

## Combating Anti-Semitism

“Exaggerate each feature until man is  
Metamorphosed into beast, vermin, insect,  
Fill in the background with malignant  
Figures from ancient nightmares -- devils,  
Demons, myrmidons of evil.  
When your icon of the enemy is complete  
You will be able to slaughter without guilt,  
Slaughter without shame.”

Sam Keen, *Faces of the Enemy*, 1986

“Because the look he gave me was not the way one man looks at another. If I could fully explain the nature of that look -- it was as if through the glass of an aquarium directed at some creature belonging to a different world -- I would be able to explain the madness of the Third Reich, down to its very core

Everything we thought and said about the Germans took shape in that one moment. The brain commanding those blue eyes and manicured hands clearly said, ‘This thing standing before me obviously belongs to a species that must be eliminated.’”

Primo Levi, *If This Is A Man*, 1987

“When you dehumanize a group, there’s lasting consequences because they know that they’re being dehumanized.”

James Carville, American Political Commentator, 20th-21st Century

**Question:** Read these quotes out loud to each other. These three above quotes, what is their common theme? Can you provide any other examples from history or literature?

## **Rabbi Sacks on The Causes of Antisemitism**

### **Definitions -- What Is Antisemitism?**

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 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.

*Future Tense*, p. 92

### **Rabbi Sacks sees antisemitism progressing in stages.**

#### **Stage 1 -- Dualism**

“The most powerful antidote to dualism is monotheism, best defined in a verse in [Isaiah \(45:7\)](#): ‘I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster [*ra*, literally ‘evil’]; I, the Lord, do all these things.’ By refusing to split light and dark, good and evil, into separate forces or entities, monotheism forces us to wrestle with the ambiguities of our own character, the necessity for moral choice and the inescapability of personal responsibility. Dualism relieves us of all these burdens. It is the supreme betrayal of monotheism.”

The Great Partnership, p. 257

“Dualism is the single most effective doctrine in persuading good people to do evil things.”

The Great Partnership, p. 256

“Dualism is what happens when cognitive dissonance becomes unbearable, when the world as it is, is simply too unlike the world as we believed it ought to be.”

Not in God's Name, p. 48

“The most profound moralizing experience, the only one capable of defeating dualism, is to undergo role reversal. Imagine a Crusader in the Middle Ages, or a German in 1939, discovering that he is a Jew. There can be no more life-changing trial than finding yourself on the other side.”

Not in God's Name, p. 152

“Theology creates an anthropology. Discovering God, singular and alone, the first monotheists discovered the human person singular and alone. Monotheism internalizes what dualism externalizes. It takes the good and bad in the human situation, the faith and the fear, the retribution and the forgiving, and locates them within each of us, turning what would otherwise be war on the battlefield into a struggle within the soul. ‘Who is a hero?’ asked the rabbis, and replied, ‘One who conquers himself.’ This is the moral drama that has been monotheism’s contribution to the civilisation of the West: not the clash of titans on the field of battle, but the quiet inner drama of choice and will, restraint and responsibility.”

Not in God's Name, p. 64

**Question:** For Rabbi Sacks, what does he mean by “dualism,” and why is a “dualistic” worldview dangerous?

### **Stage 2 -- Victimhood**

“Blaming others for our failings is as old as humanity, but it is disastrous. It means that we define ourselves as victims. A culture of victimhood wins the compassion of others but at too high a cost. It incubates feelings of resentment, humiliation, grievance and grudge. It leads people to rage against the world instead of taking steps to mend it. Jews have suffered much, but Yom Kippur prevents us from ever defining ourselves as victims. As we confess our sins, we blame no one but ourselves. That is demanding, psychologically and spiritually. Yet it is the price we must pay for freedom. Other ancient literatures record the successes of rulers and empires. The Hebrew Bible is a unique chronicle of failures. No one in its pages is perfect, not the patriarchs and matriarchs, not priests or prophets, not kings or the ruling elite. No history is as painfully honest as that of the Tanach, and it was possible only in the deep belief that God forgives. God pardons; God atones; God is holding out His hand, calling us back with inextinguishable love. That allows us to be honest with ourselves.”

