THE WORLD NEEDS THE JEWS
HIGH HOLY DAYS 5767 – TEMPLE JUDEA
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz

An Israeli recently visited Paris, and on an outing he happened upon a dog attacking a little girl. The Israeli sprang to the rescue and saved the little girl, but the dog died. Surrounded by reporters congratulating him, he was asked, "Where in Paris are you from? Tomorrow's headlines are going to read: 'Brave Parisian saves girl from Dog', 'Heroic Parisian rescues little girl from Savage beast.'"

"Actually," he said, "I am not a Parisian."

"Alright, so the headlines will be 'Brave Frenchman saves girl from Dog', 'Heroic Frenchman rescues little girl from Savage beast.'"

"Well, actually I am not from France either"

The reporters then inquired, "So where are you from?"

"Israel," he replied and the interview ended. And the next day, the headlines read, "Israeli brings violence to Paris. Dog dead, little girl injured."[i]

Thankfully, this story is not factually true. But while it is not true in fact, it is true in spirit; which is to say, while Mel Gibson may have been drunk, much of the world, even when completely sober, blames the Jews for all their problems.

A true story: I received a phone call from a member of our congregation the other day, she was very upset, crying on the telephone. When I asked her what was wrong, she explained to me an all too familiar series of events. She and a group of friends, some Jewish, some not, correspond via email on a regular basis, and they share information about their children and families. offer each other advice and support through life's daily challenges. It's a buddy list of friends that have been together for more than 8 years. Many of us are part of similar groups.

And so we can imagine what happened one day, soon after the war broke out between Hezbollah and Israel, one of the members on the list posted a joke. The joke, like hundreds of others we have all encountered, blamed Israel for making a big deal out of nothing and driving the world towards World War III. Our congregant found nothing funny about it and called it for what it truly was hatred and bigotry and wrote as much in her response.

What do you think happened next? We'll I'll tell you. She and Israel were compared to Nazi storm troopers; she was told that the root cause of all evil in the Middle East was Jewish aggression and intolerance; and that Israel was deliberately killing children. That Jews were spreading hate and fear around the world. And there it was, naked and plain as day - the world's longest hatred – anti-Semitism.

Mel Gibson's racist ranting aside, anti-Semitism, is back, in truth it never went away. Around the world Jews and Jewish communities are increasingly victimized and vandalized, at alarming rates. Now some will say, it is because of Israel, or because of Jewish power, and influence. Others will claim that we bring it on ourselves by not

assimilating into society, or because of our professed - and so often misunderstood - claim to being a "chosen people". The justifications are as varied and as long as the hatred itself, but make no mistake we are the world's perpetual outsider, its historic scapegoat, and we are always the ones to blame. We are .2% of the world's population and just 2% of the population of the United States, but to the anti-Semite we are 100% the cause of all the world's problems.

The history of anti-Semitism begins almost at the beginning of Jewish history when Moses stood up for a Hebrew slave that was being beaten by an Egyptian taskmaster, and it continues sadly to and through Daniel Pearl (z"l) who was murdered at the hands of Islamic terrorists for no other reason, than as Danny said in his own last words, as his attackers held a sword to his neck, "My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish and I am Jewish."

Go back with me 4,000 years, you are Moses, a Jew who is conflicted and hiding your identity from those around you. You see a man being beaten in the street. He's a slave and his attacker is his taskmaster. What do you? If you're an Egyptian, you turn and walk away, or maybe you join in the fray, but if you are a Jew, if you're Moses you are compelled to save him, not because he is a fellow Jew, but because he is a fellow human being, and every life has value.

It was a moment of great triumph, not for Judaism, but for humanity, the embodiment of the rabbinic command *pikuach nefesh*, saving a life takes precedent. But also in that moment anti-Semitism was born, for as soon as Moses stood up for the rights of others, those others, tried to bring him down.

