

Anti-Semitism

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

The Bible says that poverty will never cease from the earth. Sadly, hatred and prejudice will never cease either. Some hatreds are more widespread and persistent than others. Of these cultural and religious hatreds, anti-Semitism has always been the most persistent and widespread.

Anti-Semitism is like a microbe that exists as part of the natural structure of physical organisms (of which humans are). Some microbes are useful. They can be used to cause fermentation which produces alcohol and food. But they can also cause diseases which can be fatal. There is no way of destroying microbes. We can try to prevent, treat or contain them but microbes have a way of resisting and metastasizing. You can't persuade or argue with a microbe.

The hatred of evil can be legitimate. But anti-Semitism is hatred that has no legitimate reason beyond the irrational. No other people have been singled out to be hated, suspected, reviled or despised as much, and for as long as we have. Anti-Semitism is a multi-headed hydra. It comes from both the Left and the Right. I believe that, currently, the Left is more dangerous than the right. The Right's white supremacists and fascists are crude, brutish and often mentally challenged thugs. They are dangerous and crazy – but marginal. The Left is accorded serious academic and political status at the highest levels. The internet facilitates both sides to spread hatred as never before.

Jews are often criticized for being **exclusive**, clubbing together, refusing to mix and supporting each other. But so do other nationalities, tribes, societies or economic strata. We do not attack people just because they want to live amongst the like-minded. However, some antagonism may be our fault too. Unfortunately, we do not always behave considerately to others – whether Jewish or non-Jewish – as neighbors, landlords or financial operatives. The actions of some bring the community into disrepute. If we expect others to act on our behalf, we need to look to our own societies.

We have been hated because of **religion**. Judaism inspired Christianity and Islam. But as they grew, and hoped to supersede and make Judaism redundant, Judaism was an affront to their identity. It was as if we, by refusing to become like them, were a danger. So we were accused of being inferior, in league with the devil, trying to kill their children to drink their blood and

make our matzas. And yet, the canard that we thought we were better was used against us, too.

As religion began to decline, **racism** took its place. In France, Count Gobineau (1816–82) argued that the white, or 'Aryan', race possessed the supreme human virtues. Latin and Semitic peoples had degenerated through racial intermixtures. Only the Germans had preserved their 'Aryan purity'. Nazism loved such ideas. As Jews were defined as being inferior, it didn't matter if you killed them. They were sub-human. The same idea was applied to black and Asian races. Wilhelm Marr (1819-1904), the man who created the term anti-Semitism barely 150 years ago, meant it derogatively not descriptively.

Nationalism divided people into separate nations with their own cultures and religious identities. Here, too, Jews were the outsiders. They weren't regarded as real Germans or Frenchmen or Poles or Russians. They were accused of not being loyal. Ironically, when they wanted to have their own nation and return to their historical roots, they were accused of being outsiders and invaders there too.

Almost every country in the world has been **Colonial** or Imperial to some degree at some time. They have also owned slaves at some stage and some still do. But it is common to accuse only the USA of being a Colonial Power. Since the USA usually supports Israel, these two nations are now the big bad guys of colonialism. China, Russia and oil rich Arab states are not! And because of the USA support of Israel, anything that the USA does to anyone else it must be the fault of Israel, too. This also fuels anti-Semitism for it denies Jews their national rights.

Economic divisions play their part. Karl Marx was the initiator of economic theories that led to Communism and Socialism. He hated Jews despite his own origins. To him Jews symbolized oppressive middle-class industrialism. Those who were religious were hated for being religious just as those who were rich were hated for being rich. Never mind that most Jews were neither. Some Jews became Marxists and adopted socialism so they were hated for being Marxists. Some Jews preferred capitalism and self-sufficiency so they were hated for being rich.

