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Einstein's Warning Light

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*The sparkle in the eyes of American academics as they spoke in Washington about human and civil rights in their country made Prof. David Harel feel embarrassed. A quote from of the greatest physicist, which is engraved near his statue in the American capital but was omitted from his replica statue in Jerusalem, tells the whole story.*

A few months ago I attended the annual gala ceremony at the National Academy of Engineering in Washington. The gathering was particularly moving because the academy was also celebrating its 50th anniversary. But 1964 was a special year in U.S. Congressional legislation for a much more important reason than the law that established a somewhat elitist scientific body. That same year, the Civil Rights Act was also enacted, one of the most important milestones in American history and in the annals of the modern world. It outlaws all civil discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. This law, and its 50-year connection to the American Academy of Engineering, were mentioned and discussed at length by some of the speakers at the ceremony.

I sit there and listen to the speakers, see the sparkle in the audience's eyes, and don't know what to think. I listen, and feel very bad. After all, there sits a man, who lives in a country whose Declaration of Independence sets out rules very similar to this American law, but in an incomprehensible way, his country is clearly moving in a completely opposite direction.

There sits a man for which a minister in his government proposes finding ways to limit the birth rate among the Bedouins in the Negev, and whose prime minister makes sure to disqualify members of the Israel Prize Committee for Literature so that, God forbid, someone who opposes his positions is not elected.

There sits a man who recalls that the fact that "Muhammad" was the most common name for male babies in his country in 2014 was removed from the public's eye, in a clear act of racism, by the government office responsible for collecting and analyzing the data. Incidentally, this figure includes only the country's citizens, not the masses of non-citizens under our control.

There sits a man whose country, encouraged by its government, is going to great pains to denounce and block the sources of funding for people and organizations fighting for equal rights for all citizens of the country, almost exactly as was stipulated there in the USA 50 years ago, and as is enshrined here in the country's founding document, the Israeli Declaration of Independence. And here people don't really give a damn about either.

An Israeli sits at a conference at an American National Academy that extols their Equal Rights Act, and remembers that upon his return to Israel he is supposed to speak at a conference on "Xenophobia and Acceptance of The Other" at the The Israel National Academy of Sciences and Humanities, and it occurs to him that in the time allotted to him there is no point in mentioning what is happening beyond the Green Line, because the situation within Israel proper is already terrible enough.

During my trip back to Israel, I recalled two well-known sayings, very relevant to the case at hand. Some time before he resigned from the German Academy in 1933, renounced his citizenship, and emigrated to the United States, Albert Einstein wrote: "As long as I have any choice in the matter, I shall live only in a country where civil liberty, tolerance and equality of all citizens before the law prevail."

This sentence is engraved at the bottom of his statue that stands in front of the American National Academies building in Washington, but it does not appear on the

replica of the statue that stands in front of our Academy's home in Jerusalem. That's a great pity. I and my many friends fighting for peace and civil rights have no intention of abandoning the campaign and leaving. We will continue to fight until we succeed. But although it is clear that Germany of 1933 should not be compared to Israel of 2014, it is good that Einstein's warning light should also be in front of our eyes.

And in 1963, a year before the American Civil Rights Act went into effect, in his stirring "I Have a Dream" speech, Martin Luther King, Jr. uttered this unforgettable hope: "I have a dream, that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." So poetic, and so painful.

I too have a dream, and it too concerns my precious descendants. I will allow myself to borrow King's statement and bend it to my needs: "I have a dream that my five children and five grandchildren will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged themselves, nor will they judge others, according to their religion, language, or race, or according to the degree of their submissive agreement with the actions of their government, but solely according to their character, the quality of their personality, and their full acceptance of the other, be it an individual, or the nation or the state."

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