is where we learn the most important lessons of life. Your father’s prejudicial views very likely influenced your formative years and may have contaminated your children’s.

Alex Brummer writes movingly (JNews 7 Feb 2019) about how the Holocaust affected his family. Although he was born in England, he is fully aware of the impact it had and why commemoration of the Shoah and the personal remembrance of family members is so important. In the light of all this, the ignorance within so-called ‘informed’ Jewish families is beyond understanding. What part of the story of the van der Zyl family and its close shave with the horrors of the death camps did your father not get? And what part of the family trauma does your husband, and by extension yourself, not get? Where was the sympathy, consideration and **respect** due to the Holocaust survivor mother /mother-in-law/ grandmother?

Returning to the CST report, we all can and should unequivocally convey the message that racism is evil, and that there is never an excuse for it. So when you state that “There can be no room for racism and hatred”, unless you explicitly condemn and convincingly distance yourself from your father’s extremist views, the platitudes you repeat are just double-speak.

In condemning racism and hatred in public but remaining silent on your own father's abominable letters it proves you have no honesty or integrity. Silence is complicity.

Yours sincerely,

George Rooker,
Historian