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Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism has been around for as long as the Jewish nation has been in existence. Throughout our history and the current time anti-Semitism has pervaded our lives and has scapegoated Bnei Yisrael in many lands and countries.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the root cause of anti-semitism?
2. Is it only religiously based or nationally and culturally as well?
3. How do we define anti-semitism?

Below is an article from a recent media story about Jews moving into a city in Spain. What issues does it raise? Does it help to address any of the questions above?

Spanish Town Previously Called 'Fort Kill The Jews' Hit With Antisemitic Graffiti

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A sign in Castrillo Mota de Judíos, Spain, was found vandalized with antisemitic spray paint, Aug. 3, 2022. (Courtesy of Lorenzo Rodriguez)

A tiny village in Spain that bore the name “Fort Kill the Jews” from 1627 until 2015 was sprayed with anti-Semitic graffiti on Wednesday ahead of a Jewish family moving in, *JTA* reported.

According to an *El País* report, a Jewish family is planning on soon moving into the village, joining another Jewish family that moved there earlier this year – the first Jews to do so since medieval times.

The word Auschwitz was sprayed on one of the village’s signs, the name “Fort Kill the Jews” was sprayed on a sign leading into the town, and several garage containers throughout the village were lit on fire.

The town was originally called Castrillo Motajudíos, or Jew’s Hill Fort, in 1035 – when Jews fleeing a pogrom settled in the village. It was renamed “Fort Kill The Jews” in 1627 when the Inquisition was at the height of its religious persecution of Spanish Jewry.

Rabbi Lord Jonthan Sacks z”l wrote extensively about this topic and here are some of his quotes as well as some other famous personalities on the issue:

What is antisemitism? It is less a doctrine or set of beliefs than a series of contradictions. In the past Jews were hated because they were rich and because they were poor, because they were capitalists and because they were communists, because they kept to themselves and because they infiltrated everywhere, because they held tenaciously to a superstitious faith and because they were rootless cosmopolitans who believed nothing.

The best way to understand antisemitism is to see it as a virus. Viruses attack the human body, but the body itself has an immensely sophisticated defence, the human immune system. How, then, do viruses survive and flourish? By mutating.

Future Tense: Jews, Judaism and Israel in the 21st Century (Schocken, 2012): p. 92.

“A persisting latent structure of hostile belief towards Jews as a collectivity manifested in individuals as attitudes, and in culture as myth, ideology, folklore, and imagery, and in actions – social or legal discrimination, political mobilization against Jews, and collective or state violence – which results in and/or is deigned to distance, displace, or destroy Jews as Jews.”

Helen Fein, *The Persisting Question: Sociological Perspectives and Social Contexts of Modern Antisemitism* (Current Research on Antisemitism, Vol 1) (Walter De Gruyter: 1987)

“The Mutating Virus: Understanding Antisemitism,” Keynote Speech in the European Parliament (September 22, 2016)

(to view) <https://www.rabbisacks.org/videos/mutating-virus-understanding-antisemitism/>

Antisemitism is not about Jews. It is about anti-Semites. It is about people who cannot accept responsibility for their own failures and have instead to blame someone else. Historically, if you were a Christian at the time of the Crusades, or a German after the First World War, and saw that the world hadn't turned out the way you believed it would, you blamed the Jews. That is what is happening today. And I cannot begin to say how dangerous it is. Not just to Jews but to everyone who values freedom, compassion and humanity.

... Antisemitism means denying the right of Jews to exist collectively as Jews with the same rights as everyone else. It takes different forms in different ages. In the Middle Ages, Jews were hated because of their religion. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century they were hated because of their race. Today they are hated because of their nation state, the state of Israel. It takes different forms but it remains the same thing: the view that Jews have no right to exist as free and equal human beings.

... The new antisemitism has mutated so that any practitioner of it can deny that he or she is an antisemite. After all, they'll say, I'm not a racist. I have no problem with Jews or Judaism. I only have a problem with the State of Israel.

... So I end where I began. The hate that begins with Jews never ends with Jews. Antisemitism is only secondarily about Jews. Primarily it is about the failure of groups to accept responsibility for their own failures, and to build their own future by their own endeavours. No society that has fostered antisemitism has ever sustained liberty or human rights or religious freedom. Every society driven by hate begins by seeking to destroy its enemies, but ends by destroying itself.

