

The Spiritual Cause of Anti-Semitism

The Three Levels of Galut (Exile) From the Teachings of The Ba'al Shem Tov

Warning! You may not like what you read herein.

Translation and Commentary by Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok

Introduction

Anti-Semitism, the hatred of Jews and Judaism has got to be the most illogical and irrational of all human prejudice. Throughout the centuries, even peoples who were once considered allies of the Jews have eventually turned against us, for no apparent reason.

Peace with our Gentile neighbors has been the one thing Jews have endeavored to achieve throughout the centuries. Yet, even now, in the U.S.A. acts of violent anti-Semitism flair up. Indeed, recently here in Chicago, a crazed Jew-hating racist cruised the streets of the Orthodox neighborhood (passing right in front of my own home) shooting randomly attempting to kill Jews. Thank G-d no one was seriously hurt, but two of my students were indeed shot, right around the corner from where we live.

What is the reason for such hatred? We cannot AND MUST NOT dismiss anti-Semitism and say that it is simply just "another" form of racism. No, anti-Semitism is unique. It is different from any other form of racism. And Jews have suffered worst, more than any other people in history.

Throughout history, Jews have been accused of the most heinous crimes whether it is the killing of a Christian child in order to drink its blood (G-d forbid) or the plotting to take over the world to rule as vampiric leeches as the evil "*Protocols of the Elders of Zion*" alleges. No such accusations have ever been made against "Blacks", Hispanics, Kosovans, Kurds, Tutus, or anyone else.

Indeed, as Jews we have always stood up to support these groups in their hours of need, only to find them becoming anti-Semitic once they no longer need our help. Why is this so??

Most anti-Semitism appears to have its source and supporters in the religions of Christianity and Islam. While these two religions are mutually exclusive to one another, they do share one common trait: both claim to be the one true religion of the Bible, in place of Judaism.

Christianity claims to supercede Judaism. The religion claims itself to be the "new chosen people"; grafted onto "G-d's Tree" and we Jews were broken off and cast away (ref. Christian Bible, book of Romans). Christianity claims that Jews have been blinded by G-d to not see the "Christian truths" in our Holy Torah. Thus all Jews are servants of Satan and we are destined to burn forever in hell unless we give up our sacred Torah and holy faith in G-d. "Born Again" Christians believe this whole-heartedly. This is what inspires them to snare Jewish converts more than any other.

Islam also claims to be the original religion of the Biblical patriarchs. Islam teaches that we Jews have perverted the Torah by erasing out of it all references to their so-called "prophet" Mohammed. According to the Koran, we Jews are liars because we changed the Torah (G-d forbid). Islam claims that the Biblical story of Avraham sacrificing his son Yitzhak is a lie. They claim that it was Yishmael who was offered on the altar and that we Jews changed it (G-d forbid). Thus, all Jews are to be humbled and not to be trusted.

Even today it is Islamic anti-Semitism that is fueling the fires on Middle East unrest. In Arab eyes, it is an offense to Allah that Jews should have their national independence. Thus, in their eyes, the Jewish State must be destroyed by any and all means.

All in all, both of these theological systems unleash terrible attacks against Judaism and the Jewish people, the results of which have been the deaths of millions of Jews throughout Christian and Moslem lands for centuries.

Aside from the theological battle for supremacy that these groups fight with the Jewish people, there also exists a cultural

disdain for anything authentically Jewish (i.e., Orthodox). Yes, even among secular, non-religious westerners (Americans & Europeans) there is strong distaste for Orthodox Jewish codes of moral dress and behavior. Orthodox Jews are different and because of this difference not only are they ostracized, they are looked down upon as dirty and dishonest.

Did you ever stop to think how difficult it is for a Hasidic Jew, with beard and payot, to get a secular job in a modern large company? Employers do not understand about and have little sympathy for Shabat, Jewish holidays, yarmulkes and other ethnic Jewish things.

This unfortunate state of affairs is not new. Anti-Semitism and Jewish exile among hostile Christians and Moslems has existed side by side for centuries. One of the great Kabbalistic masters of all times, the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of the Hasidic movement, offers us a spiritual explanation as to why this irrational prejudice has followed the Jewish people for so long.

The Ba'al Shem Tov claims that it is due to the three levels of Jewish exile. Just what this means is what the Ba'al Shem Tov wishes to explain. Indeed, there is a spiritual explanation underlying anti-Semitism.

