

1) May Hashem remember the soul of my mother/father who have gone to their world, because *I will donate charity for his sake. Yizkor*

### The Problem

2) Anti-Semitism is very ancient and...seems impervious to change. To the anti-Semitism of antiquity was added the Christian layer and then, from the time of the Enlightenment on, the secularist layer, which culminated in Soviet anti-Semitism and the Nazi atrocities of the first half of the 20th century. Now we have the Arab-Muslim layer, dating roughly from the 1920's.

What strikes the historian surveying anti-Semitism over more than two millennia is its fundamental irrationality. It seems to make no sense, any more than malaria or meningitis makes sense. In the whole of history, it is hard to point to a single occasion when a wave of anti-Semitism was provoked by a real Jewish threat (as opposed to an imaginary one). Asked to explain why they hate Jews, anti-Semites contradict themselves. Jews are always showing off; they are hermetic and secretive. They will not assimilate; they assimilate only too well. They are too religious; they are too materialistic, and a threat to religion. They are uncultured; they have too much culture. They avoid manual work; they work too hard. They are miserly; they are ostentatious spenders. They are inveterate capitalists; they are born Communists. In all its myriad manifestations, the language of anti-Semitism through the ages is a dictionary of non-sequiturs and antonyms, a thesaurus of illogic and inconsistency. Paul Johnson, "The Anti-Semitic Disease." Commentary. June, 2005.

3) There is no easy solution to prejudice because it is an irrational sentiment. Prejudice: the etymology of the word itself is testimony to its irrationality: to *pre*-judge, to decide what a person's qualities are before meeting the person him or herself. That does not mean that a member of the group in question is immune from possessing the negative characteristics ascribed to the entire group. But when an individual's wrongdoings are seen as characteristic of "the" entire group, because "that is how *they* are," we have entered the realm of prejudice. If a person with blond hair were to do you wrong and you, as a result, condemned all people with blond hair, everyone would no doubt think it absurd. Why then, if a Jew or a person of color does you wrong, do we not think antisemitism or racism absurd? Deborah Lipstadt, "The first step to fighting anti-Semitism is recognizing how irrational it is." The Forward. January 9, 2020.

4) The Sages taught: In a time of danger [when the gentiles issued decrees to prohibit kindling lights, or in periods of anti-Semitism], we place the *menorah* on the table [inside the house] and that is sufficient to fulfill one's obligation. Talmud, *Shabbat* 21B

Also, during the Middle Ages, for reasons of safety, Jews no longer placed the *mezuzah* at the entrance of their home...J. Jean Adler, "The Order of Lighting the Hanukkah Candles." *Hakirah*, Volume 7

## What Can We Do About It? – Lean Into Being Jewish

5) When the Jewish people are attacked and murdered, loyal Jews rally with generous financial aid and moral support. And it's a great good thing they do. But why, we should now ask ourselves, do Jewish lives matter? Why do we suddenly care so much about Israel or Jewish survival? Is it just from a nativist love of our own? Is it only the Jew as eternal victim that we cherish, affirming the identity chosen for us by our enemies? Hardly so, and God forbid. "Never again" is never enough. "Never again" is a necessary but hardly sufficient motto for the Jewish state and the Jewish people. Not just Jewish lives, but *the Jewish way of living* matters. Leon Kass, "Where Are We Now?" [www.mosaicmagazine.com](http://www.mosaicmagazine.com) Nov. 13 2023.

6) Combating antisemitism requires a shift in perspective. We must be motivated far more by our love for the insights, wisdom and joy embedded in Jewish culture than by the fight against those who harbor an insane hatred of it. We need to shine a light on how Jews live rather than how they suffer. My wish [is] that Jews will respond to antisemitism by combining a relentless push against antisemites with an even more energetic pull toward their tradition. Deborah Lipstadt, "Want to Fight Antisemitism? Embrace Jewish Traditions." [NY Times](https://www.nytimes.com). Sept. 14, 2023.

7) I too would like to see Jews find meaning in Judaism and be more deeply engaged in Jewish life and practice, but not as a response to anti-Semitism. The Judaism that would result from such a response would only be a Negative Judaism. A Judaism that says, "they hate me, so I will be more Jewish... not a healthy expression of spiritual sustenance but a bitter perpetuation of Jewish anxiety. If we can think about the positive and not negative reasons for being a Jew—we have the chance to create something different. Shaul Magid, "Keep Jews Interesting: It's Time to Stop Being Defined by Anti-Semitism." [Hartman.org.il](http://Hartman.org.il) October 16, 2019

8) Amos Oz says: Imagine you had a complicated relationship with your grandfather and your grandmother. You love them, but you had a complicated relationship with them. And then they die. And everything they own, you're inheriting. So what do you do? Let's say there's one person that is so connected to his grandparents that he or she can't give anything up, [they] just take everything that their grandparents own - all the chairs, all the stools, the weird lamp, all their junk. How will his house look like if he puts in all the junk of his grandparents? It will probably be messy, and it won't be their house, it won't have their own feeling. Imagine someone else. There's a person, he had issues with his grandparents. So he decided he's not taking anything they owned. That means because you don't want anything that your grandparents owned, they're not going to enjoy the treasures, and things that are very valuable. And Amos Oz is like, OK, now let's learn the art of inheritance. Interview with Micah Goodman, [timesofisrael.com](http://timesofisrael.com) January 19, 2021.

