PUNCH A ZIONIST TODAY
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Earlier this week, a third-year student of political science and math at McGill University, who is also an elected member of the student government tweeted a message encouraging his classmates to [quote], "punch a Zionist today".

Within hours McGill University joined national Jewish groups in condemning the student politician who published the tweet calling for violence against Jews.

Christopher Manfredi, the provost and vice-principal, said the university is taking "action as required" against the author of what he called a "disturbing" social-media message.

He went on, "The university strongly condemns expressions of hatred or incitement to violence against any individual or group," Manfredi said. "Such statements do not represent the views or the values of the university and we believe they violate a number of our policies, including the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures." He added that any disciplinary proceedings would be confidential.

A coalition of McGill students posted on its Facebook page that a tweet such as the one by this student makes everyone on campus feel unsafe. They called for him to resign from his office in the student legislature.

We could for a moment take some measure of comfort the campus authorities and many among the student body strongly condemned the incitement of violence toward Jews and supports of Israel. But the context of all that is going on at McGill and throughout Canada it is really little comfort.

Last year, the Students' Society of McGill University voted in favour of joining the Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel. The vote was eventually overturned in an online vote. Though following the BDS debate, some Jewish students experienced harassment on campus.

The student newspaper the McGill Daily, has an editorial policy of not publishing articles that "promote a Zionist worldview."

All of this led the New York-based Jewish publication Algemeiner to rank McGill fourth last year on a list of North America's 40 "worst" campuses for Jewish students. (University of Toronto was ranked third.)

But its not just University Campuses in Canada. Last week it was revealed that the Coast Hotels chain was publishing and distributing anti-Semitic material in it its hotel rooms. When confronted they apologized and removed the publications, but what were they doing there in the first place?

And just two weeks ago, a story that many of us saw in social media about the carpentry trade school on Gabriola Island that refused to accept applications for admission from Israeli students. They too have apologized and changed their policy. But the reason they gave for the policy in the first place was they were trying to follow the recent UN resolution against Israeli settlements. Saying in essence they thought the UN resolution made it ok to discriminate against Israeli citizens.

Around the world Jews and Jewish communities are increasingly victimized and vandalized, at alarming rates; by every measure and study Anti-Semitism is on the rise. While many societal ills and prejudices are not longer tolerated, blaming the Jew is still considered by many to be acceptable and by some necessary.

It astonishes me, though I know it shouldn't – that the people that have served as the historical reference point for what happens when society institutionalizes racism and bigotry are still targeted with hate.

The world screams never again, it marches for women's rights, gay rights, black rights, first nations rights. And when it does it draws frequent comparisons to the scourge of Hitler and Nazi-ism. But when you point out that it is still open season on Jews and Zionists, even amongst many on the progressive left who march in protest to everything – its still ok to blame the Jew, its ok to blame Israel.

Today's 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 Jews to our historic role as the other, the outsider, subjugated and disdained.

The history of anti-Semitism begins almost at the beginning of Jewish history, indeed just a few weeks ago at the beginning of the Book of Exodus which Shoshana will read from tomorrow morning. In those first passages of the book Moses stood up for a Hebrew slave that was being beaten by an Egyptian taskmaster. In that moment, and perhaps for the first time in history Jews were seen as a threat for what they believed and practiced.

Go back with me 4,000 years to that moment in the bible. 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."[i] 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.

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."[ii]

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 was right, he's was 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." [iii]

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."[iv]

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, and now as a nation 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 recently created 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."[v]

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 in this world, in the face of a growing chorus of Nationalism and Nativism, 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 Abraham Joshua Heschel, "we are messengers who forgot our message."

So to those who wonder, and I know some in our community do and they wonder outload about why I speak so much about the horrific plight of Syrian refugees. This is why, because my Judaism demands it and our world needs this message.

That's why rabbis are sitting in the middle of 5th avenue in NYC and being arrested in protest of President Trumps most caustic statements. Because the world needs Jewish values.

That's why so many of the leaders in the LGBTQ movement and the Women's Rights Movements are Jews and Jewish leaders. Because those movements are Moses moments.

That's why Israel has hospitals on the Syrian Border, Emergency Response Units in Natural Disasters and is leading on Climate Change and health care innovations. We must be out there because the world needs our Torah, it needs our message.

Will that insulate us from anti-Semitism, will that insulate Israel from its delegitimizers no, but in the words of Bryan Stevenson, the founder and director of the Equal Justice Initiative, "you have to be proximate". When you stand shoulder to shoulder with those that fight for justice you learn from each other.

"When we get close, we hear things that can't be heard from afar. We see things that can't be seen. And sometimes that makes the difference between acting justly and unjustly."

That's why Moses went out to save the human being, being beaten by the taskmaster – you won't change the world on Facebook, you have to get out in the street and do the work.

"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]."[vi] 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 more than ever.

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[i] Rabbi Ed Farber, *Sermon* "Americans Are The World's Newest Jews" High Holy Days 5767
[ii] Random House, "A Conversation with Elie Weisel", www.randomhouse.com/boldtype 2006
[iii] Rabbi Ed Feinstein, Valley Beth Shalom, High Holy Day Sermon 5767
[iv] Jean Paul Sarte, Anti-Semite and Jew p. 13
[v] Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, "Why the Jews?" p. 194
[vi] Prager & Telishkin p. 191