

By Aliza Davidovitz

ERIC CANTOR

Fighting for Freedom

We can learn a lot about Eric Cantor by the one inanimate object he'd save if his house was on fire. Unlike some who say they'd grab their awards,

photos or wallets, Cantor fires back with an answer as if he'd rehearsed it his whole life. "*My tefillin*," he says, without hesitation. And though it is just about the one question he has never been asked before as a Congressman, it reveals much more about him than the usual canned politicians' responses.

That religious article worn by Jewish men during morning prayers serves as a binding tie between the Jewish people and their God. Cantor says that being Jewish means living a life of purpose and decency as prescribed by the Torah, with the added duty of *tikkun olam*, to make the world a more perfect place. It's a commitment to the past and to the future, and it is the hallmark of Cantor's service to his country.

Now more than ever the future is very much on Cantor's mind. As the only Jewish Republican in Congress and as the Minority Whip, he is serving during a pivotal time in both American and Israeli history. He has the mammoth responsibility of trying to save the two symbiotic nations: the one he has sworn allegiance to as a Congressman and the Promised Land, America's steadfast ally, which now faces mounting existential threats from Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, and its own internal fifth column, just to name a few. But if Jews have forgotten their history, Cantor reminded them during his AIPAC Speech in 2009, quoting author Primo Levi: "When a man with a gun says he is going to kill you, believe him."



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Cantor puts full faith in the threats of Israel's enemies who tend to keep their word on such things--better than most American politicians keep their own word on most things. He does so not because he's an alarmist trying to rally supporters through fear mongering, but because in April 2006, his 16-year-old cousin, Daniel, an American citizen, was the victim of an Islamic Jihad suicide bombing in Tel Aviv while vacationing with his family in Israel. After being hospitalized for nearly a month, Daniel lived through Israel's 58th birthday on May 14th and then died the next day. That, Cantor says, was the last time he cried!

Following Barack Obama's election as president in November 2008, Cantor stated that a "stronger U.S.-Israel relationship" remains a top priority for him and that he would be "very outspoken" if Obama "did anything to undermine those ties." And he is.

Cantor feels that Obama's policy vis-a-vis Israel is misguided, and that he is placing too much emphasis on the settlements while ignoring the bigger issues. Therefore, in July, he led a delegation of 25 Republicans on a week-long mission to Israel to show solidarity with the Jewish state.

But it is much more than just Obama's policy toward Israel that Cantor questions. He said if he'd be part of the press corps and could ask the

president just one question, he'd ask, "What do you think about when you first wake up in the morning?"

From the President's hesitation to send in more troops to Afghanistan to the scrapping of the missile defense program in Europe, Cantor is worried. "If we don't exercise the judgment necessary to see the mission through [in Afghanistan], we risk chaos in the region," Cantor has said in a past interview. "It is so important that we reject the politics and support the mission to ensure that that region does not become a launching pad for terrorist organizations to inflict damage on the U.S., our allies and our interests."

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The "change" Obama spoke about during his campaign is rolling full steam ahead and is not making change for Americans as much as it is trying to change America, Republicans fear. The Virginia Congressman, and the party he leads, don't like what they see as the current administration is expanding government while inserting itself into the private sector; taking

over healthcare which comprises one sixth of the American economy; bailing out and partnering with failed companies and institutions such as AIG and U.S. automakers; amassing more debt than the previous 43 presidents combined with the national debt now over \$12 trillion; pushing for cap and trade that will jack up taxes on energy; compromising America's security by closing Gitmo, and engaging in a dangerous appeasement diplomacy as foreign policy, to list a few of the issues instigating heartburn in the Republican Party.

In light of the Democrat's racing agenda, Cantor defends his party and says, "We are much more than "the party of NO." But few can blame them for being the "party of whoa." Cantor and his fellow Republicans

question why there is such a big rush for change even before the Members of Congress can read through the likes of the stimulus bill and the health care plan. Many also question if there is a slippery slope toward socialism being lubed by the current White House.

As for Cantor's own house, the religiously observant Representative shockingly is intermarried--not to a gentile, but to a Democrat! It's probably his best defense when people accuse him of hating all things liberal because he can always point to his wife of 20 years and the mother of

his three children and say, "Not so." And though he has proven that he can "Whip" things up in his caucus, he reveals that he can also whip things up in his kitchen. Most people would be surprised to know that he is a great short order cook for his kids. What he is not so good at is imitating the contemporary music they listen to, confessing that even though his name is Cantor he has no cantorial skills.

And then there is the house that Cantor grew up in as the middle son of three brothers.



Congressman and Mrs. Cantor and Journalist Aliza Davidovitch

He's not shy to say that everything about him reeks of the middle child syndrome. He was also very shy as a kid and works to

overcome it still. Cantor's father, who built a business developing real estate and building shopping centers, was very involved with the Republican Party in Virginia in the '70s and was treasurer of the state for the Reagan-Bush campaign of 1984. His mother, too, got very involved with the party at the grassroots level. He was inspired. While still a freshman at George Washington University in 1981, Cantor interned for Representative Tom Bliley

and was also Bliley's driver in the 1982 campaign. Though the political bug had bit, he still went on to receive his

Juris Doctor from William & Mary Law School, an M.S. in real estate development from Columbia University, and then worked in his family's business for ten years.

But at age 29, in 1992, Cantor decided to make a career pivot and served in the Virginia House of Delegates. By the time he was 37, in 2000, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives filling none other than retiring Tom Bliley's seat. Two years later, Roy Blunt appointed him Chief Deputy Republican Whip, the highest appointed position in the Republican caucus.

When the 2002 election came around, Cantor faced a famous Democratic challenger, Ben "Cooter" Jones, the former TV star from *The Dukes of Hazzard*. Apparently the political "driving" skills Cantor learned in the front seat of Bliley's car served to outmaneuver the daring duke of the legendary Dodge Charger R/T, *The General Lee*. Cantor won then as he did again in 2008, when he was unanimously elected the Republican Whip for the 111th United States Congress.

His rise has been said to be meteoric. It has also been strongly rumored and reported that Cantor was vetted to be a potential VP for John McCain. But who can say where Cantor's name might sit on the next ticket. Many have questioned whether he will be the first Jewish president?

In the meantime, the quote by Ronald Reagan that inspired Congressman Cantor as a young man inspires him still: "America is too great for small dreams." And it's that faith in the American people that gives him hope for the days ahead.

"What makes this country so great is the opportunity that we all have to pursue our dreams," Cantor has said. "It's all about unleashing the power of the individual and the ability for us to determine our own fate."

In line with Reagan's thinking, Cantor also believes "government is not a solution to our problems, government is the problem."

"America is too great for small dreams."

Cantor is working tirelessly to reenergize the Republican Party, but he is not willing to offer trite slogans and sound bites to define it such as "Yes we can," or "Change we need." He realizes that the American people deserve substantive talk and a decisive direction. "We need a sensible and reasonable platform and agenda that provide some adult leadership and balance," he tells *Lifestyles*.

As Cantor analyzes the problems facing the country, he is also rebuilding his party, understanding from the onset that there is a need to revert to its classic principles: fiscal conservatism and small government.

And if America was on fire, as some figuratively say it is, we can be sure that Congressman Eric Cantor would again do the right thing and run to save the Constitution so that the mighty star-spangled banner and Great Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God indivisible, with liberty and justice for all, will long endure.