

Understanding and Opposing Anti-Semitism

Rosh Hashanah, Day Two

September 26, 2014

Temple B'nai Shalom

Braintree, Massachusetts

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One Friday evening last month in Los Angeles, Elon Gold and his wife and four children were walking home after Shabbat dinner at a friend's home. They were dressed nicely. They could easily be identified as a Jewish family.

They waited for a light to change at a major intersection. A large black Mercedes pulled up. There were four men inside. One rolled down his window and yelled at the Gold family, "Free Palestine!"

Gold turned to face them. He knew he was in danger. He remembered that Rabbi Joseph Raksin had been shot and killed just two weeks earlier in Miami on a Saturday morning while walking to shul.

Gold also knew that "Free Palestine" means free Palestine from every Jew. Chanting "Free Palestine, from the river to the sea" is not a plea for a two-state solution. It means: drive all the Jews out of the Middle East or kill them all.

Then one guy opened the car door, stepped onto the street and walked toward this Jewish family. He yelled at Gold, "I hope your children die! Just like you are killing children in Gaza!"

As the Gold family stood silently in utter fear, the man got back in the Mercedes and the car drove off.

Gold was horrified that he and his family could no longer feel safe walking on Shabbat in their own city. These people weren't just yelling "Jew bastard" as Gold had experienced growing up in the Bronx. They instead were wishing his children dead, right to their angelic faces. This was beyond appalling.

Tragically, this is not an isolated case. Not at all. The summer of 2014 was a summer of increasing anti-Semitism around the world.

The cover story in Newsweek Magazine on July 29 was headlined "Exodus: Why Europe's Jews Are Fleeing Once Again." It documented resurgent European anti-Semitism in grim detail.

- On July 13, a mob of thousands attacked a synagogue in Paris, trapping terrified Jews inside until riot police finally dispersed the crowd.
- Two weeks later, 400 people attacked another synagogue and Jewish-owned businesses in Paris, shouting "Death to the Jews." Posters had advertised the raid in advance, like the pogroms of Tsarist Russia.
- In Britain, Jews experienced about 100 anti-Semitic incidents in July alone, double the usual number.

In addition to these anti-Semitic attacks, elections to the European parliament this summer showed a surge in support for extreme-right parties in France, Greece, Hungary and Germany. The most shocking result was the increased support for Golden Dawn in Greece. That party is openly neo-Nazi. It won almost 10% of the vote, electing three members to the European parliament.

The spike in anti-Semitism caused emigration to Israel to soar. In 2011 and 2012 about 2,000 French Jews, for example, made aliyah. Last year, more than 3,200 did. This year, the pace increased radically. It is expected that 5,000 to 6,000 French Jews will move to Israel this year. Many of them report that Zionism is a less important motivator than the main reason they are moving, which is their fear of worsening anti-Semitism.

Some of the mob actions we witnessed this year started as protests against Israel's actions in Gaza. But they changed and escalated into attacks not just on Israel but on Jews generally. But Jews living in these countries have nothing to do with determining Israel's policies, any more than did Elon Gold and his family in Los Angeles.

So this is not simply political opposition. Attacking Jews in America or any country for the actions of Israel, a country where they don't live and whose policies they don't decide, is motivated instead by anti-Semitism.

Where does that come from? What are the origins of anti-Semitism?

I did not ask, "What are the reasons for anti-Semitism?" I did not ask that question because the question implies that anti-Semitism might have a basis in rationality.

It does not. Anti-Semitism instead is an attitude or emotion that is illogical and irrational.

Beginning in July, 2013, through February of this year, the Anti-Defamation League conducted a comprehensive study of anti-Semitism as a global phenomenon. The survey included interviews in 96 languages with 53,100 adults in 102 countries. Here are some of the key findings:

- Two out of every three people surveyed either never heard of the Holocaust or do not believe the historical accounts to be accurate.
- 74% of respondents had never met a Jewish person.
- 18% of respondents believe that the total worldwide Jewish population is greater than 700 million people. The actual number of Jewish people in the world is around fourteen million.

The ADL asked whether respondents thought any of eleven statements about Jews were either "probably false" or "probably true." Anyone who answered "probably true" to six or more of the statements was rated in the survey as anti-Semitic.

Here, for example, are four of those statements:

- Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the countries they live in.
- Jews have too much power in international financial markets.
- Jews have too much control over the global media.

- Jews are responsible for most of the world's wars.

The survey found that 26% of the respondents hold anti-Semitic attitudes, answering “probably true” to six or more of the negative statements about Jews. That translates to more than one billion anti-Semites.

In the Middle East and North Africa, the levels of prejudice against Jews were the highest in the world. Sixteen countries in that region had the most anti-Semites. Palestinians topped the list at 93%, followed by Iraq at 92% and Yemen at 88%.

More than any other stereotype, anti-Semites believe that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the country where they live. In the Middle East and North Africa, 74% of respondents thought that was probably true.

The charge of Jewish disloyalty dates back more than 2,000 years, two millennia before the creation of the State of Israel.

