

Let me start first with what I am not going to do here tonight: I shall not give an objective description of what the present situation is in the world, sixty years after liberation, vis-à-vis anti-Semitism. I am not qualified to sociologically evaluate the status of the Jews in the world today, nor am I trained to fathom the historical motives that would explain the root causes of anti-Semitism's old new emergence. I am neither a sociologist nor a historian of the ways in which societies relate to each other. I am a historian of the exegesis and the formation of the Talmud. In that field and in that field only do I speak with authority. Of course, I have opinions about a number of other subjects, but I would not dare to impose them on this august body, my friends and colleagues of long standing.

If, nevertheless, I stand before you and beg your indulgence to listen to what I have to say about present day anti-Semitism, it is not so much to convince you factually, in the hope that after I have finished talking, you will be won over to my point of view, or at least, see that there exists another point of view. I am less interested in stating a point of view as I am desirous to share with you my fear and apprehension of what the future may hold, apprehension reminiscent of dark pre-Shoah days. Perhaps talking about it may enable us to initiate anticipatory prevention, and if not, it may at the very least bring a modicum of personal relief. What I have to say may not be very encouraging. I beg your understanding.

It is not that I am afraid that I may soon confront Dr. Mengele and his stick again, tremble before him as he condemns me either to life or to death. He is dead and I hope that future Mengeles are also dead. Besides, at my age, I would not even make it to him or to his ilk. My fate would be sealed long before I ever saw him or them. Nor am I afraid, looking back and remembering chapters from my past, that new anti-Jewish laws will be enacted soon. Laws curtailing normal social and economic activities, i.e. not granting Jews license to sell alcohol or tobacco, or forbidding Jews to frequent certain educational facilities. Painful as such prohibitions were, I did not feel their impact in the past and will, most likely, not feel their impact in the future, if indeed it comes. Venturing outside of my narrow confines, either economic or educational, was outside my ambition. Within these confines, such laws had little effect. Nor am I afraid, as I was in my little Shtetl, that some Gentile might pull my Peoth, my ear locks, or simply beat me up. Besides the fact that I do not have Peoth now, the oppressors have since then discovered more sophisticated ways of oppression that make this type of hatred seem childish and unbecoming.

What frightens me now is the sense of becoming a Pariah again. Being a Pariah runs the danger of having been cut off from normal human bonds that tie people together, that are responsible for the natural empathy that one human being feels for another. We are now judged by different criterion, watching, scrutinized, and judged more severely. We are not given the benefit of the doubt. We are found guilty before all the evidence is in and evaluated, before all sides are heard and examined. Upon mentioning the word Jew to a class of intellectuals in France or even Scandinavia, one has the feeling that it evokes a sense of distance, a certain detachment almost as if the Jew belongs to another class of human beings. It is not true, as some have argued, that this is anti-Israel and not anti-Semitic. I concede that it is possible to be anti-Israel or anti-Zionist and not be an anti-

Semite. Before the emergence of the state of Israel, there were a number of Jews who were anti-Zionists on religious grounds. They claimed that Jews were destined to live in the Diaspora in order to spread Monotheism in the world. They frequently quoted the famous statement in the Talmud: "God did charity to Israel by spreading them to all corners of the earth." At the present, the reverse is the case. Those that harbor anti-Semitic tendencies judge Israel more harshly. How else to explain the one-sidedness of never finding justifications for Israel's dilemma, unwillingness to acknowledge the Jewish people's historical right and attachment to the land, the willingness to create new, Jewish refugees on the pretext of helping other refugees. The world, the European world in particular, is accustomed to hearing of Jews being discriminated against, deprived of their rights and killed for often contradictory reasons. It has been part of Jewish history for millennia. And when it happens today, there is less sensitivity, perhaps subconsciously, to its injustice. When it comes to the Jews, history has weakened the European world's sympathetic chord, normally brought to bear as human beings help each other. Since Constantine converted Rome to Christianity, the Jews have been singled out for stubbornness. Their very suffering was conceived of as an indication of their wrong-headedness and separateness.

After liberation, we all thought that once the world knew of the atrocities that the civilized world had committed against us it would start a new chapter and overcome the historical pull. For a while it looked as if it worked. We regained the world's sympathy. When Israel was proclaimed the European world was on her side, hardly raising the voice of injustice as is so deafeningly heard now. Perhaps out of a sense of guilt, it identified itself with the wandering Jew, overcoming its own history. We have lost that affinity and sympathy and once again are considered as Pariahs, a separate entity of mankind in whom it is a delight to find fault. They embraced the cry of Bilam, "We are a people that dwells apart." This has been interpreted negatively to mean that it is the nature of the Jew not to mingle and not to share. Once again we are close to suffering from cosmic Isolation (America is an exception. It shares a different history.)

As a religious person I believe that as a result of God's covenant with Israel, the Jews were singled out, chosen, if you wish, to lead a life distinct and different from other peoples. They were given a strict code of conduct and threatened with retaliation should they be amiss. When they behaved, their destiny was entangled with the destiny of the world and when they misbehaved (which they did during most of their history), they suffered from isolation. Even so, they were always involved in world history (half of the world, excluding the Orient). I often illustrate this by recalling the heydays of Communism in the fifties. Communists frequently marched in the streets, particularly in Italy, opposed by a counter-march, by anti-Communist forces, most strongly the Catholic church. Both sides carried large banners with pictures of their spiritual founders, the Catholics carrying the picture of Jesus and the Communists the picture of Marx- two Jews with whom we associate centuries of suffering and who nevertheless continue to dominate the main currents of history.

