

"Where are You?" - Where I was...

I am just back after a fascinating weekend in Italy at the Global Foundation Rome Roundtable.

Amongst the sixty international participants were senior financiers including the Governors of the Banks of England, France and Italy; spiritual leaders such as Cardinal George Pell, Vatican Prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy, The Most Revd Dr. Thabo Makgoba who is the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town; captains of industry together with many senior politicians, a past Prime Minister, ambassadors and diplomats.

It was truly a privilege to participate in a discussion on the alleviation of suffering in conjunction with people who genuinely care; who have the means and influence to make a difference. The foremost concerns of this Roundtable were to eradicate forced labour from global supply chains; to improve economic empowerment outcomes for women, worldwide and to strengthen global community partnerships across business and faiths for mutual benefit and sustainable global development.

Jewish religious law and moral doctrine covers all areas of commercial activity; competition, product liability, honest representation, investment and partnerships, corporate responsibility, severance payments and pensions. Derived from Biblical verses and interpreted over the centuries, sometimes where Jewish communities have had autonomy and other times where they have depended on the fragile goodwill of their hosts, these laws have evolved with circumstance with a view to core guiding principles. They are realistic and workable. They provide security and prospects of growth for both employee and employer. They advance human dignity through the highest regard for all human life. They look for this generation to plant and resource a better world for the future generations which will follow.

While we correctly prioritise the welfare and security of those closest to home, it is a mitzvah to participate in, even to play a leadership role in and to set an example in bettering Hashem's world for all of humanity and all God's Creation.

In his address to us, Pope Francis stated, "It is necessary above all for each of us, personally, to overcome our indifference to the needs of the poor. We need to learn "com-passion" for those suffering from persecution, loneliness, forced displacement or separation from their families. We need to learn to "suffer with" those who lack access to health care, or who endure hunger, cold or heat.

This compassion will enable those with responsibilities in the worlds of finance and politics to use their intelligence and their resources not merely to control and monitor the effects of globalization, but also to help leaders at different political levels – regional, national and international – to correct

its orientation whenever necessary. For politics and the economy ought to include the exercise of the virtue of prudence.”

In the words of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, “When God created the world, He provided an opportunity for the work of His hands – man – to participate in His creation. The Creator, as it were, impaired reality in order that mortal man could repair its flaws and perfect it.

In the words of Emeritus Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, “as long as there is hunger, poverty and treatable disease in the world, there is work for us to do. As long as nations fight and men hate and corruption stalks the corridors of power; as long as there is hunger and homelessness, depression and despair, our task is not yet done, and we hear, if we listen carefully enough, the voice of God asking us as he asked the first humans, ‘Where are you?’”

Let us rise to the challenge with the biblical rejoinder “Hineini - Here I am, ready to play my part.”