The idea of a **scapegoat** is an ancient one that remains very popular. It means we can blame someone else for our shortcomings. This is why failed nations love to shift the blame onto someone else. Or failed dictators saying it is someone else's fault. When poor Orthodox Jews move into poor Black areas and begin to build better lives for themselves they are resented and blamed. In Muslim areas, Christians, Hindus or non-Muslims are persecuted. In Hindu or

Buddhist areas, Muslims are attacked. Poor countries resent rich countries. Failed States blame successful States. Rich states resent refugees and migrants.

Jews have been around for longer, and in more parts of the world, than any other minority. Whether in Persia, Rome, Europe or the Middle East, the Jew was always the convenient scapegoat. With contacts and relatives around the world, people would invent conspiracy theories about how the Jews were taking over or plotting evil. Nowadays, thanks to propaganda and the internet, Israel and Jews are interchangeable. Mossad is the source of all catastrophes and disasters that happen anywhere.

Generalizations are always dangerous. In the UK, it used to be said that the Irish were stupid, the Scots mean, the Welsh swindlers and the Jews everything bad. All Italians were Mafiosi. Now, all Russians gangsters. All Frenchmen are immoral. All Mexicans are drug dealers. All Muslims are Jihadis. All Chinese are internet spies. All priests are pedophiles. And Jews are religious fanatics or child killers. When you put it like this, it sounds ridiculous. Every society, every people, every religion have good ones and bad ones. Saints and Sinners.

Jews have always been outliers forced to be different, struggle to survive and be self-sufficient. And proud of their own religion and culture. But many Jews around the world thought that if they hid or rejected their Jewish identity they could escape anti-Semitism. In Europe, and then the USA, they really thought they could escape. But the virus got them too! It is possible to disappear and obliterate ones roots as well as one's profile. And many Jews try.

And yet despite it all we Jews have never been stronger or more in control of our own destiny. We now have a Jewish State with all its powers and status to protect us (and its failings, too). We have never been better able to defend ourselves in the Diaspora countries of most Jewish settlement where, despite the groundswell of primitive degenerate anti-Semitism, the leadership is committed to trying to combat it. Where once we remained silent, now we react.

We have the tools to fight back. In some areas, where the police are unwilling or prevented from intervening, we need to take up self-defense. Some cities, such as New York, are to blame for policies that prevent police from exercising their authority because they have been ordered to hold back for fear of being charged with racism. If they will not, or cannot, protect us, we must protect ourselves – with mace, pepper spray or professionally

trained armed guards.

And we should indeed try to remove present danger by whatever means possible – as in the case of men like General Sulimani of Iran who the USA finally stopped facilitating and, eventually, assassinated.

Positively, we must publicize, educate and teach. Marches, demonstrations, lobbying are important. But in the end the best defense is survival, keeping our tradition alive. Which is why the 120,000 Orthodox Jews who gathered in two stadia in the USA last week and hundreds of thousands elsewhere to celebrated studying the Talmud, the Daf Yomi, a page a day, is the best response of all.

It is a sad fact of history that persecution makes us stronger. Anti-Semitism actually drives as many Jews back into Judaism as it drives out. Anti-Semitism can strengthen us – although I much prefer positive reasons for being Jewish rather than negative ones. Unless we survive to maintain our ethical, cultural, religious and intellectual contribution to the world, just fighting off our enemies is not enough.

In the end, however, anti-Semitism can bring us together and helps us survive. It is a blessing as well as a curse.

Suggested Reading List

There is no end of books on anti-Semitism. Some better than others. Here are some I recommend.

General anti-Semitism:

1. A Lethal Obsession. Robert Wistrich
2. Anti-Semitism Here and Now. Deborah Lipstadt

On literary anti-Semitism:

1. Trials of the Diaspora. Anthony Julius

On Christian anti-Semitism:

1. Constantine. James Carrol

On Muslim anti-Semitism:

1. In Ishmael's House. Martin Gilbert
2. The Legacy of Islamic Anti-Semitism. Andrew G Boston

On Political anti-Semitism:

1. The Siege. Conor Cruise O'Brien
2. The War Against the Jews. Lucy Dawidowicz.
3. The Secret War Against the Jews. John Loftus and Mark Aarons