Our relationship with God is also stormy. Once gets the impression that He, as it were, does not know how to handle us, does not know quite what to do with us. He punishes us

severely, yet guarantees our survival under all conditions. He acknowledges his love for us even as he says, “the one I love, I chastise.” His attitude towards us is often difficult to fathom despite numerous messages he has sent through the Prophets. What makes the Holocaust theologically so horrendous is that its enormity makes us doubt whether God has kept His part of the bargain, His obligation as the cosigner of the Covenant. This erratic relationship is best reflected in a cynical joke I heard soon after liberation: A few Jews were praying in a concentration camp, davening very loudly. Another Jew passes by and tells them, “do not daven so loudly, for God will find out that there are still Jews left and will kill them too!”

Yes, we are Pariahs in our relationship with God but we are resentful when we are treated as such by human beings who say they honor the book that assigned to us that status. It is the book that has imposed obligations upon us, which we sometimes have not fully understood and often knowingly rejected. Among the obligations He bequeathed to us was a set of ethical behaviors to which we and the western world hypocritically continue to pay homage, even as we are defiant and delinquent. It is a code which connects us to the world at large and is responsible for our common destiny and perhaps also for a good measure of anti-Semitism. During the Nazi period an attempt was made by leading Nazi clerics to drop the Old Testament from the catechism. They did not succeed. The Hebrew bible is too deeply engraved upon the Western world’s religious consciousness for even to Nazis to be able to dislodge it. Insofar as we share this book as partners, we have every right to expect fair treatment as among equals. Such sharing ought not to be an occasion for friction. Freud has suggested that the root of anti-Semitism lies in the Gentiles’ inability to live up to the strict ethical standards of the biblical code that they accepted. The ancients believed that the messenger was implicated in the message- hence killing the Jews rather than fulfilling the precepts of the code. Secularists who reduce the book to literature often retain the prejudices of those religious orientations they no longer share.

Historically, hate for Jews has fluctuated. There have been periods when it is stronger and periods when it is weaker in response to events that happen to them or to us. Often these events are merely stimuli which revive subconscious prejudices against the Jews. Aside from the theological inconsistency of a Jewish State, the existence of the state of Israel invokes in them a sense of guilt. Perhaps this is based on having historically viewed the Jew negatively as an example of the punishment that befalls non-acceptance of Jesus. Even the secularists have inherited, albeit unconsciously, this prejudice of the religious, and jointly display a hateful attitude towards Israel. Where that hatred may lead to, what consequences may follow thereupon, fills me with existential angst.

As I said, I do not fear that the catastrophe which I experienced in the past will once again befall the Jewish people, at least not in the near future. I have argued elsewhere in a theological treatise that a new Shoah is precluded by God’s partnership in the Covenant. He is obligated to interfere when the Jewish people are threatened by annihilation and the Shoah- despite what some Chareidim say- falls under the category of total annihilation. The Shoah was possible, however, because of Tsimtzum; God withdrew Himself from interfering in human affairs and let evil prevail. Tzimtzum,

according to Luryianic teaching, was necessary to create the world. God, the infinite had to renounce Himself in order to make room for a finite and corrupt world. In the course of time and because of many violations, amongst them the periodical interference by God in human affairs, Tzimtzum, like any other created instrument, gets rusty and needs retuning. During the retuning, free will may get out of control, allowing evil people to take over and a Shoah may result. However, it takes centuries if not millennia until Tzimtzum needs new retuning and in between there is a semi-guarantee that no new Shoah will take place.

It is not the coming of a new Shoah that I fear but how easily anti-Israel sentiment may become anti-Jewish sentiment. Inevitably the word "Israel" may become synonymous with the word "Jewish." Long-harbored hatred directed against the state of Israel will unconsciously be transferred to hatred for all Jews. I once read a psychological study concerning the Nazi's effectiveness in stamping out the Jews as vermin. It made killing Jews easier. In their distorted minds, when they killed Jews they were killing vermin, not human beings. Hatred of Zionists dehumanizes them, they become identified with a sub-species, making it easier to kill them. Hatred of Zionists may make it easier to kill Jews, just as it was easier to kill Jews in the past thinking of them not as human beings but as crucifiers. Transference is a very powerful instrument of hatred.

I am aware that what I said before may sound like a dream-like fantasy, sprinkled with historical and mystical citations with little basis in reality, or no ascertainable facts to support it. You have every right to dismiss it and declare the conflict to be no more than a regional skirmish with no overtones of age-old entrenched animosities. But dreams too need interpretation (Bible history- here I go again –would be so different without its dreams and interpretations). Fantasies too need explanations. Without them, pain will not subside and fear will not be calmed down; a toothache in a dream may be no less severe than a toothache while awake. Perhaps I am oversensitive, unduly judging the future in terms of the past, but it is also possible that others are under-sensitive, inadequately reckoning with the past. I am accustomed to hearing people minimizing the effects of anti-Semitism. Before the actual Shoah took place, the enlightened Jewish population adopted an optimistic approach based upon the assumption of historical progress and denying that past history was a reliable indication of future history. History has proven wrong their views of historical events and ongoing unresolved and seemingly unresolvable religious conflict, whether conscious or unconscious. The human race is slow to change and our shared historical memory remains engraved upon our psyches, whether consciously or unconsciously. The question before us now is "are we going to relive the past, both distant and not so distant, or have we grown beyond that? Have I been freed and emancipated from old shackles?" I am more on the pessimistic side and would be happy to be proven wrong. In the meantime, I believe it is my duty to warn and to alarm, and your duty to listen and evaluate. For that opportunity, I am grateful to you. Thank you.