Many of you might not like what the Ba'al Shem Tov has to say on this matter, yet what he has to say needs to be heard now, more than ever.

Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov, Parashat Balak #3

There are three levels of conflict, i.e., those that disrespect another. These are the three levels of galut (exile).

**Did you ever stop to think
how difficult it is
for a Hasidic Jew,
with beard and payot,
to get a secular job in a
modern large company?**

The first [level] of galut (exile) is Israel among the nations. This is expounded upon in the Zohar (Vol. 2, 188A-B), where a Gentile dignitary questioned [the Rabbis] about the verse; "the speech of truth shall last forever, whereas lying speech lasts for only a moment" (Proverbs 12:19).

[The Gentile] said that it is they who speak "the speech of truth that shall last forever." [It is they] who have peace and comfort. "Lying speech lasts for only a moment." [This he says] refers to the Jews (G-d forbid); who had peace "for only a moment."

In addition, [in relation to this Gentile] does the verse apply, "your brothers who hate you" (Isaiah 66:5). This refers to the children of Esau who disrespect Israel. They honor the name of HaShem, but not Israel, by saying, "He is not your G-d, He is not your L-rd." In truth, in the end, all their rivers will dry up (ref. Isaiah 41).

Commentary

The first level of exile is the physical exile of the Jewish people among hostile Gentiles. The famous prophecy in Daniel is the Biblical source of the teaching that Israel is to be subjugated four times, first by Egypt, second by Babylon, third by Persia and last by Edom (Rome).

The Biblical Edomites are the descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother. The descendants of Esau mostly include the Amalakites, who are the sworn enemies of both the Jewish people and G-d. Rabbinic tradition has revealed to us that the Edomite people left the Middle East and relocated to Europe. They became known to us again by their new name: the Romans.

The Roman Empire lives on to this day under the guise of Christendom and the Church. It is this group, more than any other that has made life difficult and sometimes impossible for the Jews. Of course, the religion of Edom is Christianity. It is the Christian religion that applies the verse from Proverbs to the Jewish people. They say how we Jews are debased, while they prosper, because this is what they call the will of G-d.

As this section clearly states, Christians indeed do respect and honor G-d, although it is through the veil of the idolatrous worship of Yeshu. This merely reflects the attitude of Esau their father.

Jewish tradition teaches that Esau greatly loved and respected his father, Yitzhak. It was only his brother Ya'aqob that he hated and wanted to kill.

To this day, nothing has changed. Esau's descendants still manifest great respect towards their father (in Heaven) whereas at the same time they hate and plot to kill Ya'aqob, i.e. the Jews.

The Christian religion proclaims love and honor of G-d, yet throughout the centuries they have practiced nothing but disdain and persecution towards the Jewish people. Whether or not this has changed in modern times, time will tell. This then is our exile, in the first degree.

Text

The next [level of] galut (exile) is more difficult than the first. This is when the layman Jew shows disrespect to the Rabbis. This is very painful when they say that they speak the words of truth and therefore, they [i.e., the secular way] will last forever. They [claim to] be in peace and comfort, whereas the Rabbinic Sages are [the ones of] "lying speech." [They say] that only garbage is to be found by them. Therefore, they are in peace and comfort "for only a moment," only

temporarily. Thus [the Rabbis] become impoverished, the men of renown are weakened and the ones who fear sin are despised. [The laymen say to themselves] that it is they who honor HaShem and not the Rabbis of Israel (G-d forbid).

Commentary

All Jews can, when they least expect it suffer from Gentile anti-Semitism. Yet, the text now speaks of a deeper type of anti-Semitism, one that is practiced by secular Jews against the Orthodox Jews.

Unfortunately, the schism between religious and secular Jews is nothing new. The story of Hanukkah, which occurred over 2,100 years ago, relates the struggle between the Jewish religious Maccabees and the Greeks with their secular Jewish supporters. Throughout the following decades and centuries Jewish literature records the division between the Rabbis and their students referred to as the Talmidei Hakhamim and the Amei HaAretz, the unlearned secularists. Over the years the term Am HaAretz has come to mean one who is ignorant of knowledge, or a "dummy."

Although the Am HaAretz was not well educated in Torah, he was nonetheless not totally ignorant of all spiritual matters. As the saying goes, "a little knowledge is more dangerous than no knowledge at all." Those who know nothing at least acknowledge their lack. Those who know a little believe that they know a lot and therefore act with contempt towards those who truly know more than they.