9) Integrity is choosing courage over comfort; what is right over what is easy; and choosing to practice our values rather than simply professing them. Dr. Brene Brown, [Dare to Lead](https://www.brenebrown.com), 2018.

## Faith, Hope and Resilience – Believing in the Day After

10) R. Yohanan fell ill and R. Hanina went to him...R. Hanina said to him, "Give me your hand." He took R. Yohanan's hand and he raised him up/revived him. Why did R. Yohanan need R. Hanina's help? "A captive cannot release himself from prison." Talmud, *Brachot* 5b.

11) Zvika Greenlik hit a car. He said to the owner: "No problem, I'm to blame, and we'll fix [it]." They arranged to meet together at the garage on Wednesday. On Wednesday she arrives at the garage and Zvika Greenlik does not come. She tries to call him and he does not answer his phone. He disappears, as if the earth swallowed him up. Thursday, the woman sends him a message: "Your behavior is not nice, we arranged for Wednesday and you didn't come." He sees the message and immediately sends her a message back: "I'm very sorry, on Tuesday my son Shaul was killed in Gaza, so I couldn't come." The woman immediately apologized. She herself had been at the funeral but she did not make the connection that he was Shaul's father. That same day, she arrived at the shiva home and comforted the family. During the shiva, Zvika told her: 'When the shiva is over, I will transfer the amount of the repair to you.'

She told him: "Don't worry about it, I don't want the money." At the first opportunity he had, he transferred NIS 2,000 to her. She sent him a message that made him weep: "There is no need. The owner of the garage heard that the person who hit the car was the father of a soldier who fell in Gaza, so he fixed the car without taking money." *Am Yisrael Chai*.

12) Adam saw the sun sinking in the sky before him, he said, "Woe is me! Because of my sin, the world is darkening for me and is about to return to darkness and desolation: this is the death that Heaven has decreed for me." So he sat down to fast and to weep throughout the night, while Eve wept beside him. But when the dawn began slowly rising like a column, he said, "Such is the way of nature," and then proceeded to offer up a sacrifice. Talmud, *Avodah Zarah* 8a

13) R. Akiva and his companions were traveling past the destroyed Temple. When they arrived at the Temple Mount, they saw a fox coming out of [what had] been the Holy of Holies. They began weeping, and Rabbi Akiva was laughing. They said to him: 'Why are you laughing?' R. Akiva said to them: 'Why are you weeping?' They said: 'This is the place that was once so holy that only priests could tread there, and now foxes walk in it.' R. Akiva said to them: 'That is why I am laughing! It is written: "Zion will be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become rubble, the Temple Mount as...a forest" (*Micah* 3:12), where foxes are found. In *Zechariah* (8:4) it is written: "There will yet be elderly men and elderly women sitting in the streets of Jerusalem". Now that the one prophecy was fulfilled, it is evident that the prophecy of Zechariah will also be fulfilled. The Sages said to him: 'Akiva, you have comforted us.' Talmud, *Makkot* 24B.

## Living with Uncertainty: R. Jonathan Sacks and The Theology of Hope

14) Judaism is a religion of details, but we miss the point if we do not sometimes step back and see the larger picture. To be a Jew is to be an agent of hope in a world serially threatened by despair. Every ritual, every mitzvah, every syllable of the Jewish story, every element of Jewish law, is a protest against escapism, resignation or the blind acceptance of fate. Judaism is a sustained struggle against the world that is, in the name of the world that could be, should be, but is not yet. Throughout history, when human beings have sought hope, they have found it in the Jewish story. Judaism is the religion, and Israel the home, of hope. Future Tense, 2009.

15) Faith is not certainty. It is the courage to live with uncertainty. It is not knowing all the answers. Celebrating Life, 2000. Faith isn't certainty. It's the courage to live and even celebrate in the very heart of uncertainty. From Optimism to Hope 2004

16) Jewish faith is not about believing the world to be other than it is. It is not about ignoring the evil, the darkness and the pain. It is about courage, endurance and the capacity to hold fast to ideals even then they are ignored by others. It is the ability to see the world for what it is and yet still believe that it could be different. It is about not giving up, not letting go. Faith is the willingness to listen to a voice not my own, and find the strength to heal a fractured world. Radical Then, Radical Now. 2001

17) Faith is not acceptance but protest, against the world that is, in the name of the world that is not yet but ought to be. Faith lies not in the answer but the question – and the greater the human being, the more intense the question...Optimism and hope are not the same. Optimism is the belief that the world is changing for the better; hope is the belief that, together, we can make the world better. Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It needs no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to hope. The Hebrew Bible is not an optimistic book. It is, however, one of the great literatures of hope." To Heal a Fractured World

18) Jewish faith is the courage to see the world as it is, without the comfort of myth or the self-pity of despair, knowing that the evil, cruelty and injustice it contains are neither inevitable nor meaningless but instead a call to human responsibility." The Dignity of Difference, 2002

19) The whole of life is facing the unknown...there is one thing we will never know: what tomorrow will bring. We face an unknown, an unknowable, future; that means that every single course of action we take, every commitment, has its underside of doubt. It's the ability to acknowledge that doubt, and yet say, "Nonetheless, I will take a risk." That is what faith is: not the absence of doubt, but the ability to recognize doubt, live with it, and still take the risk of commitment. Transcripts from Rabbi Sacks' WhatsApp Group. "Doubt," September 17, 2019