The *Midrash* explains that when Pharaoh heard that Moses put the life of a slave ahead of the life of a taskmaster, Pharaoh feared for the breakdown of his totalitarian regime, if human rights were take precedent over building the pyramids, that would mean the end of slavery and the end of his empire. Pharaoh decided in that moment that a Jew could not be trusted, because when it came to following orders, the Jew, as the hotdog company reminded us, answers to a higher authority.

By being different and standing up for those that are being victimized, Moses found God, and found his Jewish purpose; our Jewish purpose, to be an *or'lgoyim* a light unto the nations.

What has Judaism brought to the nations of the world, what has been our light, our contribution? Judaism created universal education, charity, care for the elderly, respect for the rights and dignity of women, the primacy of saving human lives and the importance of justice which led to intense Jewish involvement with the legal, medical and scientific world."[ii] That has been our light unto the world, our contribution to humanity.

Yet in cultures and societies that lack or reject those values - our very existence is rejected and despised as well. Because in spite of the fact that no people has been more persecuted, more brutalized, more victimized than the Jewish people throughout history,

the Jew remains the eternal optimist. We believe and our tradition implores us, that as individuals and as a human race we can always do better, always be better. It is the prophetic ideal, it is the purpose for which we were created, *l'taken Olam b'malchut shadai*, to repair the brokenness in the world and restore it to God's intended perfection. Not for ourselves alone, but for the benefit of the entire world. That is what it means to be a chosen people, chosen by God to make the world a better and more humane place, a place worthy of redemption.

Sadly for Danny Pearl there was no Moses amongst his terrorist captors; in that dark basement, there was no human light but his own, there was no redemption. He was surrounded by darkness. They bound him at hand and foot, slaughtered him for the whole world to see on *Al Jazeera*. Surrounded by other people (I can't bring myself to call them human-beings) no one came to his aid, no one lit a light of hope! As they raged with the fire of hate, they extinguished his light and the world grew darker.

Yes, many in the world shook their collective heads in disgust, but many others, too many others, danced in the streets and shouted Death to Israel! Death to America! Death to the Jews! They needed no alcohol to lubricate their hatred; their cup runeth over with hatred, it had been boiling over for generations; and friends, let us speak it plain and clear: they are still dancing! Danny's murder wasn't the end of their hatred, it only fanned the flames. Anti-Semitism is the energizer bunny of hatred, it never really goes away, it recedes, but then comes back like the tides of the ocean; when the certainties of society collapse, when people are looking for some reason to explain their misfortune, we people are scared they blame the Jew. And friends, you don't need me to tell you this, but we live in uncertain and frightening times.

Elie Weisel was once asked what his greatest disappointment was in his remarkable life. Weisel answered, "I was convinced in 1945 that what happened must never be forgotten. One thing appeared to me then: that anti-Semitism died in Auschwitz. But now I realize that only its victims perished. Anti-Semitism is still alive and well and that hurts."[iii]

It used to be in the years immediately after the holocaust, until the emergence of a strong and vibrant Israel in the 1970's, that the guilt and shame of the Holocaust kept European anti-Semitism in check. Those older than me will remember, that for a brief period of time, 20 – 30 years the world was scared of its own anti-Semitic shadow, it looked in the mirror and saw what it had done in the name of blood libel and racial purity and it joined us in shouting Never Again!

It was in that climate that Israel was conceived, that Vatican II was authored, that the world, if only for a moment stood in solidarity with Israel when its athletes were murdered at Munich, its citizens taken hostage at Entebbe. Its borders violated and its people attacked on Yom Kippur.

Can you imagine the world standing up for Jews and Israel today? Can you imagine the UN or the EU coming to our defense? How long did it take for the world to

condemn Israel when its soldiers were kidnapped and rockets rained down on Haifa and Kiryat Shmona? How long for rumors to start that the Jews were responsible for 9/11? How long did it take them to suggest, as some suggest today, that if you remove the Jews from a tiny patch of land on the Mediterranean, you remove the motivation of the terrorist? "*B'chol dor va'dor omdeem alaynu l'chalotaynu*" In every generation, the *Hagaddah* laments, they rise up against us to destroy us. Elie Weisel is right, he's always right, anti-Semitism didn't die with the Holocaust; it is alive and as sickening as ever!