Throughout the years, some sectors of the Amei HaAretz have acted rather arrogantly towards the Talmidei Hakhamim. While the Talmidei Hakhamim sit and study the Amei HaAretz go out and work. During fist Temple times, when the Talmidei Hakhamim were mostly Kohen priests who taught Torah and served in the temple, the Amei HaAretz respected, upheld and financially supported these teachers of Torah.

Yet, due to Greek anti-Semitism and their gross disrespect of Torah during Second Temple times many Amei HaAretz learned not to appreciate the Talmidei Hakhamim. Not only did many stop coming to learn Torah; this same type also began to abuse Torah teachers, as did their Greek patrons.

Thus, although these Talmidei Hakhamim lived in the Holy Land of Israel, they were still, nonetheless, subject to foreign concepts of anti-Semitism, first coming from the alien Greeks and eventually coming from those Jews who had fallen into the Greek snares. Indeed this is a galut (exile) even while in the Holy Land.

It is bad enough to suffer abuse as a visitor in a foreign land. It is worse when one is treated as a foreigner in one's own land. Even after the destruction of the Second Temple, when we were all exiled from the land, the Jewish communities that were created were a blend of Talmidei Hakhamim and Amei HaAretz. Most times all lived in peace. Yet, when Gentiles with an agenda approached secular Jews, many times they were successful in turning these secular Jews against those Jews who remain faithful to Torah law.

The results of this division is the present day conflict between secular Jews (including Reform and Conservative) and the Torah faithful Orthodox community. While many are not aware, Orthodox Jews, on a daily basis, experience attacks on their character, beliefs and opinions from secular Jews.

Many secular Jews actually attempt to incite Torah faithful Jews by going into religious communities or environments and acting in certain manners in violation to Halakha (Jewish Law) that they know will cause conflict. They believe that they are expressing their so-called "human rights" whereas in reality all that they are doing is succumbing to Gentile ideas and concepts, which have anti-Semitism as their root.

Thus religious Torah faithful Jews are in exile even among our own people.

Text

The third galut (exile) which is most difficult of them all is what the Rabbis who fear sin have to suffer exile from the [so-called] Rabbis who are [nothing more than] Shedim Yehuda'in (Jewish demons). This is what I heard, that those who murdered Zecharia (the prophet in the First Temple) were Rabbis.

Commentary

Here we come to the most difficult of all levels of exile. This is the ostracization of the sincere holy Rabbis who study and teach kosher Torah spirituality and mysticism by those politically minded rabbis who are more interested in position and power than they are in HaShem, Torah and mitzvot.

This conflict too, is unfortunately nothing new. Religious hypocrisy had its origins in Biblical times. In 2 Chronicles 24:20-22, we read about the episode of the prophet Zecharia son of the High Priest Yehoyada. During the years when his father Yehoyada was alive, the Jewish people followed HaShem. Once he died, however, the king and the people fell away from being religious. Zecharia arose to admonish them. Then the "leaders of Judah" (ref. Verse 17) conspired against him and assassinated him, in no less holy a place than the Courtyard of the Beit HaMikdash (the Temple).

In the Mekor Mayim Hayim commentary to Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov a story is related from Sefer Notzer Hesed (4,5) about a contemporary of the Ba'al Shem Tov who was known to be a tzadik (a righteous man). This man would proclaim that when his time would come he would die a violent death at the hands of murderers.

He said that this would not be the first time for him to suffer in this way and that he has already come to earth and suffered this same fate a hundred times. He suffers this way for in a past incarnation, in the days of Zecharia, this tzadik was the head of the Sanhedrin (Supreme Court). He was then a

wise and intelligent man. Yet, he drank from the "poison of the Torah" (religious hypocrisy).

He was the first to lay hands of Zecharia and struck him on the cheek and face, calling him an Am HaAretz. Seeing that the head Rabbinic Judge acted in this way, the masses followed suit and Zecharia was stoned to death.

To help atone for his sin this tzadik commanded that on his gravestone be inscribed the words, "here lies the one who killed Zecharia the prophet."

Throughout Jewish history, we have had conflicts between so-called "establishment" Rabbis and a number of movements of spiritual fervor. Now, granted some spiritual movements were (and are today) outright cults, such as the Shabtai Tzvi debacle in the 1600's (and certain modern groups that will not be mentioned).

