



GEULAS YISRAEL

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RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

MAGGID SHIUR ALL PARSHA AND ALL DAF, OU.ORG

# An Ancient Hatred and a Modern Mask: Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism

There are two sections of *tochacha* in the Torah—one in Parshat Bechukotai and one in Parshat Ki Tavo. Each details the punishments we face when we abandon Hashem's commandments and violate the covenant of Torah. Most of the bleak imagery depicts divine retribution. These punishments come from above—sometimes through natural forces like famine and plague, other times through human agents, such as invading armies.

One of the punishments described in the *tochacha* in Parshat Ki Tavo is antisemitism:

“וְהָיְתָה לְשָׂמָה לְמַשָּׁל וּלְשִׁנְיָה בְּכָל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה ד' שָׂמָה”

“You shall become an object of astonishment, a parable, and a byword among all the nations where Hashem will lead you.” (Devarim 28:37)

The oldest hatred in human history—the odious and irrational hatred of the Jew—is, in part, a divine response to our national disobedience. Had we never turned from Hashem's will, this ancient hatred may never have been born.

Yet, Chazal offer a slightly different perspective on antisemitism. The *Gemara* in *Shabbat* (88a) questions why the mountain was named Har Sinai. Of all the names associated with that mountain—such as *Chorev* or *Har*

*HaElokim*—why has *Sinai* become the one enshrined in Jewish memory and culture?

Playing on the phonetics of the word *Sinai*, Chazal teach that hatred of the Jewish people—*sin'ah*—was born at the moment of Matan Torah. This approach doesn't trace antisemitism to our sins, moral failings, or religious decline. Instead, it sees this hatred as embedded in the fabric of Jewish history—a hatred that would have existed even had we remained faithful to Hashem's will and preserved our sovereignty in our own Land.

Which is it? Is antisemitism a deep-rooted hatred woven into human history, or a divine punishment for our betrayals? Did it start at *Sinai*, or with the tragedies of *Tisha B'Av*? The truth is—both.

## CHOSEN AND CHALLENGED

After two centuries of spiritual turmoil and moral chaos among the nations, Hashem chose our forefather. Through him—and through us—He tasked the building of a model nation to restore clear values lost to history. Our nation was meant to embody the twin principles of monotheism and morality. We are assigned to call a disoriented world to higher religious ground. Avraham was designated *Av Hamon Goyim*—not because he was the biological

father of humanity, but because he was meant to be its spiritual guide. We, in turn, were chosen to be a *mamlechet kohanim*—a kingdom of priests—charged with embodying the nobility of a life of covenant and commitment. We were meant to live the dignity of 613, so that the world might better appreciate the nobility of 7.

Our mission carries within it an inevitable truth: we would face rejection—if not outright disdain. No one welcomes a voice that challenges their lifestyle. No one embraces a nation that calls for moral introspection. We are the whistleblowers of history, and the easiest way to silence a message is to discredit the messenger. As bearers of a divine mandate to elevate humanity, we were fated to be resisted—if not reviled.

Hashem programmed this struggle into His historical pact with Avraham Avinu. When Avraham was told,

”כִּי־גֵר יִהְיֶה זְרַעְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא־לֵהֶם, וְעַבְדָּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם  
אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה”

Hashem wasn't only referring to geographic exile in Egypt, but to the broader, ongoing condition of the Jewish people—called to live a godly life and tasked with educating humanity. We would always be the *ger*—the outsider, the different one. And as a people who stood for something different, we would always face *inu'i*—pain, affliction, and alienation.

Our *Avot* were aware of this built-in pattern of Jewish history. They embraced the nobility of the mission, while fully recognizing its fearsome cost. Even had we remained securely in our homeland, we still would have faced hostility and rejection. It is not merely the price of exile; it is the price of being chosen. This struggle was built into *Sefer Bereishit*, built into the Brit—and it began at Har Sinai.

### THE NEW REALITY OF ANTISEMITISM

However, on Tisha B'Av, the complexion and



intensity of antisemitism radically changed. Our mission—to live a distinct life and to advance humanity—did not end with Tisha B'Av. We were cast out of Israel, condemned to roam the earth—from land to land, continent to continent. Yet our mission continued. The terms of engagement, however, shifted. We would now pursue our calling as guests in foreign lands. From that point on, the hostility toward us grew fiercer. This was a divine punishment, born from a toxic blend of factors.

Typically, when a foreign nation settles among an indigenous people, one of two paths unfolds. At times, the newcomers fully integrate—adopting the language and culture of the host land, marrying into the local population, and eventually blending entirely into the surrounding society.

Other times, ethnic groups choose to preserve their distinct identity by resisting integration. To protect their heritage and traditions, they live separately from the dominant culture, often withdrawing from modern society to maintain their way of life. The Amish in North America, the Aborigines in Australia, and the tribes of the Amazon jungle are all examples of communities that have chosen extreme cultural isolation over assimilation. They preserve their culture by living apart, maintaining a complete separation from the broader society to safeguard their unique way of life.