A recent European Union poll found that in Europe today 59% of all Europeans consider Israel the greatest single menace to world peace; in the Netherlands, the number rises to 74%. We need to understand and realize that a taboo has lifted in Europe and on a new European anti-Semitism, not directed at individuals Jews, but at Israel as the collective Jew has emerged. "The key motif, [of this new anti-Semitism]" writes British journalist Melanie Phillips, "is a kind of Holocaust inversion, with the Israelis demonized as Nazis and the Palestinians being regarded as the new Jews. Israel and the Jews are being systematically de-legitimized and dehumanized – a necessary prelude to [our] destruction." [iv]

Incredibly this European image of the Jew as all-powerful, diabolical, scheming and destructive is not native to Islam. It is of little comfort - but important to point out that throughout the Golden Age of Islam the Jew was seen as just the opposite of how the Europeans saw us, in the Islamic world they hated the Jew for being weak and incapable. For centuries we were barely worth the effort it took to Islamic societies to house us; in fact historically the Jew in the Islamic world had to pay a protection tax to cover the costs incurred by the Arab nations for tolerating and allowing the Jews to co-exist in Islamic society; we had no value other than what we paid as a ransom for our lives.

That historic subjugation of the Jew in the Islamic world has morphed into something the world is only now coming to terms with, Radical Islamic Anti-Semitism. It is a hatred that is deeply rooted in the anti-Semitism of old Europe yet now, like new European anti-Semitism, the Radical Islamic Anti-Semitism has not only the individual Jew to blame for the problems of the world, but with the rise of a strong and vibrant Israel, this new anti-Semite can blame the Jew collectively under the guise of the more politically tolerable banners of anti-Zionism, and anti-Israel. The Anti-Semite has found the perfect cover for its festering hatred, de-legitimize the Jewish state and you de-legitimize the Jew, which conveniently returns us to our historic role as the other, the outsider, subjugated and irrelevant.

Rabbi Harold Kushner reminds us, "that human-beings, can endure any burden, any suffering if they can only find a reason for it." For some, lacking a reason for the randomness of life is insufferable. Indeed if your theology claims that nothing is random and that everything happens for a reason – then the lack of a reason for suffering is a theological catastrophe!

And so people try to find a reason for seemingly inexplicable suffering. And it is in the search for the root cause, where you and I and most rational human beings would

discover that either we ourselves are the cause of the problem, or as is so often the case, there no rational explanation, the rational human being accepts that and moves on, the anti-Semite blames the Jew!

Not as a last resort when all other explanations fail, but as a first resort in order to avoid a thorough examination of the self. In the words of Jean Paul Sartre, anti-Semitism is a pathology, a hysteria. Sartre writes, "If the Jew did not exist the anti-Semite would invent him."[v]

Why blame the Jews? Because the Jews are the perfect excuse for all the ills of the world, we are outside the dominant religions, we are small and dispersed around the world, and our very existence, our resiliency as a people reminds the anti-Semite of all the times they tried to destroy us and failed. We are still here!

Sociologists have studied anti-Semitism for generations; in fact Yale University just this week announced that it was creating the first ever university based Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism. Why study anti-Semitism? Because the measure of a society can taken by how they treat their Jews. It has been true throughout history and it is truest still today. "The treatment of the Jews has historically served as one of society's great moral barometers. Watch how a nation, religion or political movement treats Jews and you have an early and deadly accurate picture of that groups' intentions, not only toward Jews but toward all groups they consider to be other."[vi]