Europe today is not fundamentally antisemitic. But it has allowed antisemitism to enter via the new electronic media. It has failed to recognise that the new antisemitism is different from the old.

How does Rabbi Sacks define anti-semitism and how would he view what happened to the family in the news article above?

According to Rabbi Sacks how has antisemitism changed nowadays? Does his view change what your definition of anti-semitism was at first glance?

Here are some sources from Daniel who lived in Bavel and had to deal with anti-Semitism in many different facets than nowadays. How did they deal with it and can their approach have any impact on our lives today?

Daniel 3:8-3:12

כָּל־קַבֵּל דָּנָה בַּה־זְמַנָּא קָרְבוּ גְבָרִין פְּשָׁדָאִין וְאַבְלוּ קְרָצִיהוֹן דִּי יְהוּדָא:

Seizing the occasion, certain Chaldeans came forward to slander the Jews.

עֲנוּ וְאָמְרוּ לְנְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מַלְכָּא מַלְכָּא לְעַלְמִין חַיִּי:

They spoke up and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever!

(אנתה) [אנת] מלכא שמת טעם די כל-אנש די-ישמע קל קרנא משרקיחא (קיתרס) [קתר'וס] שבכא פסנתרין (וסיפניה) [וסיפניה] וכל נגי זמרא יפל ויסגד לצלם דהבא:

You, O king, gave an order that everyone who hears the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, psaltery, bagpipe, and all types of instruments must fall down and worship the golden statue,

וּמִן־דִּי־לֹא יִפֹּל וְיִסְגַּד יִתְרַמָּא לְגֹאֲ-אֲתוֹן נוּרָא יִקְדָּח:

and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be thrown into a burning fiery furnace.

אימי גברין יהודאין די-מגית יתהון על-עבדת מדינת כול שדרה מישה ועבד נגו גבריא אלו לא-שמו (עליד) [עלך] מלכא טעם (לאלהיד) [לאלהיד] לא פלחיו וילצלם דהבא די תקימת לא סגדיו:

There are certain Jews whom you appointed to administer the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; those men pay no heed to you, O king; they do not serve your god or worship the statue of gold that you have set up.”

Daniel 6:4-6:6

אֲדִין דְּנִינְיָאֵל דָּנָה תְּנָא מִתְנַצַּח עַל־סְרַכְיָא וְאַחַשְׁדַּרְפַּנְיָא כָּל־קַבֵּל דִּי רִוַח וְתִירָא בָּהּ וּמַלְכָּא עֲשִׂית לְהַקְמוּתָהּ עַל־כָּל־מַלְכוּתָא:

This man Daniel surpassed the other ministers and satraps by virtue of his extraordinary spirit, and the king considered setting him over the whole kingdom.

אָדוּן סָרְכָא נאַסְשְׁדֶרְפִּנְאָ הָוּוּ בְּעִיּוֹ עֲלֵהּ לְהַשְׁפֵּתָהּ לְדַנְיָאֵל מִצְדָּ מְלָכוּתָא וְכָל־עֲלֵהּ וּשְׁחִיתָהּ לֹא־יִקְלִין לְהַשְׁפֵּתָהּ כָּל־קַבְלֵי דְיִי־מְהִימָן הוּא וְכָל־שְׁלוֹ וּשְׁחִיתָהּ לֹא הַשְׁתַּכַּחַת עָלֶיהָ:

The ministers and satraps looked for some fault in Daniel's conduct in matters of state, but they could find neither fault nor corruption, inasmuch as he was trustworthy, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him.

אָדוּן גְּבַרְיָא אֱלֹהֵי אֱמִרִין דִּי לֹא נִשְׁפַּח לְדַנְיָאֵל דְּנָה כָּל־עֲלֵהּ לְהוֹן הַשְׁפֵּתָנָא עָלֵיהּ בְּדַת אֱלֹהֵיהּ: {ס}

Those men then said, "We are not going to find any fault with this Daniel, unless we find something against him in connection with the laws of his God."



William Brassey Hole (English artist, 1846-1917), detail from, 'Daniel Interprets the Dream of Nebuchadnezzar,' oil on canvas.