

Antisemitism: A Mutating Hatred

Through the Lens of Rabbinic Thought & Literature

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וְהִיא שְׁעֵמֶדָה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ. שְׁלֹא אֶחָד בְּלִבָּד עִמָּד עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, אֶלֶּא שְׁבָכֵל דּוֹר וְדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצִילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם.

And it is this that has stood for our ancestors and for us; since it is not [only] one [person or nation] that has stood [against] us to destroy us, but rather in each generation, they stand [against] us to destroy us, but the Holy One, blessed be He, rescues us from their hand.

O Fortress, Rock of my salvation, unto thee it is becoming to give praise:
let my house of prayer be restored, and I will there offer thee thanksgivings
when thou shalt have prepared a slaughter of the blaspheming foe,
I will complete with song and psalm the dedication of the altar.

Full sated was my soul with ills, my strength was spent with sorrow;
they embittered my life by hardship during my subjection to the dominion of
Egypt, *"The kingdom of the heifer,"* see *Jeremiah 46:20*.
but God with his great power brought forth the chosen race,
while the host of Pharaoh and all his seed sank like a stone into the deep.

To his holy oracle he brought me, yet there also I found no peace,
for the oppressor came and led me captive, because I had served strange gods:
I had to quaff the wine of bewilderment; well nigh had I perished, when Babylon's
end drew near; through Zerubbabel I was saved after seventy years.

The Agagite (Haman), the son of Hammedatha, sought to cut down the lofty fir
tree (Mordecai)**See Talmud Babli, Tr. Megillah, 10b.*;
but his design became a snare to himself, and his pride was brought to an end.
The head of the Benjamite thou didst exalt, but the enemy's name thou Midst
blot out: the many sons he had gotten thou didst hang upon the gallows.

The Grecians were gathered against me in the days of the Hasmoneans;
they broke down the walls of my towers, and defiled all the oils;
but from one of the last remaining flasks a miracle was wrought for thy
beloved *"Likened to a lily in Song of Solomon 2:2.*, and their men of
understanding appointed these eight days for song and praises. Bare Your holy
arm and hasten the End of salvation –

Avenge the vengeance of Your servants' blood from the wicked nation.
For the time has delayed and there is no end to the days of evil,
Push away the Red One in the lowest shadow and establish for us the seven
shepherds.

מְעוֹז צוֹר יְשׁוּעָתִי לָךְ נֹאֵה לְשַׁבַּח.
תִּכּוֹן בֵּית תְּפִלָּתִי וְשֵׁם תּוֹדָה תִּזְבַּח.
לֵיעַת תִּכְיִן מִטְבַּח מִצָּר הַמִּנְבַּח.
אֲז אֲגַמּוֹר בְּשִׁיר מִזְמוֹר חֲנֻכַּת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ.

רְעוֹת שְׂבָעָה נַפְשֵׁי בִיגוֹן כָּחִי כָּלָה.
חַיִּי מָרְרוּ בְּקוֹשֵׁי בְשַׁעְבוֹד מַלְכוּת עֲגָלָה.
וּבִידוֹ הַגְּדוּלָה הוֹצִיא אֶת הַסְּגָלָה.
חֵיל פְּרָעָה וְכָל זָרְעוֹ יָרְדוּ כְּאֶבֶן בַּמַּצוּלָה.

דְּבִיר קִדְשׁוֹ הִבִּיאֵנִי וְגַם שֵׁם לֹא שִׁקְטַתִּי.
וּבָא נוֹגֵשׁ וְהִגְלִינִי. כִּי זָרִים עֲבַדְתִּי.
וַיִּין רַעַל מִסְכַּתִּי כִּמְעַט שְׁעַבְרַתִּי.
קֶץ בָּבֶל, זָרְבָבֶל, לִקְצֵי שְׁבַעִים נוֹשַׁעְתִּי.

כָּרוֹת קוֹמַת בְּרוֹשׁ, בְּקֶשׁ אֲגָגִי בֶן
הַמִּדְיָא.
וְנִהְיֶתָה לוֹ לֶפַח וּלְמוֹקֵשׁ וּגְאוֹנוֹ
נִשְׁבָּתָה.
רֹאשׁ יְמִינִי נִשְׂאֵת וְאוֹיֵב שְׁמוֹ מִחֵית.
רַב בְּנָיו וְקִנְיָנוֹ עַל הַעֵץ תְּלִית.