Yet, pious holy teachers such as the Ba'al Shem Tov, Rabbi Moshe Luzzato (RaMHaL), the Ba'al HaTanya (and others) were all subject to rejection and snubbing by so-called religious authorities. If it were not for the grace of heaven and the infinite mercies of our holy Father and King, the teachings of these great saints might have been lost to us.

All their lives they persevered religious snobbery in order to safeguard the holy teachings that HaShem safeguarded in their hands. Yet, the books of the Ba'al Shem Tov were banned and burned. Rabbi Moshe Luzzato was banished from his native Italy and forced to vow to stop his Kabbalistic studies and writings, the Ba'al HaTanya, the founder of Lubavitch attempted to make peace with the religious opposition, but was snubbed. Even the likes of the Gra, the holy Gaon of Vilna would not meet with him. Although Rabbi Luzzato's works are now firmly "mainstream", to this day conflict and division still reign among Ashkenazi Jews between Hasidim and Lita'im (Mitnagdim).

The conflict continues to this day between those who embody the true spiritual

connection with G-d and those who don't, but wish to imitate it and appear to be the possessors and heirs of it.

This state of affairs has no rhyme and reason. One can only look upon it and mourn.

Text

[The reason why] the Rabbis are held in disgrace in the eyes of the layman Jew is because of those Rabbis who disrespect one another. Due to the disrespect shown by the layman Jew to [all] the Rabbis, thus do the Gentiles show disrespect to all Jews.

**"Better peace from afar
than war up close."
If one cannot get along
with another,
for whatever reasons,
simply keep a distance and
avoid inevitable conflicts.**

Commentary

Here we have it; the real and true reason for Anti-Semitism. We bring it upon ourselves!

The Jewish people have been called by G-d to be "a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6). Whether we know it or not, or like it or not many "eyes" watch the Jewish people. The spiritual forces of Heaven, the messengers of blessing and of curse constantly gaze upon the Jewish people.

If we merit it then we bring blessing down to the Earth, upon all others and ourselves. If we do not merit it, then a curse comes down upon us. What little good that then comes down from Heaven is taken by our Gentile neighbors. We get only the leftovers. No one ever said it would be easy being G-'d's chosen people.

There are seventy nations among the Gentiles. It is natural for them to have differences, being that there are so many different kinds of them.

But we Jews are ONE people.
We share a common land: Israel;
a common heritage: Torah;
we share a common language: Hebrew;
we share a common history: anti-Semitism;
we share a common enemy: those who wish to kill us (all, secular and religious alike) simply for the "crime" of being born a Jew.

More than this we share a common destiny.

Granted individual Jews are different. But, so what if there are Ashkenazim and Sephardim, more religious or less religious, liberal or conservative?

Bottom line, we are all Jews AND the anti-Semites hate us all, equally!

Secularism has never been a place to hide!

The Jews of Nazi Germany found that out the hard way. Even if one was raised a good Christian and German, if one had but one Jewish grandparent that was enough to contaminate the Aryan race. Your grandparent was enough to have you condemned to death!

Sorry, my Jewish brethren, nothing has changed. King Solomon has said it best; "there is nothing new under the sun." (Kohelet 1:9).

So, what are we to do? We are to struggle for Jewish unity at all costs. I emphasize not only unity, but "Jewish" unity. We must unite under our own banner, our own culture and under our own name. The Name is Israel, the culture is Judaism, and the banner is Torah.

This is true, not because I say so, but because this is the reality created by G-d. And there is nothing that you (or I) can do about it!

Yet, what makes matters worse is when Torah faithful Orthodox Jews fall into the Satanic snare and begin to point fingers at one another accusing this one or that of being a religious hypocrite or false teacher. Nothing more than this serves to destroy Jewish unity. And in doing so, nothing more serves to destroy the Jewish people.

Many years ago, I had a conversation with one very Orthodox rabbi and I mentioned to him a point of Halakha from a leading Torah authority of our generation. He rejected the Halakha that I mentioned and proceeded to say that the Rabbi I had mentioned is none other than the physical incarnation of the Satan sent to Earth to deceive the Jewish people.

And how does he know that this leading Torah Sage is such a devil? Because once this great Sage gave a ruling different from his own Rabbi and anyone who would dare do that cannot possibly be from G-d.