In May of 1941, seven months before America's entry into World War II, Rabbi Fred Isserman of Temple Israel of St. Louis ascended the pulpit and said to his congregation, "In all human history, the anti-Semites have been the war-makers, never the peace makers; the foes, never the friends of religion; the apostles of tyranny; never the champions of liberty; the spokesmen of reaction; never the leaders of progress; the voices of tribalism, never the teachers of brotherhood; the destroyers and never the creators. Name an anti-Semite of any land, of any age, and you will name not merely a foe of the Jew, but a foe of the finest values in civilization - the noblest standards of human life. The enemy of the Jew has always been the enemy of humanity. What history teaches the present verifies."[vii]

Rabbi Isserman was prophetic in his own day and his words reverberate even today. He understood the depths of the problem we face, and now so do we! He knew too well, that, if unchallenged, Nazism, anti-Semitism – Terror - had the very real potential to darken the whole world.

A rabbi was once asked, "How do you bring light to a darkened room?" his answer, "Strike a match!" Then they asked him, "Rabbi how do you bring light to a darkened world?" his answer, "Become the match, become the light!"

Today, at this critical moment in world history when not only the Jew is once again under attack, but also those who share our values; Judeo-Christian values to defend the rights of the poor, the oppressed, the enslaved, to fight for dignity and equality for

women, minorities and those who do not have a voice. Today when the Islamic terrorist proclaims, to the world as the leader of Hezbollah did just weeks ago, "We have discovered how to hit the Jews where they are the most vulnerable. The Jews love life, so that is what we shall take away from them. We are going to win, because they love life and we love death."[viii] Today in this world, in the face of this dark inhumanity, what the world needs is not less Jews - but more Jews, not less Judaism - but more Judaism!

The world needs us! The world needs the Jews! We must find our prophetic voice once again, in the words of Rabbi Heschel, "we are messengers who forgot our message." And so our task is to find it, to find our voice, to strike a match and become in this generation as we were always intended to be, an *or l'goyim,* a light unto the nations. To fight the fire of hatred and terror with the light of Torah; not to bring the world to Judaism, but to bring Judaism to the world!

"It is the great irony of Jewish history that this sacred task, which has been the ultimate cause of anti-Semitism since the days of Moses in Egypt, must be fulfilled in order to end anti-Semitism [and its companion – terror]."[ix] We must reclaim our Jewish purpose and teach the world our values and our ideals because they are the values and ideals that the world so desperately needs.

Now is the time, in this New Year, at this moment in history, for each of us to look inside ourselves, to look to our improbable history of survival and find the courage of Moses, the pride of Danny Pearl, and the conviction that deep down we know that Judaism is not the cause of the world's problems rather it is part of the solution! We must relearn our eternal message, educate ourselves about what our tradition truly stands for, what we value and how those values stand in stark contrast to the enemies of freedom, the propagators of hate, and then, like Moses and like Danny, we must become the light the world so desperately needs. In these darkened times we must be an *Or L'goyim*, a light unto the nations – *V'yomer Adonai Y'hi Or, v'yhi Or*, and God said let there be light and there was light. We are that light, you are that light, the light the world needs, the light of Torah, the light of humanity, the light of righteousness, a holy light, an eternal light, be that light, let it shine, let your light shine and it will brighten our darkened world.

(CHOIR: THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE)

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[i] Rabbi Richard Steinberg, *Rosh Hashanah Sermon 5764*, Congregation Shir Hamalot
[ii] Rabbi Ed Farber, *Sermon* "Americans Are The World's Newest Jews" High Holy Days 5767
[iii] Random House, "A Conversation with Elie Weisel", www.randomhouse.com/boldtype 2006
[iv] Rabbi Ed Feinstein, Valley Beth Shalom, High Holy Day Sermon 5767
[v] Jean Paul Sarte, Anti-Semite and Jew p. 13
[vi] Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, "Why the Jews?" p. 194
[vii] Rabbi F. M. Isserman, *Sermon: How to Defeat Hitler* May 23, 1941 – Temple Israel, St. Louis
[viii] Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, Sun-Sentinel.com, FL - Aug 23, 2006
[ix] Prager & Telishkin p. 191