The Romans persecuted the Jews of Judea. The Judean province was the most rebellious of Roman colonies, for one important reason: Jews refused to recognize the divinity of the Roman emperors and would not participate in Roman religious ceremonies. This was our attitude because of our fundamental belief in the unity of the divine. Sh'ma Yisroel, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad. God is One. The Romans interpreted Jewish loyalty to that belief as disloyalty to the ruling power.

Jews have confronted that charge under every subsequent generation of rulers.

When Christianity became the official religion of the empire in the fourth century, Jewish rejection of the divinity of Jesus and of the concept of the trinity resulted in official persecution by the church and therefore by the state. Leaders in the early church debated what to do with the Jews. One faction wanted to kill all Jews. Augustine, a fourth-century Christian philosopher, argued instead that Jews ought to “survive but not thrive.” He advocated keeping Jews in a secondary position in society as a constant reminder that this was the fate of those who reject Jesus.

In the seventh century the new religion of Islam emerged, with Mohammed as its prophet. At first he had good relations with both Christians and Jews. Mohammed favored Jews even more than Christians because Islam and Judaism were both monotheistic religions. But then Mohammed saw that, just as the Jews had rejected Jesus and refused to become Christians, so also the Jews rejected the teachings of Mohammed and refused to become Muslims. This enraged Mohammed. The rejection inspired him to a whole series of murderous diatribes against Jews recorded in the Qu'ran. Those words became ammunition for Islamic anti-Semitism from that day to the present.

With the growth of nationalism in more recent times a new secular basis for anti-Semitism arose. In 1903 the Russian secret police issued a document titled The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. It was a forgery. It purported to record a conference of 300 Jews plotting together to control the world.

Anti-Semites then reproduced and circulated that document to many millions of people over the last century and continuing up until today.

Henry Ford published it in Dearborn, Michigan, under the name The International Jew. He funded printing of 500,000 copies and distributed them throughout the United States in the 1920s.

Adolf Hitler and the Nazis circulated it widely in Europe and included it in the curriculum of German classrooms.

The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Hitler's ally, Haj Amin al-Husseini, arranged for the Protocols to be translated into Arabic and distributed widely in the Middle East.

This forgery continues to be accepted as true in many countries, particularly but not exclusively in Asia, the Middle East and South America. Both Hamas and the Palestinian National Authority accept the book as true.

But enough bad news.

We also saw during the summer heartening rejections of anti-Semitism as people rallied against it across Europe:

- In Stockholm 1,000 people turned out to protest anti-Semitism in a rally attended by leaders from all of Sweden's major political parties.
- More than 3,000 demonstrators congregated outside City Hall in Frankfurt under the banner "Stand up! Never again anti-Semitism."
- In London some 4,500 protestors convened in the Royal Courts of Justice with the same message: "We demand zero tolerance of anti-Semitism."
- In Germany last week, more than 5,000 people rallied in Berlin to condemn anti-Semitism.

What can each of us do to combat anti-Semitism?

Remain aware of anti-Semitic actions.

Oppose them whenever and wherever they occur.

If you hear an anti-Semitic remark, object to it and counter it with the facts.

If you see something, say something.

Report to the Anti-Defamation League immediately any anti-Semitic action, whether vandalism or something worse. For more info, click [HERE](#).

The ADL is America's leading civil rights and human relations agency. It fights anti-Semitism and works to end all other forms of bigotry. Its mission includes defending democratic ideals and protecting civil rights for all.

The ADL protects civil rights for all. That is a central Jewish value. Of course we pray for the safety and well-being of Jews. But our prayers extend to all humanity, not only to Jews.

In a few moments we will join together in Aleinu and then, after mourner's Kaddish and announcements, we will sing together Adon Olam.

In the Aleinu we restate the theme of the oneness of God. That Jewish belief more than any other factor originally caused both Christian and Muslim anti-Semitism. We believe that God is one, there is no other, and God is God of the whole world.

That is the meaning of the second sentence of the Aleinu. *Sheh lo asanu c'goyei ha'aratzot, v'lo samanu c'mishpachot ha'adamah.* God made our lot unlike that of other people, assigning us a unique destiny.

That unique destiny is not that we are superior to other people. Rather we enjoy a unique destiny because we were granted the insight that there is only one God because there is only one humanity.

And at the end of our service we sing together Adon Olam, Master of the world. Not just our God. The Ruling Spirit of all of humanity.

What year is this?

We say it is 5775. Sometimes we call that the Jewish year.

But we also say it is twenty fourteen. We call that the secular date. But think about it. Twenty fourteen is not a secular date. Twenty fourteen is the date that is two thousand and fourteen years following the birth of one child in Bethlehem. Calling the year twenty fourteen proclaims that everything that happened before that event is less important than everything after that date.

The year 5775, however, is the way we calculate the calendar because we count from the beginning of the world. In the story of humanity that we tell, all of humanity began in the act of creation. All of humanity is equal. We are all equally entitled to lives of dignity and fairness as human beings.

That is the message we carry to the world. And in 5775, we have to insist on that message and act to make it happen.

And let us say, amen.