Ceremony & Celebration, p. 86

“The flight from responsibility into victimhood is the oldest of all human temptations... But it is negative, destructive, it robs us of trust in the world, it leads us to see fate as a conspiracy directed against us. It leads us to the impotence of anger and the anger of impotence. The best way of curing a victim is to help him cease to think of himself as a victim.”

The Home We Build Together, p. 62

“Shame and necessity give rise to a culture of tragedy. Guilt, repentance and responsibility give rise to one of hope. If we have free will, we are not slaves to fate. If at the heart of reality there is a forgiving presence, then we are not condemned by guilt. ‘Penitence, prayer and charity avert the evil decree’, goes one of the most famous Jewish prayers. There is no fate that is inevitable, no future predetermined, no outcome we cannot avert. There is always a choice. There are tragic cultures and there are hope cultures, and, though some combine elements of both, the two are ultimately incompatible. In hope cultures, we are agents. We choose. All depends on what we decide, and that cannot be known in advance. In tragic cultures, we are victims. We are acted on by forces beyond our control, and they will eventually defeat even the strongest. The only redemption of victimhood is to refuse that self-definition. In the long run no good can come of it, for it belongs to a world of tragedy. It divides us into victims and oppressors – and we are always the victims, while the others are the oppressors. Look at any conflict zone in the world and you will find that both sides see themselves as the victims, therefore innocent, and the others as the wrongdoers. That is a recipe for perpetual conflict and perennial disappointment. There is only resentment, rage and desire for revenge, all of which achieve nothing since all they do is provoke a reaction of attempted retaliation. The choice of freedom brings the defeat of victimhood and the redemptive birth of hope.”

Morality, Chapter 14, pp. 210-211

“The story of humanity has been, for the most part, a flight from responsibility. The culprits change. Only the sense of victimhood remains. It wasn’t us. It was the politicians. Or the media. Or the bankers. Or our genes. Or our parents. Or the system – be it capitalism, communism, or anything in between. Most of all, it is the fault of the others, the ones not like us, infidels, sons

of Satan, children of darkness, the unredeemed. The perpetrators of the greatest crime against humanity in all of history were convinced it wasn't them. They were "only obeying orders." When all else fails, blame God. And if you do not believe in God, blame the people who do. To be human is to seek to escape from responsibility."

Lessons in Leadership, p. 294

"Nowadays, to win sympathy for your cause, you have to establish your credentials as a victim. This has overwhelming advantages. People empathize with your situation, give you support, and avoid criticizing your actions. It has, however, three drawbacks: it is false, it is corrupting, and it is a denial of humanity. A victim is an object, not a subject; a done-to, not a doer. He or she systematically denies responsibility, and those who wish to help only prolong the denial. They become what is known in addiction therapy as co-dependents. By locating the cause of someone's plight in factors external to the person, the victim culture perpetuates the condition of victimhood. Instead of helping the prisoner out of prison, it locks him in and throws away the key."

The Long Walk to Freedom (Lech Lecha, Covenant & Conversation)

"We need people willing to stand up and say, rich and poor alike, we all have collective responsibility for the common good. And we need a culture of responsibility, not one of victimhood, because if you define yourself as a victim, you can never be free."

Receiving The Irving Kristol Award from the American Enterprise Institute

"We are not defined by what happens to us but rather by how we respond to what happens to us. That itself is determined by how we interpret what happens to us. If we change

the way we think – which we can, because of the plasticity of the brain – then we can change the way we feel and the way we act. Fate is never final.”

The Leader’s Call to Responsibility (Ha'azinu, Lessons in Leadership, Covenant & Conversation)

“Defining yourself as a victim is ultimately a diminution of what makes us human. It teaches us to see ourselves as objects, not subjects. We become done-to, not doers; passive, not active. Blame bars the path to responsibility. The victim, ascribing his condition to others, locates the cause of his situation outside himself, thus rendering himself incapable of breaking free from his self-created trap. Because he attributes a real phenomenon (pain, poverty, illiteracy, disease) to a fictitious cause, he discovers that murdering the cause does not remove the symptom. Hence efforts must be redoubled. Blame cultures perpetuate every condition against which they are a protest.”