This arrogance and narrow-mindedness leads to destruction. Granted this person's Rabbi is a holy man and a great leader, but so is the other Rabbi. Jewish Law requires of us to respect all of the Sages, including and especially those that we disagree with. As long as a Rabbi expresses opinions firmly based on the foundations and precedents of Jewish Law, regardless of whether or not we accept his specific edicts, we must nonetheless firmly respect both his views and his person. This must be in both word and deed.

With regards to the above mentioned Rabbi, on the spot, I condemned his speech and I warned him that no Jew can ever tolerate such a horrible display such as this and that he must repent immediately. He not only adamantly refused, he repeated his offensive and blasphemous remarks. I have not spoken again to this Rabbi ever since.

As you see from my telling of the story I did not reveal this person's name or anything else that might identify him (such as of which Rabbi he spoke or who his Rabbi is) for I refuse to violate the laws of Lashon HaRa (evil talk). I will condemn this person's

action, but I do not need to lower myself by embarrassing him by publicizing his name. Nor will I point a finger at this Rabbi and accuse him of being a Satan or anything similar.

His behavior was wrong, very wrong! Yet, we all make mistakes, even passionate ones. I am not able to change this individual's mind or his actions, so I then take the next best course of action. I have coined for myself a saying, "better peace from afar than war up close." By this, I mean that if one cannot get along with another, for whatever reasons, then simply keep a distance and avoid inevitable conflicts. If any contacts come, let them be short and respectful, avoiding areas of known conflict. This is the secret to shalom.

Granted there is a Kabbalistic-Hasidic teaching, based on what the Bible says (Deut. 13:4), that G-d does indeed allow false teachers to arise in Israel to test our steadfastness to His covenant. This is why G-d allowed the likes of the Biblical Korah to rise and challenge Moses. Even the cult leader, Shabtai Tzvi, was renown as a great Torah scholar. The fine line between good and evil is often very thin. Remember that the righteous Ya'aqob and the evil Esau were twin brother. Good and evil are often confused, especially by those seeking religion and piety.

Conflict is indeed inevitable. G-d has ordained that there be a time for peace and a time for war. When it comes time to fight our spiritual battles, we must not slack to rise up for the cause. Yet, we must also not forget that when there is a conflict between Rabbis or Rabbinic opinions, that this is all in the family. If there is sincere disagreement as to the right way to serve HaShem, with both sides presently legitimate Torah, halakhic arguments to substantiate their claims, such an argument is what we call "for the sake of Heaven." Both parties are ego-less in their service of Heaven. Each party only wants what is right, even if this means that their personal view is wrong. This is the way of the righteous.

However, sometimes ego and pride enter the picture. Sometimes an individual Rabbi will come forth to present his religious opinion and attempt to gain credibility for it through public support and not by proper Torah halakhic precedent. This is not the way of Torah. This type of political Rabbi will go to almost any extreme to prove his point right AND make sure that all know that your point is wrong! This is way of the unrighteous.

Only my rule can successfully respond in a case like this.

"Better peace from afar
than war up close."

The Torah faithful community does not have to unite under one set of laws and customs, but we do have to unite in common cause and mutual respect. We can unite through mutual respect of our individual differences.

Our sacred religion is truly different and revolutionary from all the different religions of the world. The holy Torah given to the Jewish people on Mt. Sinai should be praised by all the nations of the world. Indeed many of these nations have adopted our Bible as their own. Still many others esteem our holy texts alongside their own.

Yet, when the Gentile nations look upon us, the people of the sacred Torah, what do they see? Do they see a nation living up to the high moral standards as outlined by our holy prophets?

During the days of the Second Temple, the Rabbis of Israel were revered throughout the Gentile world for their wisdom and their miraculous mystical powers. This is the greatest "kidush HaShem" (honor to G-d's Name).

Yet, when we don't live up to our pious and holy reputation, this familiarity breeds contempt. Our Gentile neighbors know how we Jews are supposed to live. They are always watching us. They always have their eyes on "the Jews." And what is it that you think they see?

They see infighting, disunity, disloyalty and corruption. Even Adolph Hitler, in his book, Mein Kampf, gave this reason for his hatred of the Jews. He said that Jews bare no semblance of a unified people and, therefore, should not be treated as such.

Hitler used our own sins against us. Because we as a nation did not in time repent of the sin of disunity, it was as if G-d was helpless to stop that madman.

Tell me, when will we learn our lesson? Will we learn from history or repeat it. The Middle East is not cooling down, it is heating up. Time is indeed short and we have a collective, national decision to make!