יָנִים נִקְבְּצוּ עָלַי אֲזִי בִימֵי חֲשֻׁמִּים.
וּפְרָצוּ חוֹמוֹת מִגְדָּלִי וְטָמְאוּ כָּל הַשְּׂמֵנִים.
וּמְנוֹתֶר קִנְקֵנִים נַעֲשָׂה נֶס לְשׁוֹשְׁנִים.
בְּנֵי בֵינָה יְמֵי שְׁמוֹנָה קָבְעוּ שִׁיר וּרְנָנִים.

חֲשׂוֹף זָרוֹעַ קִדְשְׁךָ וְקִרְבֵּךָ קֶץ הַיְשׁוּעָה.
נִקֵּם נִקְמַת דָּם עֲבָדֶיךָ מֵאִמָּה הַרְשָׁעָה.
כִּי אֶרְכָּה לָנוּ הַשְּׁעָה וְאִין קֶץ לִימֵי
הַרְעָה.
דָּחָה אֲדָמוֹן בְּצַל צִלְמוֹן, הִקֵּם לָנוּ רוּעָה
שְׂבָעָה.

- **The song מעוז צור recaps five exiles in Jewish history (מצרים, בבל, פרס, יון, אדום). In what ways were these periods of Jewish persecution similar? In what ways were they different?**
- **If you had to add a stanza to מעוז צור what would you write it about?**

The Israeli novelist A. B. Yehoshua, in an [article](#) translated in the journal Azure (No. 32, 2008) sought a single unifying root for antisemitism:

“Does Jew-hatred stem from a single root?...Is there a discernible line connecting the first-century Roman philosopher Seneca (who called the Jews a “criminal tribe”) and the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (who called the Jews “the abhorrent ones”) to the German composer Richard Wagner or the French writer Louis-Ferdinand Celine, both of whom lived centuries after the Romans and yet were also gripped by a murderous hatred of the Jews...?”

“Of all the attempts to comprehend antisemitism, Leon Pinsker’s theory that fear of Jews is at the core of Jew-hatred seems to come closest to the heart of the problem...Fear of Jews - not envy of the Jews - is the prime, decisive cause of antisemitism...At the foundation of the mad frenzy of antisemitism lies something more genuine:fear. It is fear which drives people to the most ferocious reactions.”

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in numerous writings, sees less of a direct connection between all of historical Jew-hatred/antisemitism.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Future Tense (pg. 92)

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 to 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 defense, the human immune system. How, then, do viruses survive and flourish? By mutating. Antisemitism mutates, and in so doing defeats the immune systems set up by cultures to protect themselves against hatred. There have been three such mutations in the past two thousand years, and we are living through the fourth.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks's Haggadah, (pgs. 36-38)

In pre-Christian times it took the relatively simple form of hostility to strangers, a *dislike* of the *unlike*. In the early Christian centuries it became a religious phenomenon: anti-Judaism. In the Middle Ages it was transmuted into a series of myths whose common theme was that Jews were the cause of all bad things. Following the Enlightenment, religious or mythical justifications were no longer acceptable to secular public discourse, and the last racial antisemitism was born (the word antisemitism itself was only coined in 1879, by the German journalist Wilhelm Marr). The prestige given to prejudice by sacred texts was replaced by the new guarantor of truth: science. A pseudo-science of race was created, designed to prove that Jews were an inferior species...

Anti-Semitism in a new and virulent form - now focusing on collective Jewish existence in Israel while also attacking individual Jews and Jewish buildings in the Diaspora - has happened again. With astonishing speed and ease, it has circumvented the immune systems built up by the West during the course of more than half a century of Holocaust education, interfaith dialogue and anti-racist legislation...

A new myth as powerful as any of its medieval precursors, was born in which the existence of a Jewish state, however small, became the cause of all international disorder... Thus racial anti-Semitism mutated into mythological anti-zionism with the further rider that all Jews are zionists and that's legitimate targets of violence.

- **Do you believe that there is a common thread uniting all of historical (and present) Jew-hatred?**
- **Are the views of A. B. Yehoshua and Rabbi Sacks mutually exclusive or compatible?**

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *ibid.* (pgs. 40-41)

To be a Jew, Therefore, from the days of Abraham and Sarah 2 today, is to carry the burden and dignity of difference... Jews were persecuted because they were different... I know of no spiritual vision truer to the nature of this created world, with its multiplicity of faiths, languages and cultures; none more generous and its understanding of the Myriad forms of the human quest for God; none more vigilant in defense of the particular, the local, the relationships in which our humanity is expressed through covenants of love rather than the coercive force of power. Antisemitism - the paradigm case for the hatred of difference - is more than an assault against Jews. It is a flawed understanding, catastrophic and its consequences, of what it is to be human.

- **How does Judaism express the “dignity of difference”?**
- **What examples of antisemitism were “the hatred of difference”? How was that hatred carried out against other “different” groups besides Jews?**