

Hatred

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Isn't it true that the whole of the Muslim world hates Jews? The newly elected congresswoman for Minnesota tweeted in 2012 "Israel has hypnotized the world; may Allah awaken the people and help them see the evil doings of Israel." She is joined by several others now in Congress who have expressed similar hatred. I too would call on Allah to get his followers to see reason. And yet as the non-Jewish world's attitude towards Jews and Israel is becoming increasingly negative, relations with parts of the Sunni Muslim world are probably better now than ever before.

In France senior politicians condemn anti-Semitism. Yet there is a frightening amount of anti-Semitism on the social media in France at this very moment, blaming Jews for everything that is going wrong there and in the rest of the world. And the USA is not far behind. How does one explain this? How does one deal with this?

We know of course that both Christianity and Islam have had a visceral animus towards the stubborn Jews. We have unreasonably refused to accept their religions' claims to have superseded us. We know too that the Left hates Jews for being religious and capitalists and the Right for being Marxists. Yet it would be facile, even dangerous to generalize in our fluid world.

The Catholic Church was once the most aggressive of Jew haters. Now it is one of the most positive of Christian denominations. The mainstream Protestants were once the most favorably disposed to Jews. Now they contain many implacable enemies. Whereas Southern Baptists and South American Evangelicals are overwhelmingly on the side of the Jews. It is important to recognize that within each religion, the variations and degrees are huge, both culturally and intellectually. Religious wars are as much within religions as against competing ones. It reminds me of the old saying "I hate my brother. But my brother and I hate our cousin."

Politics, religion, any area of human activity, even sport, can bring humans into violent conflict. Why can't we all get on? All religions have all been praying for love and peace for thousands of years. We are still praying every day.

All the monotheistic religions share core messages. That God is the ultimate

power behind the universe; that God cares about us (Benevolence); that God has revealed His wishes to mankind through Holy Texts (Revelation). They all say they believe in the importance of the relationship between humans and God and between other human beings. They all believe in loving or at least trying to love one's neighbors.

The differences are what one might call cultural, social, behavioral rather than theological. In every religion you will find pacifists and fanatics. Saints and sinners. rationalists and fundamentalists. Some it is true seem more prone to violence than others. Certain situations, ideologies, insecurities and power games lead to greater aggression.

We Jews are a small sliver of humanity and yet we suffer from profound differences within our own ranks whether in Israel or the Diaspora. There are Jews in the left and the right who seem to hate the State of Israel either for political or ideological points of view. There are Jews who intensely dislike other Jews. There are those who want to reach out and those who want to turn inwards. And yet for all of that, I venture to say that those who seek peaceful relations far exceed those who do not. And wherever you look, you will find those who try desperately hard to overcome these differences and build bridges.

Religiously, Judaism and Islam probably have more in common with each other than any other religion. The Muslim centrality of Shariah coincides with Judaism's prioritizing Halacha, that made it more of a sister religion than Christianity. This emphasis on daily ritual rather than occasional observance; modest dress and behavior, charity are the essence of both Judaism and Islam. Sufism and Hassidism have more in common than either would like to admit. Christianity would claim the same. But in practice its emphasis was always much more on theological. There is a prevailing mood of cold rationality in much of Christianity and hot passion in Islam.

People will say that it is politics more than religion that now bedevils relations between Islam and Judaism. That it is all Israel's fault. But Jews suffered long before nationalism appeared on the scene. There is a myth that under Islam Jews were always treated well and had no reason to seek independence. If truth be told Jews were always treated as second class citizens, Dhimmis, tolerated at best. It was worse under the Shia than the Sunnis (and of course much worse under most of Christianity). But even then, how Jews were treated was often random and unpredictable.

And it would be so much easier were it not for political agitation which polarizes and prevents us seeing other points of view. If I care about other

Jews being targeted by anti-Semitism, why should not Muslims feel the same way about other Muslims they see mistreated by Jews or Christians or anyone else? Isn't it natural that they should feel for their own? Even when their own are to blame for their suffering as much as others? Have we really reached deadlock? No way forward? Eternal conflict?

I wish we could find ways of putting hatred aside. Of course, one has to defend oneself. But that is just one side of the coin. The other is to try our best to forge positive friendships and connections even if we disagree politically and religiously. We must try to do this regardless of the passions of our commitments to our different sides.

These are the best and the worst of times I can remember for inter religious relations. On the one hand we see increasing hatred of Jews and Israel who, no one seems to realize, includes a far higher proportion of Jews than any other country has Jewish citizens. And a certain bloodlust to kill us. On the other, more Inter Faith communication and friendships than ever before.

What should we do? Above all, do not be afraid. Not think that hiding or escaping will solve anything. Instead one should seek out those who will meet and talk. This surely is the mark of civilization. To try our best, however hard it is, to love our neighbors. And we can all do our bit by reaching out, inviting "the other" into our homes or visiting theirs.

More of us should be engaging in conversation. Showing an example. I know the automatic reaction of the insecure is to be on the defensive, to tighten up and close down. To claim it is pointless to try because "they hate us." I am more convinced than ever that we must persevere, and support others who do. Amazingly, Abraham seems to have been able to defend himself and yet still reach out across the divides and survive thousands of years ago. Why can't we today?