Not in God’s Name, p. 249

**Question** : How does victimhood lead to dangerous social consequences? Can you think of any from history?

### **Stage 3 -- The “Scapegoat”**

Source 1

“Jews cannot cure anti-Semitism. Only anti-Semites can do that, together with the society to which they belong. The reason is that Jews are not the cause of anti-Semitism. They are the objects of it, but that is something different. The cause of anti-Semitism is a profound malaise in the cultures in which it appears. It happens whenever a society feels that something is badly

amiss, when there is a profound cognitive dissonance between the way things are and the way people think they ought to be. People are then faced with two possibilities. They can either ask, “What did we do wrong?” and start to put it right, or they can ask, “Who did this to us?” and search for a scapegoat.”

Judaism’s Life-Changing Ideas, p. 226

#### Source 2

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Judaism’s Life-Changing Ideas, p. 226

**Question:** According to Rabbi Sacks, how does the “scapegoat” theory lead to social conflict?

#### **Stage 4 -- Sibling Rivalry**

“The essential irreplaceability of persons is what gives love its vulnerability, its openness to loss and grief, its fragility and pathos. It is what separates science (the search for universals) from poetry (the love of particulars). It is also what distinguishes the God of the philosophers from

the God of the Hebrew Bible... We are particular and universal, the same and different, human beings as such but also members of this family, that community, this history, that heritage. Our particularity is our window onto universality, just as our language is the only way we have of understanding the world we share with speakers of other languages. Just as a loving parent is pained by sibling rivalry, so God asks us, His children, not to fight or seek to dominate one another. That is the conceptual link between love, creation, and difference. God, Author of diversity, is the unifying Presence within diversity.”

The Dignity of Difference, p. 47

“Sibling rivalry is defeated the moment we discover that we are loved by God for what we are, not for what someone else is. We each have our own blessing.”

Not in God’s Name, p. 141

“If only we were to listen closely to the voice of the other, we would find that beneath the skin we are brothers and sisters, members of the human family under the parenthood of God. When others become brothers and conflict is transformed into conciliation, we have begun the journey to society-as-a-family and the redemptive drama can begin.”

Not in God’s Name, p. 160

“We can only change the world if we can change ourselves. That is why the book of Genesis ends with the story of Joseph and his brothers. It tells on an individual level the story that the book of Exodus tells on a national level. Israel is charged with the task of transforming the moral vision of humankind, but it can only do so if individual Jews, of whom the forerunners were Jacob’s children, are capable of changing themselves.”

“Teshuvah is the ultimate assertion of freedom. Time then becomes an arena of change in which the future redeems the past and a new concept is born – the idea we call hope.”

The Future of the Past (Vayechi, Covenant & Conversation)

“Today God is calling us, Jew, Christian and Muslim, to let go of hate and the preaching of hate, and live at least as brothers and sisters, true to our faith and a blessing to others regardless of their faith, honouring God’s name by honouring his image, humankind.”

Not in God’s Name, p. 267

“The way to peace is to realize that our grasp of truth is partial, fragmentary, incomplete. That is the human condition. Truth matters, but peace matters more. That is Judaism’s considered judgment. Many of the greatest crimes in history were committed by those who believed they were in possession of the truth while their opponents were sunk in error. To make peace between husband and wife (Abraham and Sarah) and between brothers (Joseph and Jacob’s other sons), the Torah sanctions a statement that is less than the whole truth. Dishonesty? No. Tact, sensitivity, discretion? Yes. That is an idea both eminently sensible and humane.”

The White Lie (Vayechi, Covenant & Conversation)

“Peace comes when we see our reflection in the face of God and let go of the desire to be someone else.”

Not in God’s Name, p. 139

**Question:** According to Rabbi Sacks, why is civilizational “sibling rivalry” dangerous, and how do we prevent it? Can you think of historical civilizational “sibling rivalries,” and how they concluded?