

It's all our fault!

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

So I am to blame for the current world financial crisis! That is the latest conspiracy theory. It is all over the blogosphere. Evil, greedy Jews caused the crash. We started it on Wall Street in New York and then we spread the poison all the way to China.

Isn't it funny how we Jews, who cannot agree on anything within our religion or without, can all get together to conspire to manipulate markets around the world to our advantage! I just wish some Jew I know had told me beforehand! We won't agree on whether socialism or capitalism is preferable, on who the Messiah is, who will serve in the Temple, or indeed who will be the architect. But we can agree on a good conspiracy, like blowing up the Twin Towers and fooling the rest of the world into believing it was done by who actually did it.

I grew up conscious that the European Christian world did not like us. I was a kid when my father gave me a book of pictures of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen and I realized that there were a lot of people on this earth who wanted to kill a Jewish child like me who had never done them any harm, and even more who couldn't have cared less.

When I was eleven and lived in the Oxfordshire countryside, I walked into the nearest town to go to the cinema. When I got there I discovered the prices of the seats had been raised and I did not have enough to go in. I complained to the ticket manager. He looked down at me malevolently and said, "It is all your fault. You are a Jew. You know about money. Now piss off."

I knew I was no Rothschild. I was brought up in a modest family. So clearly there were some people out there with very strange perceptions if they supposed all Jews to be wealthy businessmen. I once met a Jewish boy who had been evacuated during the war to a country farm. He told me the farmer's wife refused to give him sheets for his bed for fear that the tail and scales that all Jewish boys had would tear them. Anyway, the New Testament kept on about nasty Jews and moneychangers so it was hardly surprising that regular churchgoers got the message.

You could not grow up in Britain, study its literature or its history, without realizing that Jews were not popular! The Blood Libel started in Medieval England. The Jews had been expelled in 1292 after hundreds of years of torment. They were only reluctantly allowed back six hundred years later. The Jew Bill of 1753, giving Jews citizenship, had been passed by parliament and actually signed by the king. But then it was repealed under pressure that included the claim that there were too many poor, criminal Jews in the country. That is the problem. We are both too rich and too poor. Too religious and too secular. The Mosley fascists marched through the Jewish East End protesting that the Jews were wealthy bankers as well as evil communists. The truth is we are like any other people with their wealthy and

their poor, their Democrats and their Republicans, their good ones and their bad ones. But I grew up thinking that Jew hatred was a British Christian disease.

Then under Pope John 23rd Catholicism began to modify its negative stance, the old hatred now came from Islam. Walking down the Edgware Road in the West End of London one Shabbat afternoon I was accosted by a gang of Muslim youths who accused me of killing innocent Muslims to drink their blood. Actually I heard the same sick nonsense from a black Muslim in New York last month outside Macy's.

OK, I reasoned, I could understand religious hatred. After all, here were two new religions we Jews had spurned, sticking to our own old-fashioned traditions. No wonder they hated us. And, of course, politics in the Middle East won't have helped. Even if we had a point we were massively outnumbered, and besides some of our own actions and decisions had not been too clever. At least I thought academics could be objective. But no, they too became increasingly as irrational in their hatred.

No doubt you read all those reports from around the world about how Obama would change everything and drive all the wicked Jews out of Washington. And lo and behold he has appointed Jews to significant positions. Oh dear. That was not what the anti-Semites of the world expected. We are back. What devious people we are.

There is no logic at all to this oldest of hatreds, other than our refusal to give up. We are the eternal outsiders wherever we are, the convenient scapegoat, only because we are both contrary and identifiable. We human beings are not inherently logical. Emotion plays a more powerful role than intellect in human affairs. That is why whipping up prejudice is so easy, particularly when it plays on human anxiety. That is why there are so many anti-Semitic sites on the internet and why you are as likely to find a hate site as not when you Google "Jew". So welcome to cyberspace, fellow Jews. The rule is that if anything is wrong in this world it is our fault.

There is an old joke about the Jew in Germany between the two World Wars. He was reading [Der Sturmer](#), the Nazi anti-Semitic broadsheet. "Why are you reading this rubbish," asked a fellow Jewish passenger.

"Look, when I read the Jewish press," he answered, "I see we are losing numbers, we are assimilating, arguing amongst ourselves, unable to support our institutions and communities. We are a disaster we are. But when I read anti-Semites I see we are the most powerful, wealthy people who control the world. Of course I would rather read the good news."