## LIVING APART, LEADING FORWARD

The Jewish people don't fit neatly into either of these models. We are tenaciously different. Halacha sets us apart—in marriage and in food, in our weekly rhythm and yearly calendar. We mark time differently. Even when halacha doesn't mandate separation, an inner sense of cultural distinctiveness drives us to protect and preserve our unique Jewish identity. Bilam's prophecy—

“הן עם לבדד ישכון”

—“Behold, a nation that dwells apart”—has echoed throughout the centuries. An essential part of Jewish identity is the awareness that our distinct heritage must be preserved—and that we must not dissolve into the culture around us.

Yet, despite our extreme cultural insularity, we have always been active participants in the societies around us. For much of our exile, we were denied equal status—barred from owning land, attending universities, or rising to classic positions of socio-political prominence. Yet even when pushed to the margins, we profoundly influenced the cultures surrounding us.

Our way of life made us indispensable. We built strong families and cultivated powerful networks of trust among Jewish communities across the world. Through the discipline of Talmud Torah, we maintained high levels of literacy in a world where literacy rarely surpassed ten percent. Even while being discriminated against, we were uniquely positioned to energize local economies and drive intellectual advancement.

Over the past 250 years, since we were invited back into broader society, our influence on the human condition has grown exponentially. The Jewish mind has played a pioneering role in advancing science, politics, culture, and philosophy. If you are part of us, join us; if you choose to remain apart, do not

expect to influence the course of human events. The Jewish experience defies simple classification—we insist on being distinct, yet refuse to isolate ourselves from the flow of history and the shared human journey. This tension, both our burden and our strength, continues to shape our destiny.

When we betrayed Hashem, were evicted from our Land and sent into exile, our national mission continued—but under conditions that naturally invited hostility. This, too, was part of the divine punishment for our failure.

## DO NOT ACQUIT

Antisemitism is woven into Jewish history and the sentence of galut. But this does not excuse the crime or lessen the guilt of those who commit it. Every individual chooses whether to hate, attack, or surrender to darkness. The fact that antisemitism is woven into the fabric of history does not absolve anyone of responsibility or moral culpability.

Additionally, it doesn't absolve us from the responsibility to confront antisemitism and work to contain it. Even if this powerful force is embedded in Jewish history and has flared throughout exile, we are still obligated to push back, to defend ourselves, and to limit its reach whenever and however we can.

There are two distinct models of antisemitism tied to the Jewish mission. The first exists independently of exile—rooted in the fact that we are disliked precisely because of our role challenging humanity's values. The second emerges during exile, where the unique pressures of living among other nations intensify the inherent tensions woven into Jewish history.

## RETURN AND RESISTANCE

There is also a third model of antisemitism connected to the Jewish mission. When the people of Hashem return to the Land of Hashem, history shifts and quickens its pace.

The trajectory of this story moves toward a world illuminated by the presence of Malchut Shamayim. Those who oppose Hashem—whether consciously or unconsciously—oppose our return to Israel. In coming home to the Land of Hashem, we have stirred a new form of antisemitism—one cloaked as anti-Zionism but rooted in the same ancient rejection of Jewish destiny. This perspective on modern antisemitism centered on the State of Israel brings us to a crucial question: is anti-Zionism merely political dissent, or does it fundamentally embody antisemitism itself?

### THREE REASONS THAT ANTI-ZIONISM=ANTISEMITISM

Many claim that anti-Zionism and antisemitism are distinct. Theoretically antisemitism is hatred of Jews, whereas anti-Zionism is opposition to a Jewish state. There are three responses to this crucial question.

Firstly, history has taught us a painful truth—humanity cannot be trusted not to persecute Jews. Time and again, it has regressed into hatred and violence. Without a Jewish state as a haven and refuge, Jewish survival is always at risk. So while anti-Zionism may not be antisemitism in theory, in practice, it often is. Denying the right of the Jewish state to exist is effectively denying the sustainability of the Jewish people.

Secondly, when anti-Zionism becomes

obsessive—when opposition to a Jewish state is wildly disproportionate—it begins to cross the line. When the same classic antisemitic tropes are recycled and weaponized against Israel, anti-Zionism becomes indistinguishable from antisemitism.

Thirdly, as stated above—at a metaphysical level—anti-Zionism resists the Jewish return to the Land that Hashem promised us. Our return fulfills our historical mission and advances a better destiny for all humanity. Those who oppose our return to Zion are, consciously or not, opposing our historical mission of bringing Hashem to our world.

At its core, opposition to our presence in Israel stems from the same root as antisemitism: a refusal to accept the presence of Hashem in this world, as reflected through our people and our way of life.

Antisemitism did not begin on Tisha B'Av; it intensified as we entered exile. Now, as we return from exile and herald the unfolding of history's final chapter, it has not vanished—it has merely reemerged under a new mask. ■



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